FRENCH POLITICS, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

# THE 2017 FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

## A Political Reformation?


Jocelyn Evans & Gilles Ivaldi

# French Politics, Society and Culture

Series Editor
Jocelyn Evans
University of Leeds
Leeds, United Kingdom

"This book provides a fascinating analysis of the 2017 French elections. The extraordinary electoral sequence that led Emmanuel Macron to the Presidency of the French Republic, with its many singular events, but also its underlying trends, is set out here with the help of political and empirical analyses based on an ample set of data. This book is both an academic work, underpinned by concepts and recent methods in political science, and at the same time a book for a wider, informed readership. The recent electoral history of France and more generally of political studies into the transformation of party systems and voters in Europe are at the very heart of this book."

—Professor Bruno Cautrès, *Sciences Po/Cevipof, Paris, France*

This series examines all aspects of French politics, society and culture. In so doing it focuses on the changing nature of the French system as well as the established patterns of political, social and cultural life. Contributors to the series are encouraged to present new and innovative arguments so that the informed reader can learn and understand more about one of the most beguiling and compelling of European countries.

More information about this series at
http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14991

Jocelyn Evans • Gilles Ivaldi

# The 2017 French Presidential Elections

## A Political Reformation?

palgrave
macmillan

Jocelyn Evans
University of Leeds
Leeds, United Kingdom

Gilles Ivaldi
University of Nice Sophia Antipolis
Nice, France

French Politics, Society and Culture
ISBN 978-3-319-68326-3 ISBN 978-3-319-68327-0 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017956109



Cover illustration: Paulo Amorim / VWPics / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To Sandrine*
*To Jeanne and Andrew*

# Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the French *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* in funding the large-scale Internet survey used in Chaps. 7 and 8 as part of the Open Research Area 'Subnational Context and Radical Right Support in Europe' (SCoRE) programme. We would also like to thank Pete Cape of Survey Sampling International (SSI) for allowing us to include a series of questions on a French electoral panel survey, which we used in Chap. 1. Thanks too to the University of Leeds for the period of study leave granted to work on the book. We are indebted to Marie-Pierre Evans for her superb compilation of the index. We would lastly like to thank Ambra Finotello and Imogen Gordon Clark at Palgrave Macmillan for their help and support throughout the writing of this book.

# Technical Notes

Two primary datasets have been used for analysis in this book. The first, in Chap. 1, is a quota-sampled Internet survey run by SSI, in the field between 5 and 12 January, with a total sample size of 1738 respondents. The second, in Chaps. 7 and 8, is a quota-sampled Internet survey run by BVA, in the field between 11 May and 25 June 2017, with a total sample size of 19,454 respondents. Quotas were based on age, gender, level of education, region and size of town.

All weblinks cited in the book were accessed and valid on 30 August 2017.

All figures in the book were generated in Stata using the 'plotplain' scheme from the blindschemes package by Daniel Bischof (2017).

## Reference

Bischof, D. (2017). New graphic schemes for Stata: plotplain and plottig. *Stata Journal, 17*(3), 748–759.

# Contents

# List of Figures

# List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

The 2017 French presidential election did not follow its expected course. As the next data point in a study of French electoral history under the Fifth Republic, its outcome—the election of Emmanuel Macron as its eighth president since 1959—did not match the dynamics which, until 2012, had predominantly shaped the outcome of presidential elections, that is, the alternation in power between left and right since the early 1980s. Moreover, the expectation had been, until mid-2016, that the 2017 election would precisely follow the pattern of those dynamics very closely. Indeed, one could go further and state that the expected outcome of the election *should* have been the accession of the candidate from the *Les Républicains* (LR), as a straight alternation with the socialist incumbent, François Hollande. Even in that regard, however, the eventual LR candidate was not the individual that most commentators would have expected: Alain Juppé, not François Fillon, was probably the favoured moderate right *notable* expected to occupy the Elysée Palace on 7 May 2017. The evidence of public opinion, both on the presidential race only a year out and in party primaries, and the purported party system dynamics shaping French electoral competition, all pointed clearly to the former prime minister and mayor of Bordeaux comfortably winning the run-off, against Marine Le Pen, the *Front National* (FN) candidate.

The presence of Marine Le Pen in the second round was itself not a standard feature of the Fifth Republic's bipolar competition traditionally



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_1

conditioning presidential dynamics across the left and right blocs. However, whatever the academic conventions on how left and right blocs should confront each other in the second round, the FN candidate's consistent polling ahead of any candidate other than Alain Juppé, and never below 20 per cent since 2013, illustrated her solid position to move into the *ballottage*. Her eventual score of 33.9 per cent in that second round also confirmed the presence of a majority of French voters as solidly against Le Pen and her party, from all sections of the political spectrum, as for the eventual winner. The so-called *front républicain*—the willingness of left and right to support each other's candidates to face down the FN—put paid to any fears of a radical right-wing head of state rising to power in France, where other European countries such as Austria or the Netherlands (premier rather than president) had avoided this outcome.

What is striking about the *front républicain* phenomenon is that both the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) and LR were forced to ask their voters to support the moderate candidate against Le Pen. For the first time under the Fifth Republic, neither of the main parties was present in the run-off. For this book on the presidential elections, then, the primary goal has to be to explain how this situation occurred and whether this can be interpreted as a dynamic step in the evolution of the French party and political system, rather than a one-election aberration.

The results in Table 1.1 make it clear that the landslide that Macron won in the second round, and which his party, *La République en Marche!* (LRM) replicated in the subsequent legislative elections in June, which we cover in Chap. 9, was not based upon an affective outpouring of electoral support in the first round, with 24 per cent of the vote. In 2012, Hollande had won the first round with 28.6 per cent, while Nicolas Sarkozy's vote share in 2007 was as high as 31.2 per cent. Indeed, in 2017, Macron barely did any better than Lionel Jospin in 1995, at a time when the Socialist Party was in tatters following its 1993 legislative debacle.

No presidential election in France has seen four candidates this equally placed: in 2017, the average margin between the four top candidates was as low as 1.5 percentage points compared with 5.8 and 6.9 in 2012 and 2007, respectively, and one has to go back to the 2002 'earthquake' election to find such a close first-round race. That Mélenchon's fourth place at 19.6 per cent of the vote reflects a 'too little, too late' surge in support for the populist radical left candidate in the latter part of the campaign, or that Fillon's third place (20 per cent) and elimination seems appropriate, given the spectre of the Penelopegate scandal which effectively hobbled

**Table 1.1** 2017 Presidential election first- and second-round results

| *Candidate* | *First round* | | | *Second round* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Votes* | *% registered* | *% valid* | *Votes* | *% registered* | *% valid* |
| Emmanuel MACRON | 8,656,346 | 18.19 | 24.01 | 20,743,128 | 43.61 | 66.10 |
| Marine LE PEN | 7,678,491 | 16.14 | 21.30 | 10,638,475 | 22.36 | 33.90 |
| François FILLON | 7,212,995 | 15.16 | 20.01 | | | |
| Jean-Luc MÉLENCHON | 7,059,951 | 14.84 | 19.58 | | | |
| Benoît HAMON | 2,291,288 | 4.82 | 6.36 | | | |
| Nicolas DUPONT-AIGNAN | 1,695,000 | 3.56 | 4.70 | | | |
| Jean LASSALLE | 435,301 | 0.91 | 1.21 | | | |
| Philippe POUTOU | 394,505 | 0.83 | 1.09 | | | |
| François ASSELINEAU | 332,547 | 0.70 | 0.92 | | | |
| Nathalie ARTHAUD | 232,384 | 0.49 | 0.64 | | | |
| Registered | 47,582,183 | | | 47,568,693 | | |
| Abstention | 10,578,455 | 22.23 | | 12,101,366 | 25.44 | |
| Voted | 37,003,728 | 77.77 | | 35,467,327 | 74.56 | |
| Blank | 659,997 | 1.39 | 1.78 | 3,021,499 | 6.35 | 8.52 |
| Spoiled | 289,337 | 0.61 | 0.78 | 1,064,225 | 2.24 | 3.00 |
| Valid | 36,054,394 | 75.77 | 97.43 | 31,381,603 | 65.97 | 88.48 |

Source: Ministry of the Interior official results

his campaign, is coincidental—the four shares of the vote to all intents and purposes reflect four very different, but equally weighted, social and attitudinal groups in French society supporting candidates with very different policy positions and visions of France in the world.

The other surprising absence from the second round, and shocking absence from the top four in the first round, is the socialist candidate. Benoît Hamon's election in the socialist primary in January 2017 may have been a surprise to those expecting this preliminary race to be between the two heavyweights of the opposing governmental and *frondeur courants*, former Prime Minister Manuel Valls and former Economics Minister Arnaud Montebourg, but as the candidate of one of the two duopolistic parties of government, Hamon's position could have been expected to be

more secure in the standard play-off between left and right. In the end, the sheer unpopularity of the incumbent socialists, and by extension perhaps of any representative of their party, and the growing realization that a vote for a candidate polling at best a distant fourth and, by the end of the campaign, a receding fifth, was a wasted vote, particularly in ensuring as strong a 'democratic' candidate as possible to face the 'anti-democratic' Le Pen, ended in the abandoning of Hamon both by many socialist *éléphants* and the voters themselves. This gave the socialist candidate a disastrous 6.4 per cent of the vote, *du jamais vu* for a socialist runner since Gaston Defferre's debacle in the 1969 election in the old days of communist hegemony on the French left.

Fillon's own dismissal from the race was by less than half-a-million votes. In opinion polls at the end of 2016, this sort of margin looked to be what divided Fillon from Le Pen. By the beginning of the year, it separated him from Macron, with Le Pen riding high in first place. By the election itself, what looked six months earlier to be a replication of Chirac–Le Pen in 2002 had shifted to a different structure entirely. Had Fillon progressed to the second round, his victory against Le Pen would have been assured. Indeed, had any candidate reached the second round, the *cordon sanitaire* would have prevented an FN victory. A victory for Fillon would have followed the path of what has now become a cliché of any commentary on the Fifth Republic's executive complexion—namely, that with the exception of 2007, no government since 1978 had ever managed to renew its mandate. Given the previous disconnect between presidential and legislative election calendars, this *hyper-alternance* between left and right had seen the discordant electoral cycles penalize governments mid-term and post-presidentials. But as we consider in Chap. 2, in 2017 the evidence suggested that this pattern had returned for the harmonized presidential-legislative set-up.

It had not. The incumbent PS lost, but the apparently well-placed LR could not claim its expected victory. What led to the two parties which had thus far dominated Fifth Republic politics finding themselves in the position of also-rans?

## 1 A Pre-ordained Defeat: The Electoral Decline of François Hollande and the PS

In a situation of *une politique bloquée* (blocked polity), the inability of either governing party to deliver satisfactory executive policy performance should lead to a cycle of alternation whereby the left and the right take it in turns

to effectuate one term of inadequate government. Hollande's victory in 2012, famously promising *Le changement, c'est maintenant*, took place in precisely this context. And in line with the *politique bloquée* argument—a closed system of self-selecting elites, endlessly alternating power between themselves—the progression of Hollande's presidency matched that of his *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) predecessor in many key respects, which we detail in the next chapter. Within a couple of months, Hollande's popularity ratings had dropped below 50 per cent approval—no evidence of a honeymoon period here—and within a year dropped below 20 per cent, only to rise above this ceiling a total of twice in the next four years. Hollande's three prime ministers, Jean-Marc Ayrault, Manuel Valls and, briefly, Bernard Cazeneuve, fared little better, with only Valls managing any sustained period above 30 per cent positive ratings.[1]

In the early day of Hollande's presidency, embarrassing clashes with his soon-to-be former partner, Valérie Trierweiler, and a hesitant, 'unpresidential' start made for poor PR. However, as the presidency progressed, a series of more prosaic, but policy-based issues ensured that his period of office would be synonymous with failed politics. In particular, an obstinate unemployment rate, rising national debt and a public deficit which, whilst smaller than when he took office, never reached the promised 3 per cent, gave critics an objective baseline. Ideologically, the retreat from his speech at Le Bourget, promising a root-and-branch reform of the financial sector, and instead offering tax breaks to business, alienated a large proportion of the socialist electorate, as well as activists and politicians, who opposed social liberalism as a market-driven force of the right. From the arrival of Manuel Valls, and the changing of the Bercy guard from Arnaud Montebourg to Emmanuel Macron, the most vocal critics of the socialist government were the so-called *frondeurs* (literally, 'slingers') from within the PS, challenging a more centrist economic programme which lacked electoral legitimacy. The El-Khomri employment law, first put to the National Assembly in February 2016, which reduced workers' rights and strengthened business, came to symbolize the abandoning of the socialists' core constituency (even though lower socio-economic strata had long since become a secondary support group for the PS). Meanwhile, the strong law-and-order agenda adopted by Valls's government amidst the Islamic terrorist attacks of 2015 would alienate further the cultural left and the Greens, notably leading to the resignation of Justice Minister Christiane Taubira from the government in January 2016, a critical political event in the second half of Hollande's presidency.

Electorally, the PS suffered greatly as a result of this poor executive approval. Successive European, local and regional elections delivered ever greater blows to the party's fortunes at the ballot box. Whilst sub-national elections are often a cold shower even for strongly performing national governments, the three key elections between 2012 and 2017 illustrated just how parlous the PS's position was. In the March 2014 municipal elections, the PS suffered its heaviest defeat since 1983, losing 150 town halls, not just to the UMP but also in a few cases to its own 'allies', the Greens.

Two months later, the European elections did not represent a massive slump on 2009, given the party had seen its support broken from 31 to 14 seats at that earlier race. But the party still managed to lose an additional seat and see its support drop below 14 per cent of the vote. The departmental elections the following year saw the socialists lose almost half of its departmental councils, and by December 2015's regional elections, with the *Union de la gauche* lists—anything but, in reality, given separate lists run by all other parties of the left, notably the PS former ecologist allies running independently or together with Mélenchon's FG across all regions—falling behind both the right and radical right lists in vote share, the loss of its decade-long quasi-monopoly of regional councils to retaining 5 of the 17 new regions was a relatively positive result.

## 2 The Revival of the Moderate Right

In all of the above cases, the Socialist Party's problem came from being unable to mobilize its supporters, as a result of spiralling losses to its grassroots base and membership, itself exacerbated by the progressive loss of local politicians, and associated funding, in previous elections. Conversely, the UMP seemed to benefit from a revival of its mobilization potential in these same elections.

This came after a period of extreme instability following Sarkozy's defeat in the 2012 election. In the immediate aftermath, a shambolic leadership race between François Fillon and Jean-François Copé, with accusations of ballot-rigging, lost votes and abuse of party organization resources, ended in a grudging truce, with Copé remaining president but shadowed by Fillon's delegates on the politburo, and an agreement to re-run the race in September 2013, eventually postponed until 2015. However, in the run-up to the municipal elections, it was agreed to cancel the leadership ballot, both to save a party whose coffers were decidedly empty from further campaign expense and to avoid a potentially divisive internal battle when unity was

needed. Copé's resignation in May 2014, due to investigations into his part in the Bygmalion party funding scandal, led to the establishing of a triumvirate comprising François Fillon, Alain Juppé and Jean-Pierre Raffarin, leading the party until a formal leadership election at the end of 2014.

That election saw the formal return of Nicolas Sarkozy to France's political fray. After his retirement from politics following his defeat in 2012, it had taken very little time for Sarkozy to make clear his desire to re-enter political life. The launch, immediately after the election, of *l'Association des amis de Nicolas Sarkozy* by two UMP *notables*, Brice Hortefeux and Christian Estrosi, acted as a de facto support group leading up to his eventual declaration as a candidate for the party leadership in 2014, which he hoped would be a springboard for his future 2017 presidential bid, as had already been the case ten years earlier when he had taken the UMP from the *chiraquiens* and had used it as a politically 'behind lines' base for his successful presidential election in 2007. His convincing first-round victory, against Bruno Le Maire and Hervé Mariton, was nonetheless made less certain as a presage of the primary race, given the absence of Fillon and Juppé. And indeed, the primary race saw his elimination in the first round, putting an end to his nearly 15 years of leadership over the moderate right in France.

The UMP's electoral fortunes in the 2014 municipals were notably successful. However, the importance of the two-round electoral system to the formal opposition was clear when the UMP's results in the European election were relatively weak, and particularly in its coming second to the FN under a proportional representation system. In many ways, the party managed to side-step longer term fallout from this defeat, given the focus on Jean-François Copé as departing party leader. The departmental elections the following year saw a much better result, with the UMP and its allies winning close to 60 per cent of the seats, despite a first-round vote share almost identical to that of the left, indicating the much greater cohesion across the parties of the right than of those across the floor. Once again, France's majoritarian fabric had shifted the final outcome towards the larger parties of government with strong local bases of *notables* across French territories, a local entrenchment which the FN, for instance, clearly lacked despite its exceptional showing in the first round, thereby accounting for its meagre gains across local councils in 2015. Similarly, from a position of almost complete exclusion from regional council presidencies, the 2015 elections saw the right win control in 8 of the 17 regions, yet the Republican troops had gone into battle without much enthusiasm and, for

a substantial part, right-wing voters had preferred the Le Pen family—Marine in the north and Marion in the south—and their associates in the first round, allowing the FN to win an unprecedented 27.7 per cent of the national vote.

In a period of opposition, the right's capacity to challenge the left's record seemed unassailable. Only on one dimension was the UMP in particular discomfited, namely on the issue of same-sex marriage. As a touchstone issue of the liberal left, support for the Taubira law across the PS, the Greens and the radical left was assured, allowing Hollande and his government relative tranquillity within their own camp. However, the conservative Catholic right, spanning the right wing of the UMP and smaller satellite parties such as Christine Boutin's *Parti Chrétien-Démocrate* (PCD), Nicolas Dupont-Aignan's *Debout la France (DLF)*, and the FN (though more strongly from its Catholic conservative region in the south, led by Marion Maréchal-Le Pen) aggregated with a number of social movements to form the *Manif' pour tous*, mobilizing a direct action campaign against the law. Within the UMP and its centrist Union des Démocrates et Indépendants (UDI) partners, this divided supporters of the law, such as Juppé, Benoist Apparu and Franck Riester, as well as 'tactical abstainers' such as Bruno Le Maire, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet and Edouard Philippe, from the rest of the party. In the longer term, the lack of willingness to roll back the legislation under an eventual UMP government brought further UMP *notables* into the implicit 'for' camp, including Nicolas Sarkozy. Support from the conservative Catholic right would, however, prove decisive in LR's 2016 presidential primary, fostering the unanticipated triumph of Fillon, and precipitating the fall of both the Juppé and Sarkozy houses.

This division saw the continuation of a political wing of the nominally apolitical *Manif' pour tous* under the label *Sens commun*, as a pressure-group pushing for a more conservative, reactionary line from right-wing politicians, particularly within the UMP. During the height of the Penelopegate scandal, and the greatest pressure on François Fillon to stand down, which we discuss in Chap. 5, the presence of this group as a rallying force, in particular for the notorious Trocadéro rally, which Fillon had announced as 'make-or-break' for his candidacy, was vital to his continuation in the race. As a result, his position as a candidate, although popular with the hardline right of his party, could never find purchase with a more centrist electorate as would have been the case with, say, a Juppé candidacy. More broadly, then, what became LR in spring 2015 found itself in strong electoral shape for its own core support, and certainly

stronger than its socialist counterpart, but was weakened by some internal policy divisions, as well as threatened by an apparently burgeoning party on its radical right flank.

## 3 The (Continued) Rise of the Extremes: The *Front National* and *La France Insoumise*

Any uninformed observer of the 2017 race might reasonably have concluded that Marine Le Pen was the likely victor, given the extent of media coverage in France and abroad, and her polling success throughout much of the campaign. The FN's unique position within the French party system of course implied that her chances in the second round against any 'normal' candidate were almost non-existent—as indeed proved to be the case. However, what distinguished her run from that of her father in 2002, against Jacques Chirac in the second round, was that much of the coverage of Le Pen and her party up to the election itself had emphasized the so-called *dédiabolisation* which she and her politburo, most notable Florian Philippot, the vice-president of the FN, and Nicolas Bay, her campaign manager, had tried to impose upon the party. The inflammatory comments of Jean-Marie Le Pen, echoed by party members and lower-level activists, on issues of ethnicity, immigration and political corruption, not to mention 'subtle' anti-Semitism and explicit support to Holocaust denial theses, were no longer to be tolerated, given the likelihood of alienating potential future supporters, rather than mobilizing the already loyal electorate. Whilst the party was still split on its strategic position regarding searching to cooperate with parties of the right, the attempt to moderate the party's tone and rhetoric appeared to be a key part of Le Pen *fille*'s party. In April 2015, Jean-Marie Le Pen had caused one last internal crisis after he had restated his controversial comments about Nazi gas chambers being a 'detail of the second world war',[2] which in August 2015 had led to his expulsion from the party he had founded more than four decades earlier. This helped Marine Le Pen steer further away from the extremist past of her party, also fuelling her narratives of the advent of a 'new' FN.

The electoral results of the party subsequent to Marine Le Pen's strong performance in 2012 suggested that the new party strategy was successful. Perhaps the most notable success came early on, with the largest vote share in the 2014 European elections, finally allowing the FN to substantiate its claims to be the first party of France. However, the acid test would

come from less nurturing electoral environments for smaller parties, and especially for the FN whose regional and local implantation in the late 1980s and early 1990s had effectively been wrecked by the party split led by Bruno Mégret in the very late 1990s, and only recently reinvigorated by a reinvestment in local party organizations and social movements. The rewards of this were apparent in the targeted campaigning of the party, first in the 2014 municipal elections, where across the 587 communes where it field lists, it won 11 major town halls, and over 1500 council seats. In the 2015 regionals, it repeated its feat of winning the single largest share of the vote, leading in six regions at the first round, and was only finally prevented from winning a region outright by the PS stepping down to allow the right to monopolize the non-FN vote. The revitalization by the PS of the *front républicain* highlighted once again the FN's status as political pariah in French politics, an 'outsider' profile which would subsequently be key to Le Pen's disappointing performance in the 2017 presidential.

This once more betrayed the party's inherent weakness, namely its capacity to mobilize voters of the left and right *against* it in a second-round run-off. Whatever *dédiabolisation* had taken place—and the extent to which the party has truly changed in its policy positions has been debated extensively—a large proportion of the electorate still regard the party as beyond the pale, no less than 58 per cent seeing it as a 'threat to democracy', and the vast majority doubting its economic policies, notably its plan to leave the Euro which, on the eve of the 2017 election, was supported by just about a fifth of the French.[3] Nevertheless, as we shall see in Chap. 8, this delineation is perhaps not as entrenched as once was the case, and certainly certain parts of the political spectrum seemed to regard Le Pen's second-round opponent as equally beyond the pale.

That part of the spectrum, the radical left, has shifted across the history of post-war French politics, from the most dominant and monolithic of anti-system parties, the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF) under the Fourth Republic and the beginning of the Fifth, to a rapidly shifting wing of post-materialist, neo-Trotskyist and radical anti-capitalist movements. For a political party widely predicted to disappear after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the PCF itself has managed to survive as a party mobilizing core support in a few key Ile-de-France strongholds, such as Seine-Saint-Denis and Val de Marne. Yet, one of its former presidential candidates, Robert Hue, who managed only 3.4 per cent in 2002, came out in favour of the capitalist social liberal Emmanuel Macron in 2017. The party has

found itself in a love–hate relationship with a new actor, the *Parti de Gauche* (PG) of Jean Luc-Mélenchon, whose (admittedly flawed) electoral performances in 2012 and 2017 have far outstripped any communist presidential candidate since Jacques Duclos in 1969, on a shifting platform of anti-globalization, anti-social liberalism and a strong anti-FN stance.

In early 2016, Mélenchon decided to unmoor the FG vessel, breaking free from his former communist allies to found his own presidential party, *La France Insoumise* (LFI). He shifted to a more overt populism and national protectionism, rejecting Brussels' diktat of austerity, free trade and fiscal orthodoxy, and notably promising to undo the European treaties, while simultaneously intensifying opposition to the ruling socialists on account of both their social–liberalism and authoritarian anti-terrorist agenda during 2015. The move by Mélenchon from the PG to LFI was certainly one of hardening his anti-establishment appeal, conceptualizing the need to 'clear out' politicians (*dégagisme*) and calling upon the 'people' against the 'political oligarchy'. Embracing a Podemos-like type of enthusiastically grassroots-oriented participatory democracy, LFI provided the organizational base for Mélenchon's presidential campaign which showed popular fervour and excitement over technical innovations such as appearing by hologram at meetings held in different cities simultaneously.

## 4 Macron and LRM: A Steep Learning Curve to Power

While severely shaken up by Mélenchon on their left, the French socialists confronted a much bigger challenge on their right with the political birth and meteoric rise of Macron and his new movement *En Marche!* (EM!) in April 2016. In just a year, Macron laid the foundation for one of the most spectacular political hold-ups in the history of the Fifth Republic, certainly of about the same significance as Chirac taking over the Gaullist right in the late 1970s and, more recently, Sarkozy's hostile take-over of the UMP in the mid-2000s, but achieving a similar outcome with virtually no previous political experience. As discussed in Chap. 4, Macron's presidential bid was strategically faultless, showing a carefully thought-through variation of both tone and tempo at every step of the long process of distancing himself from his former socialist colleagues, which ultimately was helped by Hollande's serious political mistakes at the end of his presidency.

Whilst reminiscent of previous reformist candidates such as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in the 1970s and, more recently, François Bayrou in the mid-2000s, Macron ran a resolutely modern American-style campaign emulating the techniques developed by Barack Obama during his 2008 campaign, relying on grassroots mobilization, new media and social network technology, all embedded in a start-up entrepreneurial culture, thus radically changing the face of French presidential politics in an age of opinion-based democracy. Like US politicians, Macron campaigned with his wife, Brigitte, with whom he formed an inseparable political duo, promising to give her an official status as France's First Lady (a promise which he had to roll back some months into his presidency). Most evidently, Macron was able to embody youth and renewal, as well as the promise of new political winds to unlock French politics and finally take France into the new century.

## 5 Change and Renewal: Popular Discontent and Electoral Support

As well as tailing a period of partisan dealignment, and the weakening of the parties of government at the expense of the extremes, other indicators of demand-side dissatisfaction revealed that the parties and leaders of *la politique bloquée* were not in a position to address the concerns of the French electorate. As will be discussed in the next chapters, French voters were eager to impose change in national politics and turn the page on politics as usual. This would be achieved through traditional party channels as well as by supporting alternative presidential candidates, both mainstream and radical. Incontestably, the socialist and Republican primaries were used by voters for that very purpose of shaking up the established order within the governing parties. Both nomination races delivered the underdog and political 'outsider', ousting the old party apparatchiks. *Exeunt*, then, Juppé, Sarkozy, Copé, Valls, Montebourg and, of course, Hollande, who simply chose not to run for re-election against a backdrop of economic difficulties, unemployment and all-time low popularity, a first in the presidential history of the Fifth Republic.

Going into the presidential campaign, change was on the mind of the vast majority of voters. When faced with a hypothetical roster of candidates standing in 2017, which of these candidates did the French electorate most link to renewal? (Fig. 1.1).

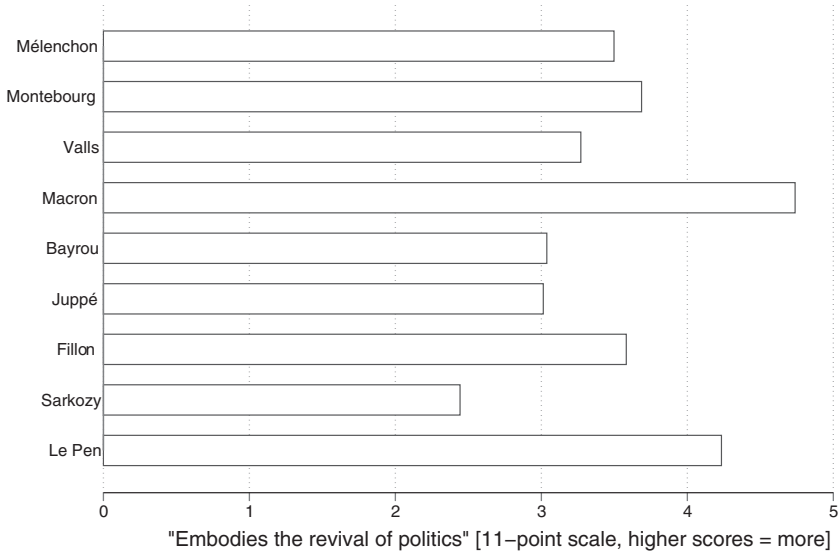


**Fig. 1.1** Presidential candidate contenders and voters' views of their link to political renewal (January 2017). Note: Question asked 'To what extent do you link the following candidates to the revival of politics?' Source: Survey Sampling International, online survey of French voters ($n$ = 1738), 5–12 January 2017

It is striking that, in early January 2017, when the survey was carried out, the mean level of renewal that the candidates represent to the French electorate mirrors the ranking of the top four candidates in the first round of the presidential election. We should be careful of course not to read any direct causality into this. However, the relative strength of these candidates across the whole electorate on the issue of renewal is symptomatic of the importance their ability to incarnate political change held in the 2017 race. Among the potential right-wing candidates, Fillon is the most associated with renewal, which is another way of shedding light on the deleterious impact that the Penelopegate scandal would later have on his candidacy. Similarly, Montebourg (as a *frondeur*) rather than Valls (as the former prime minister) is seen as embodying change to a greater degree. While these are relatively small differences, however, the gap between Macron, Le Pen and the other candidates is striking.

In 2017, voter aspiration to change continued to be strongly linked with the general perception of French democracy as being 'stalled'.

Trust in political parties has always been low, at least for the past decade-and-a-half where we have comparable data,[4] but in the previous electoral cycle the level of trust in parties has reached historic depths (see Fig. 1.2). Engagement in the electoral process itself has also declined. French presidential elections have generally enjoyed higher turnout than most other countries with voluntary voting. But, even here, turnout has dropped some six percentage points in the first round over the past decade, at 77.8 per cent in the first round of the 2017 presidential down from 83.8 in 2007. The legislative trend is even more stark, with more registered electors choosing to abstain rather than vote for the first time: in 2017, participation in the first round of the legislatives fell to 48.7 per cent compared with 60.4 per cent ten years earlier, following a downward trend in turnout since the mid-1980s.

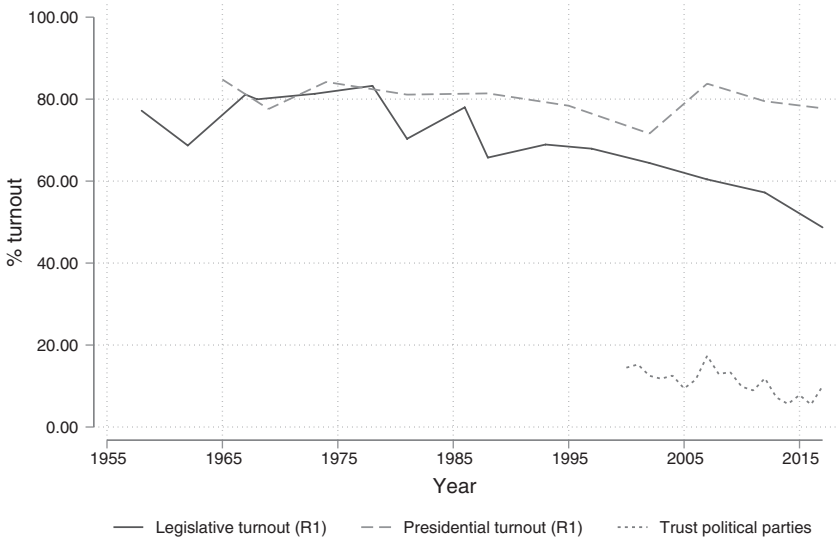


**Fig. 1.2** Trends in first-round presidential and legislative turnout (1958–2017) and in trust in political parties (2000–2017). Note: Question asked 'Do you tend to trust or tend not to trust political parties?' Source: Eurobarometer opinion data (http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/index); Ministry of the Interior official results

For the presidential elections, then, we cannot interpret support for Macron as a popular wave of support, or a catch-all phenomenon. Nonetheless, the crushing majority won by LRM in the second round of the legislatives is not a fluke. We will turn in due course to institutional explanations of how a 28 per cent vote share in the first round for a party which had not existed a year earlier converted into 43 per cent of the second-round vote share and over 300 seats. We will also outline how Macron's party managed to adapt to the diverse sociological and political conditions that are found locally across the multitude of electoral constituencies in France. Suffice to say here that the manner in which Macron's party built upon his presidential success was both testimony to the primacy of the presidential election over the legislatives, but perhaps just as importantly, thereby constituted the key step in the new incumbent's reformation of political life.

## 6 Conclusion: Towards a Political Reformation of France?

Any shift in political alignment needs to be sustained in the longer term to be worthy of the label 'reformation'. In this book's title, we deliberately use the term reformation, because the changes that Macron promised, and which in political systemic terms appear to have manifested themselves, go beyond a simple reform, through policy or other statutory approaches, formulating a new philosophical and moral compass to achieve change and renewal in France's political economy, polity and civil society. In his manifesto to reviving French society, *Révolution*, the broad-brush principles which Macron put forward constitute articles of faith as much as any detailed policy proposals. In that regard, the changes proposed by Macron in French political life are based upon the rejection of the old regime, still dominant but increasingly solipsistic and self-serving, a revitalization of the spirit of French Republican democracy and stripping away the trappings of elite power, to re-establish the founding principles.

In the chapters which follow, then, we look first at the context of the 2017 election compared with the previous race for the presidency, between François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, before considering the longer historical trajectory of the party and political system which has brought the Fifth Republic to the state in question in this election. Understanding the institutional drivers which have underpinned the competitive dynamics to

French elections in the modern era then frames the short-term influences which shape the electoral campaign—the selection of candidates, and the condition of the parties after the previous electoral cycle. We then move to the even shorter-term influences which impact upon the campaign—the 'events' which provide shocks changing the course of individual candidates' performance, and how these are reflected in the key markers of any contemporary election, namely the opinion polls. Finally, we turn to the three outcomes of the campaign—the first round and run-off rounds, and how these are reflected in the candidates' policy programmes and voter demand; and finally, the legislative elections which followed hard on the heels of the presidential race, and further established the fundamental shift in the political system which Emmanuel Macron's victory had shaped.

As we conclude, that shift is far from consolidated. The very forces which led to this unprecedented electoral result continue to push against the new executive and its legislature, and as we will discuss over the course of this book, it is by no means certain that the renewal of French politics that its victors have claimed is indeed a renewal, or can form a stable basis for a new democratic life in the country. If there is one theme to the chapters that follow, it is that the change in the French political system is a continuing dynamic, not a resolved outcome.

## Notes

1. Historically, it is worth noting that presidents have usually done better in their poll ratings than their prime ministers—see Pascal Perrineau, 'Popularité: le dévissage des deux têtes de l'exécutif', http://www.trop-libre.fr/popularité-le-dévissage-des-deux-têtes-de-l'exécutif/.
2. 'Jean-Marie Le Pen sur les chambres à gaz: "Ce que j'ai dit correspondait à ma pensée"', http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/jean-marie-le-pen-persiste-sur-les-chambres-a-gaz-873716.html.
3. 'Baromètre 2017 d'image du Front National', http://fr.kantar.com/opinion-publique/politique/2017/barometre-2017-d-image-du-front-national/.
4. The Eurobarometer data we use to look at this has multiple data points in some years. We therefore use the latest data point for these years.

CHAPTER 2

# The 2017 Presidential Election: Continuity and Change

Emmanuel Macron's victory in the 2017 French presidential and legislative elections has produced one of the most dramatic changes in France's politics since 1958 and an apparently profound reshaping of the bipolar polity that has traditionally dominated the Fifth Republic. Whilst incontestably rooted in the specific political opportunity structure of the 2017 presidential election, the meteoric rise and electoral success of Macron also emphasize important elements of continuity in electoral politics and the dynamics of the French political system in the longer term, and more generally in the key factors driving presidential and legislative election results in France.

This chapter explores the path dependency of the political innovation that occurred in the 2017 elections, placing the presidential race in the broader context of party competition and party system development since the mid-1980s, and looking at the Macron phenomenon across the array of socio-economic, cultural and political factors that traditionally affect electoral politics in France. We look to chart regularities in the dynamics of electoral competition and the clustering of the party system over time, placing the 2017 elections in the context of previous 'natural' swings of the electoral pendulum, including the atypical scenario of 2002. Notably, our analysis seeks to illustrate the processes and changing contours of bipolar multipartism in France, thus taking the 2017 election as yet another occurrence of change in the morphology of the party system.



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_2

We begin by looking at the set of political conditions that emerged from the post-2012 electoral cycle, which in key respects strongly resembled Sarkozy's declining presidency between 2007 and 2012. The parallels between the two presidencies are striking and they concern important drivers of French national election outcomes such as presidential and prime minister popularity, the unpacking of presidential party support during the legislature, mid-term election results and depression in electoral turnout, and general socio-economic performance, as well as voter dissatisfaction and the loss of public confidence about the reliability of party messages during electoral campaigns. We argue that all these variables operated in a very similar way across both Sarkozy and Hollande's presidential terms, highlighting the strong institutional and competitive inertia that exists in the French political arena, and which reduces the room for manoeuvre for incumbent presidents and their governments, contributing to the continuation of '*hyper-alternance*' (Evans and Ivaldi 2002).

The second half of the chapter looks at the 2017 presidential race from a wider perspective, placing it in the context of previous presidential elections in France while simultaneously identifying areas of differentiation, configuration of resources and temporal opportunities encountered by Macron, which facilitated the development and success of EM!, thus precipitating the collapse of the traditional bipolar party system. We argue that three main factors mattered in 2017, namely the size of the radical vote; the rise of a viable centrist alternative; and finally the increase in fragmentation which significantly lowered the threshold for electoral relevance and qualification in the runoff. As will be discussed, fragmentation in French presidential elections is closely associated with the level of voter turnout, and it reflects more generally the increasing 'proportionalization' of France's first-order electoral politics.

## 1 An Electoral Cycle Repeated: The Dynamics of 2012 and 2017 Compared

In our analysis of the 2012 elections (Evans and Ivaldi 2013), we emphasized the early anticipation of Nicolas Sarkozy's defeat from a number of factors: disastrous opinion poll ratings for president and prime minister, poor public image, progressively worse subnational electoral performance, growing challenges from the radical right-wing FN, and relative coherence of a socialist opposition rebuilding after a period of within-party divisions. In the lead-up to the 2017 presidential race, an almost identical set of conditions affected the socialist incumbent to perhaps an even greater degree, suggesting a likely crushing defeat for Hollande.

Looking across both periods, this section outlines the parameters which have affected both presidential incumbents in 2012 and 2017, providing relatively stable foundations to election outcomes while simultaneously confirming the institutional and competitive inertia in France's electoral politics. These factors are summarized in Table 2.1 and they are examined comparatively across both Hollande and Sarkozy's presidencies in the following sections.

**Table 2.1** Parameters of the 2012 and 2017 electoral cycles compared

| *Area* | *Sarkozy 2007–2012* | *Hollande 2012–2017* |
|---|---|---|
| Public opinion | | |
| Presidential approval ratings (% of trust, TNS-SOFRES series) | Start of period: 63<br>After 1 year: 37 (−26 pts)<br>Lowest: 20<br>End of cycle: 37 | Start of period: 55<br>After 1 year: 16 (−39 pts)<br>Lowest: 11<br>End of cycle: 14 |
| Media and public criticism | Fouquet's Dinner<br>Bolloré's Yacht<br>'*Casse toi pauvre con*' | Trierweiler's tweet in the 2012 legislatives<br>Julie Gayet love affair<br>*Un président ne devrait pas dire ça* Book |
| Voter political cynicism and mistrust<br>% who trust neither the left nor the right in government, CEVIPOF Barometer | 52 (October 2011) | 63 (December 2016) |
| % satisfied with way democracy works, CEVIPOF Barometer | 40 (October 2011) | 29 (December 2016) |
| Elections | | |
| Subnational elections: drop in electoral support for the incumbent | Regional (2010), Cantonal (2011) | Municipal (2014), European (2014), Departmental (2015), Regional (2015) |
| Challenge from the radical right | Regional (2010), Cantonal (2011)<br>Voting intention polls | Municipal (2014), European (2014), Departmental (2015), Regional (2015)<br>Voting intention polls |
| Parties and blocs | | |
| Split in the presidential majority | UDI | Greens (EELV)<br>Taubira (PRG) |
| Coherence in the opposition party rebuilding | Reims party congress 2008<br>PS primary election of 2011 | November 2012 leadership election in the UMP<br>LR primary election of 2016 |

### *1.1 Public Opinion*

A first area concerns public opinion and presidential approval, which showed important similarities in 2012 and 2017. As Fig. 2.1 illustrates, both Hollande and Sarkozy faced record political discontent with their policies and styles of presidency, confronting a dramatic decline in public support after only a brief honeymoon period.

In 2007, Sarkozy had entered presidential office with nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of positive ratings, but dropped 26 percentage points in the first year alone. His approvals had reached the lowest towards the end of the cycle with just a fifth of the French saying they trusted the president, showing a rebound just before the election to 37 per cent. A similar pattern was found for Hollande with his disastrous approval ratings showing an accentuation of the previous trend. In 2012, Hollande began his presidency with the lowest level of popular support ever achieved by a French president, at 55 per cent of positive ratings. Within a year, he had seen his

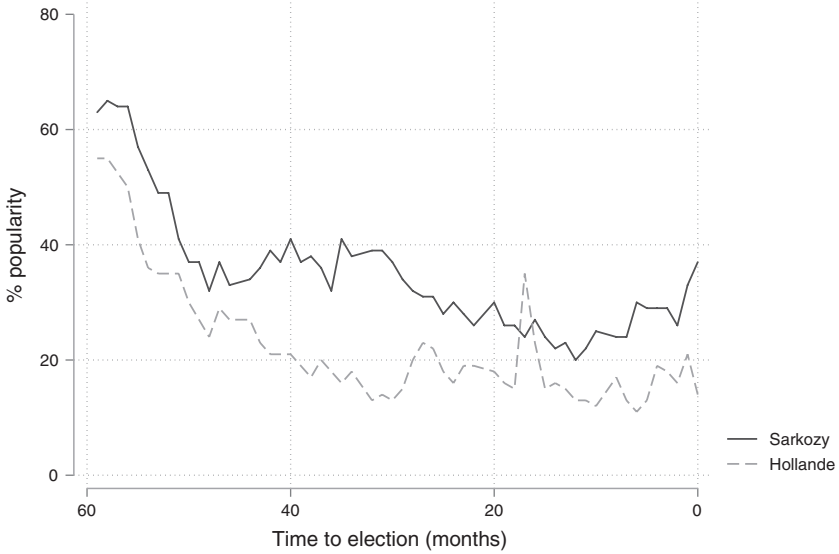


**Fig. 2.1** Comparative pre-election presidential popularities (2012–2017). Note: TNS-SOFRES monthly presidential popularity data; per cent of respondents who say they 'trust the President to solve the problems of the country' (2012–2017). Source: http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites

popularity decline to only 24 per cent, a substantial drop of over 30 points. Notwithstanding a short-lived rebound in popularity associated with the response to terrorist attacks in November 2015, on average presidential approval remained near an all-time low below 20 per cent throughout the last three years of Hollande's term, constantly lower than comparable figures for Sarkozy in the previous cycle, and ending at 14 per cent on the eve of the 2017 elections.

Linked to this, both presidents' styles were the subject of significant media and public criticism—Sarkozy too arrogant, almost monarchical in his bearing and enjoyment of the trappings of power; Hollande too reticent and uncomfortable in the public spotlight. Political controversies punctuated both presidencies, beginning with the *Fouquet's* dinner and Bolloré yachting holiday in the early stages of Sarkozy's term, which were mirrored by similar scandals during Hollande's presidency such as Valérie Trierweiler's tweet against Ségolène Royal in the 2012 legislatives, Hollande's secret love affair with actress Julie Gayet and the many revelations in the 2016 book *Un président ne devrait pas dire ça*.

In both cases, public distrust and voter discontent during the electoral cycle were fostered by the disconnect between the performative and essentially rhetorical acts of the presidential campaign, on the one hand, and the reality of hard policies, on the other hand, contributing to the perception of politicians as essentially unresponsive, and of the polity as static. As had already been the case in the mid-1980s, the 2014 economic policy U-turn by the socialist government, and its adoption of a clear social-liberal agenda, undermined the credibility of previous 'hard left' campaign messages, fuelling anger amongst left-wing voters. In the early stages of his presidency, Sarkozy had been strongly criticized for his 'bling-bling' style, hardly compatible with his campaign claim to represent France's hard-working middle and working classes, *La France qui se lève tôt* (the France that gets up early). Amidst the financial crisis, austerity policies by Fillon's government had tarnished Sarkozy's reputation as a candidate of the *pouvoir d'achat*, alienating a large tranche of his electorate in the *classes populaires*.

Across both presidencies, the depth of political discontent not only with the incumbent but also with the main opposition party was further revealed in public attitudes reflecting a more structural estrangement of voters from the governing parties of the left and right in France. Disaffection with party politics and anti-elite sentiments dominated both Hollande and Sarkozy's presidencies, with an average majority of six in ten

voters expressing their distrust of both the left and the right's ability to govern the country, thus keeping political space open for alternatives outside the main party channels (see Fig. 2.2). Over the same period, an average 85 per cent of voters would agree that 'politicians do not really care about what people think', while 57 and 65 per cent on average of the French under Sarkozy and Hollande, respectively, were generally pessimistic about their future.[1]

Looking at the 'end-of-cycle' popularities of the two dominant parties over the 2007–2017 period clearly shows that the mainstream right failed to truly provide an opposition to Hollande's socialists in the 2017 elections. Five years earlier, in the wake of a successful primary, the PS had enjoyed a significant increase in popular support, with no less than 51 per cent of positive ratings, against only 29 per cent for the incumbent UMP. By the end of Hollande's presidency, support for the socialists had logically fallen to 27 per cent, yet, in sharp contrast with the previous election, polls

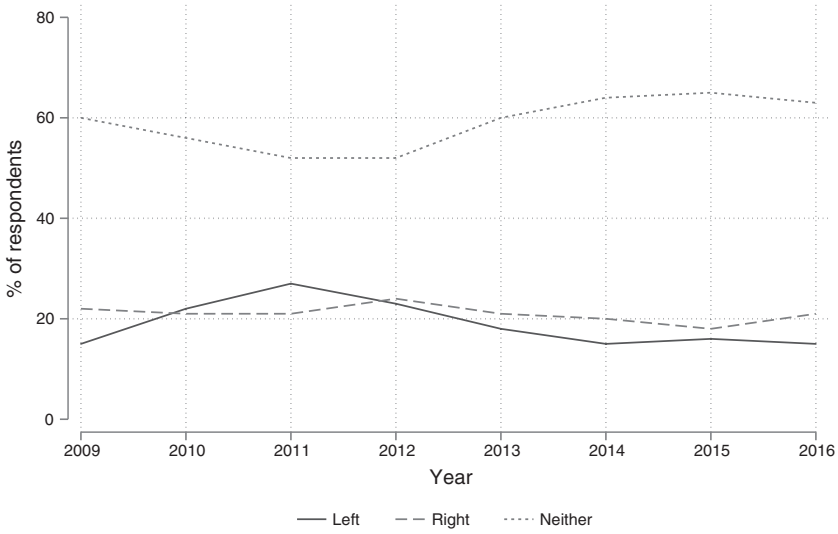


**Fig. 2.2** Public opinion trust of the left and the right (2009–2016). Note: CEVIPOF Baromètre de la confiance politique 2009–2016 (end-of-the-year surveys conducted in December); per cent of respondents who said that they trust the left; the right, or neither the left nor the right to govern the country. Source: https://www.opinion-way.com/fr/sondage-d-opinion/sondages-publies/politique/barometre-de-la-confiance-en-politique.html

demonstrated that the UMP had not rebuilt its credibility as the main party of opposition. Clearly, the party had not repaired the damage caused by its many political scandals, leadership rivalries and in-party fighting since 2012. On the eve of the 2017 presidential race, which had been deemed impossible for the right to lose, UMP popularity had slumped to 27 per cent, placing the party on an equal footing with the ruling socialists.[2]

The drop in support for traditional parties was reflected in the persistently high level of dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in France throughout both Sarkozy and Hollande's presidencies. As the CEVIPOF Barometer data in Fig. 2.3 suggest, there was a clear trend towards strong negative perceptions of the democratic quality of France's polity since 2009, averaging 55 and 66 per cent under Sarkozy and Hollande, respectively, and culminating at 70 per cent in the lead-up to the 2017 elections.

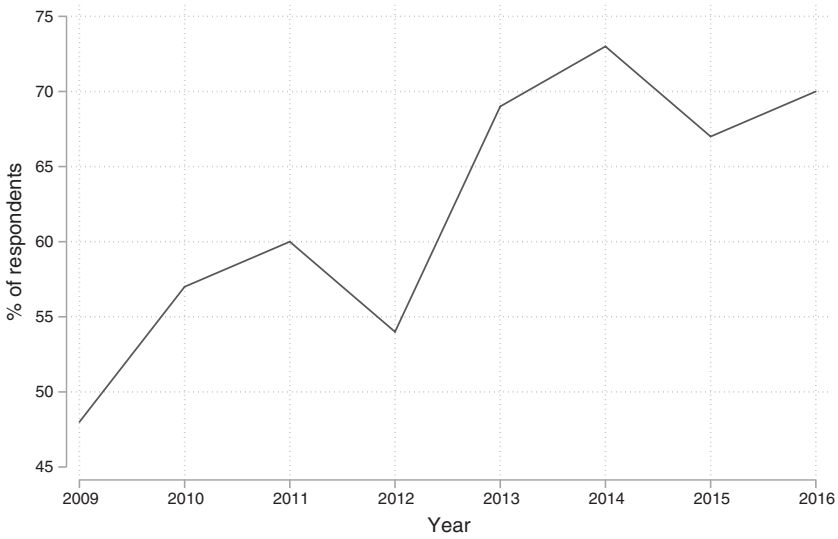


**Fig. 2.3** Dissatisfaction with democracy in France (2009–2016). Note: CEVIPOF Baromètre de la confiance politique 2009–2016 (end-of-the-year surveys conducted in December); per cent of respondents 'not satisfied' with the way democracy works. Source: https://www.opinion-way.com/fr/sondage-d-opinion/sondages-publies/politique/barometre-de-la-confiance-en-politique.html

### *1.2 Mid-term Electoral Results*

Linked to the above context of citizen disaffection, a second parallel existing between the two electoral cycles is that of incumbent performances in mid-term elections. While incumbent parties are typically expected to perform less well in second-order subnational elections, both the UMP and the PS in government nonetheless performed substantially worse than this during Sarkozy and Hollande's presidencies, with both also having to confront significant electoral challenges from the radical right.

Beginning with Sarkozy, the ruling UMP had been dealt a series of electoral blows between 2007 and 2012, experiencing a first notable setback in the 2008 municipal and cantonal elections, where the right had lost some of its traditional strongholds, with the left capturing 29 out of the 40 largest cities with 100,000 inhabitants or more, and winning 58 out of 102 general councils across French departments. Sarkozy's UMP then suffered heavy losses in the 2010 regional elections, where the socialists in opposition had picked up 21 out of 22 metropolitan regional councils—the notable exception being Alsace. In March 2011, the mainstream right abandoned another four departments to the left and lost control of the Senate for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic.

Similarly, poor incumbent performances in mid-term elections were key to Hollande's presidency. Early signs of voter anger with the ruling socialists were seen in local by-elections in 2013 amidst the political tremors provoked by the Cahuzac financial scandal. The first significant warning shots were fired in the 2014 municipal elections, however, in which the PS suffered devastating losses, their biggest since the electoral debacle of 1983, with the party giving up no less than 150 municipalities of more than 10,000 inhabitants, which produced a 62 per cent majority for the UMP and its centre-right allies in the larger urban areas. Nationally, the mainstream right seized an additional 155 municipalities of over 9000 inhabitants, which included symbolic wins in some of the left's historical strongholds such as Toulouse, Limoges, Montbéliard and Quimper, as well as a number of former left-wing bastions in the suburban 'red belt' around Paris, such as Villejuif, Villepinte, Aulnay-sous-Bois, Argenteuil, Colombes, Saint-Ouen and Bobigny.

In May 2014, the deeply unpopular socialist government suffered its worst score in the European elections, winning a paltry 14 per cent, in third place behind the FN and the UMP, and their worst performance since 1979—close to Michel Rocard's disastrous showing in the 1994

elections with 14.5 per cent of the national vote. The 2014 elections underlined the growing spatial and social polarization of the PS support in bourgeois metropolitan areas such as Paris and Lyon, while the more traditional working and lower-middle-class support for the PS would be increasingly turning to the FN (Jaffré 2016).

That the radical right was the main beneficiary of voter discontent with the ruling socialists was evidenced further in the 2015 departmental elections, where the PS won less than a fifth of the vote nationally, as opposed to 25.7 per cent for the FN and 29.3 per cent for the various parties of the centre-right and François Bayrou's *Mouvement Démocrate* (Modem). Majoritarian rule together with the premium for local *notables* that is typically found in cantonal elections in France gave the right-wing alliance a landslide victory with a total of 67 departmental councils, including strongholds of the left such as Nord, Seine-Maritime, Allier and Côtes-d'Armor, as well as, and more symbolically, Hollande's Corrèze and Valls' department of Essonne. The 2015 regional elections confirmed electoral dominance of the FN, however, as Le Pen's party topped the polls at 27.7 per cent of the vote nationally. Whilst rolling back on the previous monopoly of the left across regional councils, the winning by the UMP-UDI-Modem alliance of seven regions looked like a mediocre performance, particularly given that right-wing wins in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) and Nord-Pas de Calais-Picardie (NPDCP) were largely due to the PS standing down from the runoff to block FN candidates Marine Le Pen and Marion Maréchal-Le Pen from regional power.

Both presidencies were increasingly overshadowed by the threat of the radical right, following the electoral revitalization of the FN. After a period of shallow waters between 2007 and 2009, the FN had made its first significant comeback at a relatively late stage in Sarkozy's presidency, winning 11.4 and 15.1 per cent of the vote in the 2010 regional and 2011 cantonal elections, respectively. The 2011 cantonal elections were Marine Le Pen's first real-life test after her accession a few weeks earlier. Her undeniable success, moreover in a local structure of competition traditionally adverse to the FN, was seen as the first sign of the political rejuvenation and 'de-demonization' of Jean-Marie Le Pen's 'old' extreme right. Meanwhile, voting intentions for Le Pen peaked at 24 per cent, putting the far right candidate on top of presidential polls for the first time ever, but a lead that she would soon lose to Sarkozy and Hollande.[3]

The FN's progression was even more spectacular during Hollande's presidency, showing significant gains across all second-order elections in

2014 and 2015. Beginning with the 2014 municipals, the FN secured a total of 1544 municipal councillors across the country and 11 municipalities, taking most notably the 7th sector of Marseille and the larger city of Fréjus in the department of Var. In May 2014, the FN won its first national election ever, topping the European election with 24.9 per cent of the vote and 24 seats in the European parliament. From May 2014 onwards, polls would have Le Pen leading the first round of the 2017 presidential against Hollande and Sarkozy, with scores regularly in excess of 25 per cent, and peaks well above 30 per cent. The FN leader would in most cases be relegated to second place where Juppé was the candidate for the right, yet still enjoyed a substantial lead over all other candidates, systematically progressing into the runoff.

The March 2015 departmental elections represented another step towards FN institutionalization. The party achieved its best score ever in a local election, winning 25.2 per cent of the vote, a performance which was replicated a few months later in the December regional elections where the FN emerged as France's most popular party at 27.8 per cent of the national vote. The FN took the lead in six regions, with scores above 40 per cent in its traditional Mediterranean and Northern strongholds of PACA and NPDCP. FN lists received nearly 7 million votes in the second round of the regionals, even surpassing Marine Le Pen's presidential score of 6.4 million in 2012, and giving the party a total of 358 regional councillors.

### *1.3 Party Cohesion and the Discipline of Blocs*

Finally, one last important variable concerns the unpacking of presidential party support and the relative coherence of the opposition party rebuilding during the legislature, which operated in a similar way across both Sarkozy and Hollande's presidential terms. These aspects will be covered more extensively in Chap. 4, yet, as key elements common to the two presidential terms, and, beyond those, to previous periods of French government, they are briefly reviewed below.

Both Sarkozy and Hollande had faced fragmentation and splits in their legislative majorities towards the end of their presidential term. In 2011, the UMP had seen its more moderate centre-right allies in the *Nouveau Centre* (NC) and *Parti Radical* (PR) leave the presidential majority in protest against the 'hard right' strategy endorsed by Sarkozy in preparation for the 2012 campaign, and this had resulted in the creation of an

independent centrist party, the *Union des démocrates et indépendants* (UDI) in September 2012. A similar unpacking of the presidential majority occurred during Hollande's term, yet at a much earlier stage of his presidency, whereby Hollande's leadership had been challenged by a group of rebellious socialist MPs, the *frondeurs*, who opposed austerity measures pushed forward by Jean-Marc Ayrault's government. Hollande's social-liberal turn from 2014 onwards had alienated further the left of the socialist party, as well as the Greens and the left radicals. Both EELV and the PRG had distanced themselves from the PS after Valls' government had proposed stringent anti-terrorist legislation, including the most controversial proposal to strip terrorists with dual citizenship of their French nationality.

In both the PS and the UMP, electoral defeat in the presidential election triggered factionalism and in-fighting. On the left, factionalism had occurred in the disastrous Reims Congress of 2008, where Martine Aubry very narrowly defeated Ségolène Royal for the socialist leadership, but nonetheless failed to reunite the party. Aubry's legitimacy as party leader was challenged in the 2011 primary election that she eventually lost to Hollande. In 2012, immediately after Sarkozy was ousted from the presidency, the UMP had undergone a chaotic leadership contest in November 2012, which had almost split the party. Copé's disputed election with a narrow 50.3 per cent of the membership vote amidst allegations of electoral fraud within the party led Fillon to temporarily break away from the UMP to form his own dissident rival parliamentary group, *Rassemblement*-UMP, together with another 67 right-wing deputies. A short-lived political endeavour, Fillon's group was dissolved in January 2013, however, after a peace agreement had been reached between him and Copé to resolve an ongoing crisis which could severely and durably damage the mainstream right, postponing leadership rivalry to an open primary to be held in 2016 to select the UMP's presidential champion.

Both parties had rebuilt themselves as opposition forces, however, achieving some degree of internal cohesiveness after a period of within-party divisions, while simultaneously securing electoral partnerships with their traditional allies. In both the PS and the UMP, electoral defeat led to a renewal of the internal party procedures and nomination of candidates through balanced open primaries, providing a 'unified' candidate to challenge an unpopular incumbent (see Chap. 3).

Meanwhile, both parties were able to re-establish leadership over their respective bloc, forging alliances with the minor parties around them.

Parties of the left had displayed a good deal of republican discipline during Sarkozy's presidency, which prefigured the union of all left-wing forces against the right in 2012. The PS had negotiated stable electoral deals with the smaller parties of the centre-left such as the PRG, while simultaneously securing a common legislative platform with EELV's Greens. Similarly, during Hollande's term, despite disagreement over strategy and policies, the parties of the moderate right managed to build a more cohesive bloc ahead of 2017. The new cooperative strategies were pushed forward in the 2015 elections, resulting in a competitive bloc that accommodated the entirety of the UMP and the UDI, as well as Bayrou's Modem, marking a return to traditional patterns of cooperation on the right of French politics.

## 2 Party System Trends

One year prior to the 2017 race, the French political system appeared irrevocably locked into a situation of alternation between left and right. The institutional logic which had funnelled French political competition from the instability and fragmentation of the Fourth Republic to the *quadrille bipolaire* of the 1970s and early 1980s, and whose period of mismatched executive partners during *cohabitation* had apparently been solved with a simple harmonization of presidential and legislative cycles, had settled close to an executive majoritarian logic of presidentialized governmentalism, a hybrid of that originally conceived in the Gaullian and Debré constitutional models (Duhamel 1984: 621).

The resilience of the French party system, from the balanced four-party array of 1978 to the bipartisan dominance of 2012, is impressive in this respect. Since Bartolini's identification of the institutional and electoral logic shifting the remnants of the Fourth Republic's polarized pluralism towards moderate pluralism (1984), this type of party system has remained the baseline for French political competition, despite the varied challenges to it—the 'stress, strain and stability' of the system (Cole 2003). Those challenges have come from a number of directions—from new party actors, from internal party schisms and from a multiplicity of different electoral levels.

In some cases, these challenges have simply been absorbed by the institutional framework without threatening any significant disruption to the system's dynamics in the long term. The advent of the Green party as a relevant political competitor on the left-right spectrum, whilst disruptive

to the party system itself (Boy 2003), was absorbed easily enough by the left bloc. The splits and reconfigurations on the right, from the separation of *Démocratie Libérale* (DL) from the *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF) in 1998, to the formation of the UMP in 2002, and the ever-shifting constellation of the centre-right, currently shaped as the UDI, have for the most part seen the assertion of cooperation across the various actors in the second round of presidential and legislative elections.

Both aspects have been sustained by the presence of the so-called electoral accordion (Parodi 1992), opening up for regional and European elections held under proportional representation, and allowing new and smaller parties a success which raises their profile even in elections held under the 'closed' majoritarian logic of legislatives and presidentials.[4] Key to the implantation of *Les Verts* and *Génération Ecologie*, as well as to the FN in the beginning of its first period of local implantation, the European election counterpart seemed likely to serve the *souverainiste* movement, *Rassemblement pour la France* (RPF), of Charles Pasqua and Philippe de Villiers, in 1999, until the split and eventual de facto partnership between the RPF and UMP.

More complex characterizations of the party system as 'hybrid' (Knapp 1999: 114) or 'asymmetrical multipartism' (Cole 2013: 18) have still acknowledged the underlying bipolarity which pertains in presidential races, indicative of the resilience of the format to the challenges. In party system terms, we can identify three challenges to the stability of the party system since the period of 'ideal-type' moderate pluralism: the emergence and implantation of radical challengers; the emergence of a viable centrist alternative, and the fragmentation of party supply, the latter also being linked with levels of voter turnout. As we shall discuss, these challenges have varied over time, and their impact on the system has equally been variable. However, it is only in 2017 that systemically all three were sufficiently strong to result in the foundations being laid for a structural transformation of the party system. We will look at each of these in turn, before considering their impact in the 2017 presidential race.

### *2.1 The Emergence of Radical Challengers: Polarization*

On the right of the French political system, the presence of the FN over almost half-a-century has shrouded its rise to electoral relevance in the 1980s as a recent critical juncture in party system development and, until this election, perhaps the most recent. From the single-issue anti-immigrant

party, through a period of neo-liberalism and potential rapprochement with the moderate right, to its position as a pariah party of the radical right, cut off from its Gaullist neighbours by a *cordon sanitaire* which allowed no electoral alliance and, further, saw the implementation of the *front républicain* when its electoral success did increase, the FN has since the 1990s acted as a disruptive political influence.

However, the FN's nuisance potential—defined as instances in which the electoral pressure from FN significantly affects election results—has been limited in most national elections. The FN's disruptive power was most visible in the 1997 legislative elections, where the party's extensive presence in three-way second-round runoffs deprived the RPR-UDF cartel of a likely victory, and again in the 2002 presidential election where Jean-Marie Le Pen beat the PS candidate, Lionel Jospin, to second place. The last case was the 2012 presidential election where Le Pen concentrated her attacks against Sarkozy in the second round, depriving him of the votes needed to defeat Hollande (Evans and Ivaldi 2013).

At the national level, the FN's story has been one of electoral failure, or perhaps more precisely, under-performance, due mostly to the party's deficit in governmental credibility and its extremist reputation, as well as to its inability to foster cooperation with the moderate right in order to achieve competitiveness under France's majoritarian two-round electoral system. Leaving aside the brief period of legislative presence under proportional representation from 1986 to 1988—an indication of the power of the rules of the game in allocating seats from votes—the FN has never been able to exploit seemingly long periods of increases in its vote share. Between the 1986 legislative elections and the 2002 presidential first round, the FN and its presidential candidate increased their vote share consistently in legislative and presidential race, with the exception of the confirmatory legislative election in 1988 (where the FN nonetheless kept its score almost identical to the PR election two years earlier) (Table 2.2). This was followed with a period of low electoral tides and internal feuds, which paved the way for a change in party leadership and the advent of Marine Le Pen in 2011.

The FN has entered a new political era following Marine Le Pen's accession in 2011, seeking to address issues of credibility and to detoxify its extremist reputation to present a more amenable political profile to voters. The recent history of the FN under Marine Le Pen has been one of consolidated electoral returns and organizational development across all levels of national and local competition (Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016).

**Table 2.2** FN national electoral results since 1973

| *Year* | *Election* | *% valid* | *Year* | *Election* | *% valid* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1973 | Legislative | 0.5 | 1999 | European | 5.7 |
| 1974 | Presidential | 0.7 | 2002 | Presidential | 16.9 |
| 1978 | Legislative | 0.8 | 2002 | Presidential[a] | 17.8 |
| 1979 | European | 1.3 | 2002 | Legislative | 11.3 |
| 1981 | Presidential | – | 2004 | Regional | 14.7 |
| 1981 | Legislative | 0.3 | 2004 | European | 9.8 |
| 1984 | European | 11.0 | 2007 | Presidential | 10.4 |
| 1986 | Legislative | 9.6 | 2007 | Legislative | 4.3 |
| 1986 | Regional | 9.6 | 2009 | European | 6.3 |
| 1988 | Presidential | 14.4 | 2010 | Regional | 11.4 |
| 1988 | Legislative | 9.7 | 2012 | Presidential | 17.9 |
| 1989 | European | 11.7 | 2012 | Legislative | 13.6 |
| 1992 | Regional | 13.7 | 2014 | European | 24.9 |
| 1993 | Legislative | 12.4 | 2015 | Departmental[b] | 25.2 |
| 1994 | European | 10.5 | 2015 | Regional | 27.7 |
| 1995 | Presidential | 15.0 | 2017 | Presidential | 21.3 |
| 1997 | Legislative | 14.9 | 2017 | Presidential[a] | 33.9 |
| 1998 | Regional | 15.0 | 2017 | Legislative | 13.2 |

Source: Ministry of Interior

[a]Second-round runoff
[b]Local elections with FN presence in nearly all the cantons

Hollande's presidency was marked by an uninterrupted series of FN successes. The radical right made significant gains across all intermediary elections from 2012 onwards, and polls anticipated another 'historic' performance by Le Pen in the 2017 elections.

Meanwhile, the 2012–2017 period saw a significant reshaping of the French radical left, with the rise of a new political movement, namely Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise* (LFI). The once dominant actor of the radical left, the Communist Party (PCF), had irremediably declined during the 1980s and 1990s (Bell and Criddle 1989). In the early 2000s, the Communists had been temporarily replaced by an invigorated extreme left represented by small Trotskyite parties and presidential candidates, most notably Arlette Laguiller's *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) and Olivier Besancenot's *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR). While operating with a weak organizational infrastructure, the extreme left had capitalized on the divisions amongst former members of Jospin's *gauche plurielle*—which notably included a 'cartelized' Communist Party—and they had hampered a

significant share of the left-wing vote in the 2002 presidential election, winning a total of 10.4 per cent. During 2005, the European Constitution referendum campaign had brought together a coalition of protest movements to the left of the socialists, while simultaneously splitting the PS in two, thus contributing to the victory of the 'No' (Ivaldi 2006). However, the 2007 elections had seen a fragmentation of the far left, and a return to former socialist dominance.

A new unitary force, the *Front de Gauche* (FG) emerged in 2008 from the left's campaign against the Lisbon Treaty, from a joint venture between the Communists and Mélenchon's newly created *Parti de Gauche* (PG). The FG successfully mimicked the radical strategy of *Die Linke* in Germany, progressively reclaiming leadership over the '*gauche de la gauche*' in the French party system, which resulted in the marginalization of the smaller far left groups that had emerged in 2002. Despite a propitious economic context, the FG was duly hampered by the bipolar dynamics of the 2012 presidential election, however, with Mélenchon winning a mere 11.1 per cent, well below his expectations during the campaign. Diverging strategic views and a series of poor electoral returns undermined the cohesion of the FG during Hollande's presidency (see Chap. 4), leading to a split and the creation by Mélenchon of his own movement, LFI. The foundation by Mélenchon of his own party signalled significant changes in his mobilization strategy, notably his adopting a more populist and Eurosceptic orientation strongly opposing EU austerity and fiscal orthodoxy, which was articulated with previous claims of constitutional reform—by means of a constituent assembly that would initiate the move towards a new regime—and the former FG's smorgasbord of generous redistributive policies. This new left-wing populist agenda, clearly resembling Podemos' strategy in Spain, allowed Mélenchon to capture an unprecedented 19.6 per cent of the vote in the 2017 presidential election, clinging to fourth place.

To date, 2002 had represented the presidential election where the extremist vote had been the highest, proportionately. Evidently, the most salient memory from this election was the progression of Jean-Marie Le Pen to the second round. However, this was also the election where radical left candidates beyond the PCF garnered over 10 per cent of the vote for the first time. Yet, the presidential race of 2017 surpassed even 2002 in the share of vote going to candidates from extreme parties.[5]

Figure 2.4 plots the level of polarization in the system as the total size of the radical vote in each election. Before 2017, the highest level of polarization can be seen in 2002 where radical parties totalled 37.2 per cent of

the vote. In 2017, the score leaps to just under parity with parties of the mainstream. The combined support for Mélenchon, Poutou, Arthaud, Dupont-Aignan, Le Pen and the three micro-candidates almost reached 50 per cent. Abstention may have been some six points lower than in 2002, but the election which thus far had been characterized as '*un vote de tous les refus*' (Perrineau and Ysmal 2003) and '*le nouveau désordre électoral*' (Cautrès and Mayer 2004) largely on account of the level of radicalized vote, had seen an eventual wholesale rejection of radical right-wing extremism in the second round, and the establishment of a centre-right government in support of its president, leading into three successive electoral cycles including alternation between left and right.

### *2.2 Centrist Alternative*

A second significant area of differentiation in the 2017 elections was the presence of a viable centrist alternative both as presidential party—namely *En Marche!*—and candidate—that is, Emmanuel Macron. Where the 1978 legislatives had produced four parties of almost identical vote share in the *quadrille bipolaire*, the 2017 presidential square-dance featured four candidates, if not four poles, disrupting a clear left-right balance. While anti-system left and right, as well as moderate right, remained stable as political loci across the more recent electoral periods, the centrist position claimed by Macron represented a highly unstable competitive location generally deemed a losing position under the institutional context.

The history of centrism under the Fifth Republic has largely been one of single-election promise followed by failure. Jean Lecanuet, president of the centre-right *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP), performed well in the 1965 presidential election (15.6 per cent) but the formation of the *Centre Démocrate* (CD) for the subsequent legislative elections saw the party unable to compete between François Mitterrand's *Fédération de la Gauche Démocrate et Socialiste* (FGDS) and the Gaullist *Union des Démocrates pour la Cinquième République* (UDR) (Elgie 1996: 155). In the 1969 election, Alain Poher, President of the Senate from the CD, and therefore acting president after the resignation of De Gaulle, won 23.3 per cent of the vote and proceeded to the second round, behind the Gaullist and former Minister of the Economy, Georges Pompidou, who led Poher by over 20 points. As an amalgam of vestiges of Fourth Republic Centre parties, the CD's success was predicated upon the fragmentation on the left, and it was simply unable to build upon potential support against the party machine of the Gaullist UDR backing Pompidou.

The first viable centrist alternative to traditional Gaullist dominance was Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's *Républicains Indépendants* (RI) in the early 1970s, which formed the support base for Giscard's successful presidential bid in the 1974 elections. In some respects, parallels can be drawn with Macron despite his operating in a very different political context from that of Giscard in the 1970s. Alongside ideological commonalities between Giscard and Macron, both centrist candidates emerged from within the ruling majority—Gaullist for Giscard, Socialist for Macron, and both would progressively distance themselves from their previous political attachments, precipitating the fall of their mentors, only to capitalize on the internal divisions they had provoked in their former camp. In 1974, within-party rivalries and in-fighting in the Gaullist UDR deeply weakened Chaban-Delmas' candidacy, offering a propitious electoral opportunity for Giscard. Similarly, in 2017, Macron's emancipation from the PS was rendered possible largely because of the fragmentation in the socialist camp. Finally, in both cases, the centrist 'outsider' received support from splinter moderate groups from the previous majority: in 1974, Giscard was endorsed by the anti-Chaban sector of the UDR, notably Jacques Chirac, while, in 2017, Macron received official support from social liberals in the PS, such as Manuel Valls.

In the wake of Giscard's defeat in 1981, the UDF moved back to the right, however, regularly cooperating with the Gaullist *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR) in legislative elections, while abandoning its previous leadership to Chirac's RPR and, from 2002 onwards, to the UMP. As Table 2.3 illustrates, all successive centrist candidates after 1981 failed to achieve a level of presidential vote share similar to Giscard. In 1988, Raymond Barre came closest to disrupting Gaullist presidential dominance at 16.5 per cent of the vote just behind Chirac at 20 per cent. The influence of the UDF declined throughout the 1990s and early 2000s due to internal division and the making of an organizationally consolidated unitary right-wing party in the form of the UMP in 2002.

Thus, after Barre in 1988, it would be nearly 20 years until a centrist candidate would achieve a similar level of vote share. In 2007, François Bayrou from the UDF staked his presidential platform upon a government of national unity, placing himself equidistant between the governing UMP against which his party had supported a vote of no confidence in 2006, and the Socialist Party which it had joined in that censure vote. A distant echo to Macron's presidential bid of 2017, Bayrou ran on a centrist platform claiming to operate independently from both the left and right,

**Table 2.3** Electoral results of centrist candidates in national elections (1974–2017)

| *Year* | *Election* | *% valid* | *Candidate/Party* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1974 | P | 32.6 | Valéry Giscard d'Estaing |
| 1978 | L | 21.5 | UDF |
| 1981 | P | 28.3 | Valéry Giscard d'Estaing |
| 1981 | L | 19.2 | UDF |
| 1986 | L | Unitary lists with the RPR | Proportional representation |
| 1988 | P | 16.5 | Raymond Barre |
| 1988 | L | 18.5 | UDF |
| 1993 | L | 18.6 | UDF |
| 1995 | P | – | UDF support to Gaullist candidate E. Balladur (18.6%) |
| 1997 | L | 14.7 | UDF |
| 2002 | P | 6.8 | François Bayrou |
| 2002 | L | 4.8 | UDF |
| 2007 | P | 18.6 | François Bayrou |
| 2007 | L | 7.6 | UDF-Mouvement Démocrate |
| 2012 | P | 9.1 | François Bayrou (MODEM) |
| 2012 | L | 1.8 | Centre pour la France |
| 2017 | P | 24.0 | Emmanuel Macron (En Marche!), first round |
| 2017 | P | 66.1 | Emmanuel Macron (En Marche!), second round |
| 2017 | L | 32.3 | LRM+MODEM |

*P* Presidential, *L* Legislative

Source: Ministry of Interior, National Assembly

advocating a social liberal economic agenda, supporting European integration and pushing forward institutional reforms to renovate French politics. Bayrou also strategically adopted a more confrontational style embedded in a 'soft' anti-establishment appeal against the 'old established order' dominated by the PS and the UMP (Evans and Ivaldi 2013).

With 18.6 per cent of the vote, the 2007 race was the height of centrist presence in French presidential elections since the mid-1980s, reflecting Bayrou's popularity which peaked at 58 per cent of positive ratings on the eve of the 2007 elections, as opposed to 26 per cent five years earlier.[6] Referring back to Fig. 2.4, Bayrou's candidacy came at a time when polarization of the system was at one of the all-time lows. Of course, this is partly endogenous to Bayrou's own strong performance. However, it was also the election where the two main parties of left and right combined

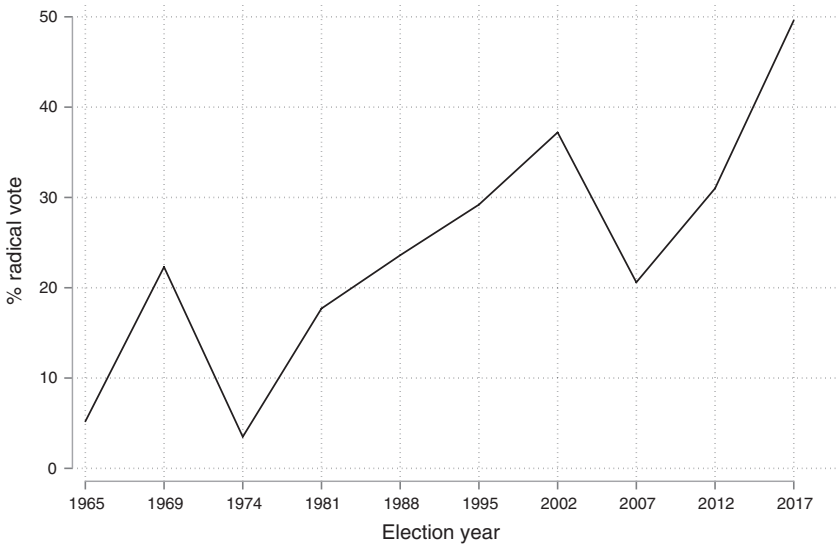


**Fig. 2.4** Polarization as the total size of the radical vote in presidential elections (1965–2017). Source: Ministry of Interior official figures, in per cent of the valid vote cast; authors' calculations

more than at any other election since 1974—some 57 per cent of the vote. A substantial proportion of Nicolas Sarkozy's vote had been won from voters potentially available to the FN, from the UMP candidate's hardline immigration and law-and-order stance (Mayer 2007). Similarly, Ségolène Royal had, to a lesser extent, secured some of the more hard left support potentially open to the PCF or Trotskyist candidates (Michelat and Tiberj 2007). These two centripetal tendencies on left and right wings ensured that the centrist support could only ensure a respectable third place.

Reformed as the *Mouvement Démocrate* (Modem) prior to the 2007 legislatives, in a further explicit attempt by Bayrou to distance the party from its avowedly right-rooted predecessor,[7] it managed only 7.6 per cent of the first round vote—still some three points more than the UDF had won after the formation of the UMP in 2002 had deprived it of some three-quarters of its candidates (Sauger 2003: 115). Indeed, in light of Modem's much weaker performance in the 2007 legislatives—undoubtedly a negative manifestation of confirmatory elections—maintaining this level of support was seen as difficult (Sauger 2007), and a score of less

than 10 per cent in 2012 suggested that the centrist peak had passed, which was corroborated by the drop in Bayrou's popularity, down to 44 per cent from 58 per cent five years earlier.

In 2017, Macron represented a viable centrist alternative, despite *En Marche!* being novel to French politics, lacking Bayrou's reputation as a *notable*. Macron's popularity was similar to that of his centrist predecessor at 40 per cent of positive ratings on the eve of the 2017 presidential election, but showing stronger political momentum and growth in support during the last months preceding the election. Macron's vote share of more than five points more than Bayrou in 2007 would therefore seem to be predicated spatially upon a heightened version of 'moderate polarization', or centrifugal competitive dynamics among the candidates of the centre-left and centre-right. In fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, this more radicalized position for the Socialist and Republicans candidates emerged from the primary process, rather than the programmatic strategy of internally anointed candidates. However, as the Bayrou example demonstrates, centrist space is not election-winning if the flanking competitors are not challenged by their own respective radical neighbours.

### *2.3 Fragmentation of Competition*

One last challenge to the stability of the party system concerns the level of fragmentation of party and candidate supply, both across the party system as a whole and within each of the two main blocs of the left and right. In party system classification terms, the total number of parties matters (Sartori 1976: 125–126). Where limited pluralism has in general between three and five relevant parties, more than five is characteristic of extreme pluralism. As Fig. 2.5 illustrates, the 2002 presidential election was the only time when the effective number of candidates surpassed this threshold, showing 8.8 candidates,[8] a number which was nevertheless significantly reduced in the legislative elections that followed, down to 5.2 candidates, setting a benchmark for average levels of fragmentation in post-presidential 'confirmatory' legislative races after 2002.

Fragmentation of the party system as a whole is dependent upon the presence and relative size of all parties, centrist and radical, across the spectrum, together with more traditional parties of the mainstream. As such, fragmentation must be regarded as a trait rather than a driver of change. Returning to Fig. 2.5, the total level of party system fragmentation in 2017, with 5.3 effective presidential candidates, was not substan-

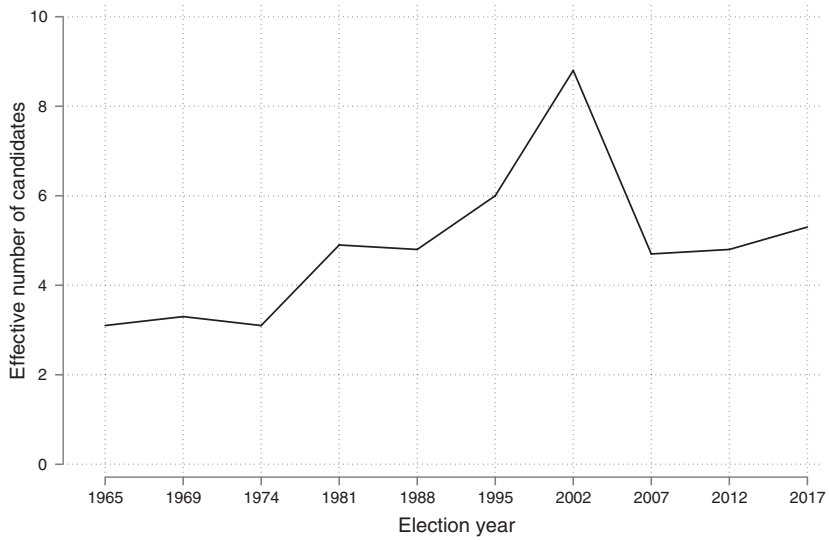


**Fig. 2.5** Effective number of candidates in presidential elections since 1965. Source: Ministry of the Interior official results; authors' own calculations

tially higher than the two previous editions in 2012 and 2007 at 4.8 and 4.7 parties, respectively. The effective number of parties or candidate may reflect some very different configurations, however.[9] In the 2017 election, the value of 5.3 captures primarily four main candidates of roughly equal size—Macron, Le Pen, Fillon and Mélenchon—plus Hamon and the rest of the more minor candidates, which account for the additional fifth 'theoretical' party.

More importantly, perhaps, the size of fragmentation within each bloc suggests that both the Republicans and the Socialists were strongly challenged by their more radical competitor in 2017, Hamon even more so than Fillon. As Table 2.4 illustrates, in the two previous elections of 2007 and 2012, the PS had secured over 70 per cent of the left-wing vote, a relative vote share which fell down dramatically to 23 per cent in 2017, however. Similarly, in 2017, the balance of power within the right pole of French politics shifted towards the FN, splitting the right-wing vote in two with Fillon securing only 48 per cent, as opposed, for instance, to 60 and 75 per cent for Sarkozy in 2012 and 2007, respectively. Thus, in 2017, the redistribution of power within each ideological pole attested to

**Table 2.4** Balance of power between mainstream and radical presidential candidates by bloc (2002–2017)

| | *2002* | *2007* | *2012* | *2017* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Left | | | | |
| Mainstream | 55.4 | 75.3 | 70.3 | 23.0 |
| Radical | 44.6 | 24.7 | 29.7 | 77.0 |
| Right | | | | |
| Mainstream | 50.9 | 74.9 | 60.3 | 48.4 |
| Radical | 49.1 | 25.1 | 39.7 | 51.6 |

Per cent of total presidential candidate vote share

Source: Authors' calculations from official result, Ministry of the Interior

the electoral decline of their mainstream components, expanding the political space available to Macron at the centre, which was a crucial factor of his success in the presidential.

Finally, it is worth considering the status of voter turnout, which, whilst clearly not a systemic property of the party system, is nonetheless closely linked with the competitive dynamics of French presidential elections, particularly with regard to the number of candidate, or fragmentation of its party supply. As Parodi (1997: 299) argues, French presidential elections became increasingly 'proportionalized' and fractionalized over time, a trend which was to continue until 2007, mostly as a result of the development of second-order elections held under proportional representation, which relaxed the constraints of the dominant majoritarian framework, fostering proportionalist and more expressive behaviour amongst voters in first rounds of national elections, while also allowing peripheral parties to gain visibility and achieve political relevance. In terms of Parodi's accordion analogy, having 'opened' for the second-order elections, the system does not entirely 'close' at subsequent first-order elections.

Simultaneously with this stretching, measured by the level of fragmentation, turnout has steadily declined over the same period. As Fig. 2.6 suggests, there is a strong relationship between voter participation and fragmentation in French presidentials across the 1965–2017 period, whereby a higher turnout is associated with lower fragmentation in the first round. As the 2002 election illustrates, it can be assumed that, because it primarily reflects voter discontent with the political system, lower turnout is more likely to affect its mainstream parties of government, with a relative and absolute increase in vote share for non-traditional party alternatives,

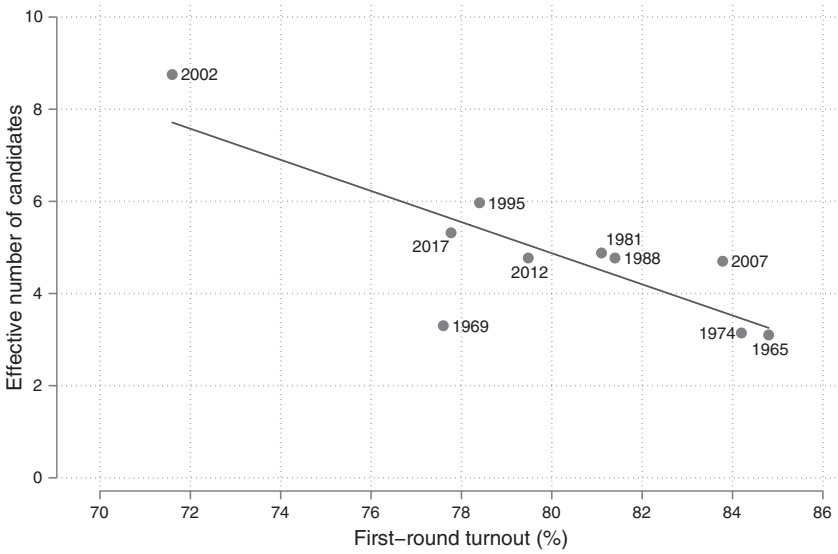


**Fig. 2.6** Voter turnout and fragmentation of candidate supply in French presidential elections since 1965. Source: Ministry of the Interior official results; fragmentation is expressed as the effective number of candidates (see above); authors' calculations

most likely radical candidates, whose populist appeal is best fit to capitalize on voter distrust of 'old' politics. In the wake of 2002, the elections of 2007 and 2012 saw a renewed centralization of presidentialized governing party, with improved mobilization, reducing support for other actors outside the mainstream.

In this regard, 2017 was not an outlier election in any sense. Candidate fragmentation was higher than average, turnout lower, in the first round, ensuring a propitious environment for a rejection of 'old' politics, as in 2002, but with the expected relationship between the two. In Parodi's formulation, the system has stretched further from 2012 and 2007, because of the impact of second-order elections in the previous cycle which we will explore further in Chap. 4. The election followed its expected trajectory, systemically. However, what the fragmentation argument cannot portray is the profound reorientation of underlying support leading to this pattern, and including a shift from governing parties to centrist challenger.

## 3 Conclusion

This chapter has identified three major challenges to the bipolar stability of the French party system, namely the consolidation of radical challengers, the fragmentation of party supply and the emergence of a viable centrist alternative. The first two challenges appear to be essential conditions of challenge to the competitive status quo. These challenges have varied over time, however, and they have played out differently across French presidential elections since 2002. Based on the data in this chapter, the variation in the impact of each of those factors on the party system can be summarized in Table 2.5.

As can be seen, the 2017 diagnostics provided the most favourable set of opportunities: it is only in 2017 that systemically all three parameters were sufficiently strong to result in the foundations being laid for a structural transformation of the party system. In contrast, in 2007, a potentially stronger centrist candidate—at least in terms of Bayrou's all-time high popularity besting that of Macron in 2017—failed to disrupt the bipolar dynamics of the presidential race, specifically lacking the opportunities that would be produced by the other two parameters, in an election which was marked with lower fragmentation and reasonably sized radical challengers. A similar conclusion applies to the 2012 election, where the radical vote increased significantly from 2007, yet failing to produce a centrist win as fragmentation did not augment substantially, while Bayrou had also lost some of his political lustre. Finally, looking back at the 'earthquake' election of 2002, the structure of opportunity was certainly ripe for change, showing high fragmentation and a sizeable radical vote, yet, at the time, Bayrou would simply not represent the credible centrist alternative that he would later embody in the 2007 and, to a lesser extent, 2012 presidentials.

Overall, the party system array at the end of the 2017 presidential elections could be characterized as in limbo. Four equal strength candidates,

**Table 2.5** A diagnostic summary of the three main challenges to the French party system since 2002

| | *2002* | *2007* | *2012* | *2017* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Size of radical vote | + | − | + | ++ |
| Credible centrist alternative | − | ++ | + | + |
| Fragmentation | ++ | − | − | + |

of very different ideological blocs, suggest a high level of polarization, and the fragmentation of the system, increased on 2007 and 2012, strongly suggests a move towards a higher number of actors across a wide ideological spread. However, looking beyond the drivers of this situation, which we consider over the next half-a-dozen chapters, the result of the presidential election does not give a clear indication of a realignment, but rather of a dealignment in progress. As perhaps might seem predictable given the label 'party system', the even partial resolution of this alignment would not be visible until the end of the legislative elections. The drivers which we turn to in the next chapters, then, can be regarded as the stimuli for dealignment, peaking at the end of the first round of the presidential race.

## Notes

1. http://www.cevipof.com/fr/le-barometre-de-la-confiance-politique-du-cevipof/resultats-1/vague8/.
2. TNS-SOFRES political popularity trends, http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites.
3. 'Un nouveau sondage illustre la dynamique Marine Le Pen', http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2011/03/05/un-nouveau-sondage-illustre-la-dynamique-marine-le-pen_1489056_823448.html.
4. In some instances, the electoral accordion has been invoked between legislative and presidential elections, for example, in 2002 where the fragmentation of candidates in the presidential race was replaced by a concentration of parties in the legislatives (Martin and Salomon 2004).
5. We use 'extreme' in the sense of Sartori's anti-system parties, namely parties which represent a challenge to the existing political order, and which reject coalition and are rejected by their nearest moderate neighbour (Sartori 1976: 123–133) LFI's coalition potential from the moderate neighbour is perhaps debatable, given Hamon's (rejected) offer of a pact with Jean-Luc Mélenchon.
6. TNS-Kantar political popularity trends, http://www.tns-sofres.com/dataviz?type=2&code_nom=bayrou.
7. For this reason, we do not consider the 1995 candidacy of the RPR's Edouard Balladur, supported by the UDF, as in any way centrist—Balladur was a 'classic' candidate of the social conservative right, splitting the right-wing vote between himself and Jacques Chirac.
8. We refer here to the standard measure of the effective number of parties (ENP) proposed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979), which takes into account both the number of parties and their relative weights. In this book, the ENP

is also used for the effective number of candidates in primary and presidential elections. As Taagepera and Shugart (1989) suggest, the 'effective number of parties' index should not be used as a proxy for the actual number of competitors, as it primarily conveys information about fragmentation.

9. See Michael Gallagher on this—(https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/Docts/effno.php).

## References


Bartolini, S. (1984). Institutional constraints and party competition in the French party system. *West European Politics, 7*(4), 103–127.

Bell, D., & Criddle, B. (1989). The decline of the French communist party. *British Journal of Political Science, 19*(4), 515–536.

Boy, D. (2003). La place de l'écologie politique. In P. Perrineau & C. Ysmal (Eds.), *Le Vote de tous les refus* (pp. 275–287). Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Cautrès, B., & Mayer, N. (Eds.). (2004). *Le Nouveau désordre électoral*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Cole, A. (2003). Stress, strain and stability in the French party system. In J. Evans (Ed.), *The French party system* (pp. 11–26). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Cole, A. (2013). Politics as normal? The 2012 French presidential election. *Parliamentary Affairs, 66*(1), 17–32.

Duhamel, O. (1984). Les logiques cachées de la Constitution de la Cinquième République. *Revue française de science politique, 34*, 615–627.

Elgie, R. (1996). Christian democracy in France: The politics of electoral constraint. In D. Hanley (Ed.), *Christian democracy in Europe* (pp. 155–166). London: Pinter.

Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2002, May 18). Quand la crise du consensus profite à l'extrême droite. *Le Figaro*, p. 14.

Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2013). *The 2017 French presidential elections. The inevitable alternation?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ivaldi, G. (2006). Beyond France's 2005 Referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty: Second-Order Model, Anti-Establishment Attitudes and the End of the Alternative European Utopia. *West European Politics, 29*(1), 47–69.

Ivaldi, G., & Lanzone, M. E. (2016). From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: Organizational change and adaptation in the French Front National. In R. Heinisch & O. Mazzoleni (Eds.), *Understanding populist party organization: A comparative analysis* (pp. 131–158). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Jaffré, J. (2016). Les nouveaux électeurs du Front national. CEVIPOF-ENEF, Note #7/Wave 1/January. Retrieved from https://www.enef.fr/app/download/12983061325/LA_NOTE_%237_vague1.pdf?t=1504181591

Knapp, A. (1999). What's left of the French right? The RPR and the UDF from conquest to humiliation, 1993–1998. *West European Politics, 22*(3), 109–138.

Laakso, M., & Taagepera, R. (1979). Effective number of parties: A measure with application to West Europe. *Comparative Political Studies, 12*, 3–27.

Martin, P., & Salomon, A.-C. (2004). L'accordéon électoral. In B. Cautrès & N. Mayer (Eds.), *Le Nouveau désordre électoral. Les leçons du 21 avril 2002* (pp. 303–324). Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Mayer, N. (2007). Comment Nicolas Sarkozy a rétréci l'électorat Le Pen. *Revue française de science politique., 57*(3), 429–445.

Michelat, G., & Tiberj, V. (2007). Gauche, centre, droite et vote. *Revue française de science politique, 57*(3), 371–392.

Parodi, J.-L. (1992). La doube consultation de mars 1992. A la recherche d'un modèle. In P. Habert, P. Perrineau, & C. Ysmal (Eds.), *Le Vote éclaté* (pp. 269–285). Paris: Presses de la FNSP.

Parodi, J.-L. (1997). Proportionnalisation périodique, cohabitation, atomisation partisane: un triple défi pour le régime semi-présidentiel de la Cinquième République. *Revue française de science politique, 47*(3), 292–312.

Perrineau, P., & Ysmal, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Le Vote de tous les refus.* Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Sartori, G. (1976). *Parties and party systems. A framework for analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sauger, N. (2003). The UDF in the 1990s: The break-up of a party confederation. In J. Evans (Ed.), *The French party system.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Sauger, N. (2007). Le vote Bayrou. *Revue française de science politique, 57*(3), 447–458.

Taagepera, R., & Shugart, M. S. (1989). *Seats and votes: The effects and determinants of electoral systems.* London: Yale University Press.

CHAPTER 3

# The Presidential Primaries and Polarization of Mainstream Party Politics

The presidential primaries of 2016 and 2017 represented a first crucial step in the process of political renovation, affecting predominantly the larger governing parties of the left and right, the PS and LR. Candidate selection is 'one of the central defining functions of a political party in a democracy' (Katz 2001: 278). Since the mid-1990s, presidential primaries have become an integral part of the political process in France, producing new opportunities but also new challenges to political parties (De Luca and Venturino 2015). The continuing development of primary elections reflects the complex interactions that exist between various aspects of party organization and internal politics such as leadership and factionalism, on the one hand, and the more structural trends towards intra-party democratization in French politics, on the other (Bucur and Elgie 2012).

In the French context, the continuing institutionalization of nomination races is specifically embedded in the process of presidentialization of the dominant parties, reflecting the external circumstances of those parties (Bachelot and Haegel 2015). As suggested by Samuels and Shugart, 'party behaviour and organization tend to mimic constitutional structure, giving rise to 'presidentialized' parties' (2010: 16). Presidential primaries represent a new *modus operandi* whereby parties try and adjust to an increasingly candidate-centred and mass media-dominated polity. Parties of the left, most notably, have resorted to presidential primaries to adjust to the institutional logics of presidential politics, reducing the tension between



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_3

their predominantly proportionalist partisan culture and the majoritarian framework that dominates presidential competition (Bergounioux and Grunberg 2005; Lefebvre 2011).

Nomination races may also be considered a strategic response by traditional partisan actors to the political sclerosis of the French political system. Presidential primaries are part of a broader attempt by French parties to address their 'democratic deficit' through plebiscitary democracy. Since the mid-1990s, political parties in France have endorsed direct membership votes to perform a variety of partisan tasks such as policy making, leadership elections and presidential candidate screening.[1] As Hopkin (2001) argues, democratization may occur as a formal process allowing parties to rebrand themselves and improve their reputation for democracy, presenting the primary race as a new departure, while claiming to empower the people. Finally, in a context marked by voter apathy and disenfranchisement, nomination races can be seen as a means for the more established and increasingly 'cartelized' parties of government of addressing their declining ties with civil society (Katz and Mair 1995: 21) and to mobilize voters in the presidential arena.

In giving all voters, rather than just members, access to the sovereign election process, however, parties have relinquished a vital part of their capacity to identify their presidential candidates strategically. In the sections that follow, then, we discuss the processes put in place by the governing parties of the left and the right, but focus in our analysis on the impact that the voters' decisions had on the eventual shape of competition in the first round of the presidential race.

## 1 The Context of the 2017 Presidential Primaries

Primaries were clearly intended by the PS and the Republicans as a vehicle to mobilize voter support in the presidential electoral arena. As we have discussed in the previous chapters, the 2017 elections took place against a backdrop of social pessimism and persistent distrust of traditional parties, reflecting a more general 'populist' mood in French politics (Ivaldi et al. 2017). Voter demand for political renovation and elite renewal would put France's 'blocked' polity under unprecedented political strain, while simultaneously producing new opportunities for political entrepreneurs both within and outside the main party channels (Mény 2017).

Notably, this gave rise to Macron's *En Marche!* (EM!) and Mélenchon's *France Insoumise* (LFI), both operating on grassroots democracy outside tra-

ditional political channels, and procuring voters with new policy and organizational alternatives (see Chap. 4). Among the main governing parties, on the other hand, change predominantly occurred as a result of the presidential primaries that were held by the PS, *Europe Ecologie-Les Verts* (EELV) and the Republicans in the lead-up to the 2017 elections. As Table 3.1 illustrates, the distribution of presidential selection methods correlated quite significantly with the strategic location of the various candidates and parties.

In a number of non-governing parties, both centrist and radical, presidential nominations were processed by means of exclusive leadership or party agency decisions, closely intersecting with party leadership. Despite diverse political cultures and backgrounds, parties such as the FN, EM!, *Debout La France* (DLF) and LFI exhibited a number of common features organizationally, most notably the centralization of their process of decision-making, strong personalization and a crucial role of the leadership in mobilizing support. In those parties, party leaders such as Le Pen, Macron, Dupont-Aignan and Mélenchon typically enjoyed their natural prerogatives as party leaders, showing substantial levels of party unity and discipline. Similarly, Bayrou's stepping down from the presidential campaign to endorse Macron was a smoke-filled room decision made in the leader's inner circle, rather than by consulting with party members.

This contrasted sharply with the more inclusive and democratic nominations that were found in mainstream parties in 2017, with EELV, the Republicans and the PS holding open presidential primaries, in the case of LR a historic first. As the data in Table 3.1 show, the nomination races of the PS and LR showed a higher degree of inclusiveness, producing large selection bodies of several million voters, however, showing substantial levels of fragmentation—here measured by the classic index for the effective number of candidates (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Together, inclusiveness and fragmentation provide an indication of how candidate screening interacted with key intra-party variables such as factionalism and leadership, while also shedding light on the strategic goals that the parties were seeking to achieve through the primaries and which, to some extent, would be disrupted by the unanticipated outcome that they produced.

## 2 Presidential Primaries and Intra-party Politics

In this section, we examine the specific set of opportunities and challenges produced by the political process and outcome of the primary elections held by EELV, LR and the PS in the lead-up to the 2017 elections. As

**Table 3.1** Presidential candidate selection procedures in 2017

| *Elite-centred nomination* | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Party* | *Nominee* | *Procedure* |
| LO | Nathalie Arthaud | Party leadership nomination, no vote, March 2016 |
| LFI | Jean-Luc Mélenchon | Party leadership nomination, no vote, February 2016 |
| EM! | Emmanuel Macron | Party leadership nomination, no vote, November 2016 |
| DLF | Nicolas Dupont-Aignan | Party leadership nomination, no vote, March 2016 |
| NPA | Philippe Poutou | Party leadership nomination, with delegates' vote<br>152 delegates, March 2016 |
| FN | Marine Le Pen | Party leadership election, with party members' vote (single candidate)<br>22,329 party members, November 2014 |
| Modem | – | Endorsement of Macron, February 2017, no vote |
| *Democratic*[a] | | |
| *Party* | *Nominee* | *Procedure* |
| PCF | – | No candidate, 53.6% support to Mélenchon, party membership vote, 40,937 party members, November 2016 |
| EELV | Yannick Jadot | EELV party members and sympathizers' vote<br>17,000 registered sympathizers<br>First round: 12,898 (3.5)<br>Second round: 13,926 (2.0) |
| *Belle Alliance Populaire*: PS, PRG, Front Démocrate, Parti Ecologiste | Benoît Hamon | Left-wing sympathizers' vote, January 2017<br>First round: 1.6 million (3.7)<br>Second round: 2.0 million (1.9) |
| UDI | – | Membership vote: 66.6% against participating in the LR primary, 23,000 party members.<br>Support to Fillon in March 2017 |
| *Droite et centre*: LR, *Parti Chrétien-Démocrate* (PCD) | François Fillon | Right-wing sympathizers' vote, November 2016<br>First round: 4.3 million (3.1)<br>Second round: 4.4 million (1.8) |

[a]Effective number of candidates in square brackets, as per Laakso and Taagepera (1979)

Sandri et al. suggest, primaries are decision-making instruments 'that are applied within a given context' and 'operate within a specific structure of party politics' (2016: 2). Presidential nomination races interact with more traditional aspects of party politics such as leadership, organization and factionalism.

### *2.1 Primary Elections and Party Leadership*

Looking first at the interaction of primaries with leadership, mechanisms of candidate selection in the 2017 elections, presidential candidate screening showed diverging models of leadership and presidential decision-making among parties. As noted earlier, competitive open primary elections concerned exclusively EELV's Greens, the PS and the right-wing Republicans. That those parties were holding presidential primaries reflected the absence of a 'natural' candidate, which in the case of the PS notably included incumbent President François Hollande.

All three elections specifically mirrored the persistent disjuncture between party leaders and presidential nominees. Beginning with EELV, such a disconnect has been a central feature of Green politics since 2002, which is embedded in the movement's tradition of direct grassroots democracy and the balance that the party has typically been trying to achieve between its democratic culture and France's institutional incentives (Villalba 2008). In 2012, the EELV primary had been notable for the change that had occurred in the electoral college, as well as for opening the competition to candidates from outside the party (Evans and Ivaldi 2013: 68). In 2016, the presidential nomination failed to achieve such a degree of openness, also confirming the leadership disjuncture, with the newly elected party leader, David Cormand, standing down from the race to endorse Cécile Duflot.

In the PS, the decision to hold a primary election was a bitter admission by Hollande of his loss of legitimacy as natural candidate for the PS, against a backdrop of the increasing fractionalization of his socialist camp. Looking back over the history of French socialism, this contrasted with the Mitterrand era as well as with Lionel Jospin's presidential bid in 2002, which had been entirely based on credibility and undisputed authority. While contingent on the 2017 opportunity structure, Hollande's decision to submit to the popular vote accentuated further the disjuncture between the party and its presidential nominee, which has been a characteristic feature of the post-Mitterrand period of socialist politics. This process had

begun in the mid-1990s when the PS had first introduced the principle of membership-based primary elections in its party statutes. In the lead-up to the 2012 election, the socialists had officially adopted open primary elections, taking the presidential nomination outside the boundaries of the party for the first time, thus acknowledging the declining relevance of party leadership. In 2011, Martine Aubry's failure to win the candidacy whilst enjoying a strong position as PS first secretary had diminished further the power and legitimacy of the Socialist Party leader in the presidential arena (Lefebvre 2011).

The decision to hold a presidential primary in 2017 was unanimously approved by the party's national council with the blessing of the Elysée Palace on 18 June 2016. The main rationale behind Hollande agreeing to the primary was that it would allow him to emerge as the unified candidate of the left, regaining legitimacy and creating political momentum before the election. Hollande's master plan would, however, be thwarted by stubbornly high unemployment and abysmal popularity ratings. In October 2016, the revelation of his many controversial comments in the *Un président ne devrait pas dire ça* tell-all book provoked political embarrassment and public outrage, fuelling further public anger with the incumbent president while also raising scepticism and fury within his own camp. In November, polls showed that only 14 per cent of voters would support Hollande's re-election bid,[2] leading him eventually to step aside from the presidential race, an unexpected decision which was announced on television on 1 December 2016, thus provoking a complete reshuffle of the competitive structure in the primary.

In LR, the move towards an open primary contrasted sharply with previous membership-based nomination votes in the UMP, suggesting a significant departure from the traditional Bonapartist culture of party unity and strong leadership in the French right (Haegel 2012). In 2007 and 2012, UMP presidential nominations had intersected almost naturally with Nicolas Sarkozy's uncontested leadership, in keeping with the 'incarnation' legacy of the Gaullist mythology. As Cross and Blais (2012) suggest, more democratic leader selection procedures are often adopted by parties in opposition, in the aftermath of an electoral setback, and they are stimulated by change in the party's competitive position. Following Sarkozy's withdrawal from national politics immediately after his defeat in the 2012 elections, the UMP had entered a raging leadership war opposing François Fillon to Jean-François Copé, nearly splitting the mainstream right in two.[3] Whilst a truce agreement had been found in early 2013, the

risk of yet another devastating leadership struggle in the 2017 elections had led to the decision to hold a presidential primary. The primary had been confirmed in January 2015 following Sarkozy's return as party leader in November 2014.[4] At the time, presidential hopefuls like Fillon and Juppé would agree on the principle of an open primary mostly in order to counterbalance Sarkozy's popularity and personal influence within the party, which would have given him a decisive advantage in any membership vote.

These open processes contrasted sharply with the presidential nominations in the other parties, most of which naturally featured their leaders. Inside-track elite nominations occurred, for instance, in the two small anticapitalist Trotskyite parties, *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) and the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA), replicating the 2012 candidacies. Reflecting LO's old culture of internal secrecy, Nathalie Arthaud was nominated at a closed party congress in March 2016. The same month, despite strategic disagreement with other members of the central leadership, Philippe Poutou was officially endorsed by the NPA's National Conference, receiving support from 95 per cent of 152 delegates representing some 2000 party members.

In right-wing populist parties like the FN and DLF, exclusive selection methods were consistent with the traditional model of centralized hierarchical organization oriented towards strong leadership. As Ivaldi and Lanzone (2016) suggest, in the current FN, the centralization of power has taken the form of a 'Marinization' of the party. Additionally, in the context provided by an uninterrupted series of electoral victories since 2011, there was little room for alternate candidates contesting Le Pen's authority within the FN.

In movements such as *En Marche!* and LFI, the closedness of presidential nominations was somehow at odds with their organizational features as non-traditional party alternatives based primarily on direct grassroots democracy. Such an emphasis on the role of the party rank and file was found in *En Marche!*, incontestably the main innovation of the 2017 campaign. The movement was launched by Macron in April 2016 and developed primarily as a 'virtual' personal party across social networks and the web, showing a hybrid form of highly personalized leadership and participatory democracy clearly resembling Ségolène Royal's *Désirs d'avenir* movement in 2007. Despite claims of bottom-up democratic procedures, however, *En Marche!* operated almost exclusively as an empty shell organizationally, based solely on free online membership, thus remaining first and foremost a political vehicle for Macron's personal ambitions.

Similar hybridization was found in Mélenchon's LFI which was created in February 2016 from the array of anti-austerity social movements that had operated within the former *Front de Gauche* (FG). LFI's strategy for mobilization rested primarily on horizontal processes based on local participatory assemblies (*Groupes d'appui*), grassroots participation and free online membership, assigning, however, a decisive emphasis to the de facto more formal type of populist leadership embodied by Mélenchon as 'charismatic leader'. Mélenchon's announcement that he would run in 2017 occurred without no prior consultation of his party members, or of his former communist allies, reflecting his personal power and organizational emancipation from the former FG.

### *2.2 Fragmentation*

Together with issues of presidential leadership, the 2017 primary elections reflected the fragmentation in the two dominant parties of the left and the right. In both cases, presidential primaries were clearly intended as a means to mediate competition between rival groups of elites operating within the party, as well as an effort to build more competitive electoral blocs with their potential allies both proximal and more distant.

In 2017, fragmentation occurred both inside and around the major parties. Since 2012, both LR and the PS had experienced significant internal struggles between factions of elites competing with each other over ideology and strategy, particularly on political alliances. Moreover, there was some evidence that their 'natural' partners were tactically keeping their distance, although the likelihood of independent presidential bids by minor parties on the periphery of the PS and LR was in fact very small. In this, the 2017 primaries provided important cues to voters as to the subsequent strategies of party cooperation in the general election.

Externally, the PS and LR parties failed to pull in their most significant electoral neighbours. Beginning with the Republicans, the primary included only two minor right-wing conservative parties, namely the *Parti Chrétien-Démocrate* (PCD) and the *Centre national des indépendants et paysans* (CNIP). LR's main centrist allies, François Bayrou's Modem and Jean-Christophe Lagarde's UDI, had refused to participate in the primary, despite having forged nationwide alliances with the Republicans in the 2014 municipal and 2015 local and regional elections. Bayrou had officially endorsed the more centrist bid of Alain Juppé in September 2016, announcing that he would run in the presidential should Sarkozy win the

nomination. As in 2012, Bayrou was strongly critical of Sarkozy's hardline strategy and what he deemed the former president's 'obsession with identity', notably after Sarkozy had made controversial comments about the French's 'Gallic ancestors'.[5]

Similar criticism was found in the UDI, the Republicans' most loyal ally on the centre–right. A majority of the 23,000 party members (66.6 per cent) had voted against taking part in the LR's primary at the UDI's party congress in March 2016. Bereft of its leader, Jean-Louis Borloo, who had stepped down for health reasons in April 2014, the UDI membership had been split in half, however, over the opportunity to run their own candidate in the presidential election, with 47 per cent voting in favour, 47 per cent against, and a remaining 6 per cent undecided. In October 2016, the UDI leadership, together with 600 elected representatives of the centre–right, including 18 MPs and 27 Senators, officially announced that they would support Juppé in the primary, a decision justified on the grounds of Juppé's more moderate ideological profile and his endorsing progressive, European values.

On the left, the socialist primary was organized in a deeply fragmented political landscape, reflecting the collapse of Hollande's majority during his presidential term. The socialist presidential nomination was placed under the auspices of the *Belle Alliance Populaire* (BAP), a PS-led umbrella organization founded in April 2016 to unite whatever was left of the pro-Hollande sectors of the French left, which primarily concerned their closest left-wing radical allies of the *Parti Radical de Gauche* (PRG) and various minor splinter ecologist parties.

The PRG was represented in the primary by Minister of Housing Sylvia Pinel who ran on a culturally liberal platform including legalizing cannabis and granting voting rights to foreigners. Other tiny left-wing and ecologist groups included former Modem vice-president Jean-Luc Bennahmias and his *Front Démocrate, Écologique et Social* (FD), as well as François de Rugy's *Écologistes!* which assembled the majority of former EELV cadres such as Barbara Pompili and Jean-Vincent Placé, who had left EELV earlier in September 2015 over disagreement with Cécile Duflot's radical left strategy of moving towards Mélenchon's FG. Whilst keen on joining the primary, other minor parties of the left such as *Nouvelle Donne*, the *Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen* and the *Mouvement des Progressistes* found themselves excluded from joining the BAP and therefore from running in the primary, a decision by the dominant PS, which was accounted for by the need to avoid an uncontrolled inflation in the number of

candidates in what was already a crowded race. As the PS's first secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis succinctly put it, the BAP primary was not 'an open bar'.

While aggregating a myriad of negligible parties around the PS, the BAP nevertheless demonstrated the incapacity of the socialists to secure a potentially more competitive alliance with its other potential allies on the left, most evidently Macron, the Greens and Mélenchon. The latter had clearly indicated as early as January 2016 that he would simply not endorse a socialist primary, as the leader of LFI would continue his radical left shift further away not only from the socialists but also from his former communist allies in the FG since 2009. In June 2016, a similar decision was made by EELV's Greens, increasingly independent from the PS, but at the risk of losing whatever was left of the parliamentary group they had formed in 2012 thanks to the tactical pact with their former socialist partners. Finally, taking a firm position to the right of the PS, Macron confirmed in December 2016 that he would run for president as an independent candidate on a centrist platform, building on his popularity and hoping to capitalize on the profound identity crisis in the PS to mobilize disillusioned moderate socialist voters.

Fragmentation also affected the parties internally. In the PS, in particular, the 2017 primary demonstrated the deterioration of party cohesion and increased ideological pluralism, which contrasted sharply with the more unitary party that had emerged from the Toulouse congress in October 2012, a few months after Hollande's presidential victory. In Toulouse, the majority motion put forward by Harlem Désir and Guillaume Bachelay with the support of Hollande, Martine Aubry and Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault had received over two thirds (67.9 per cent) of the membership vote, resulting in an overwhelming majority (72.5 per cent) for Désir's nomination as party leader. Overall, the effective number of motions in the Toulouse congress had gone down to just under 2 compared with 3.9 and 5 in Reims in 2008 and Le Mans in 2005, respectively, showing a marked decrease in party factionalism. A semblance of party unity had been maintained also in the party congress of Poitiers in June 2015, where the majority motion led by Jean-Christophe Cambadélis had received 60 per cent of the membership vote against the *frondeurs*' motion *A gauche pour gagner!* led by Christian Paul, at 28.5 per cent.

The roster of candidates in the 2017 primary showed on the other hand the ever growing divide between the two main anti-liberal and social–liberal factions that had operated within the socialist majority throughout

Hollande's presidential term (see Chap. 4), reflecting deeply diverging sets of policy preferences and strategies of presidential competition. Hamon had formally joined with the socialist rebels in November 2014 after leaving the government in August, and he had participated in the political 'putsch' of the 2016 motion of no confidence against Valls's government. Whilst finding its way into the 2017 nomination, primary support by the group of *frondeurs* was split in half between Hamon and Montebourg, however. The former was endorsed by Alexis Bachelay, Pascal Cherki and Barbara Romagnan, for instance, while the latter received official support from other rebellious MPs such Laurent Baumel and, perhaps less expectedly, from Christian Paul who was seen as politically closer to Hamon.

Clearly reflecting this split in the left wing of the PS, the primary showed persistent factionalism with an effective number of candidates of 3.7, similar to the 2011 race at 3.5, higher, however, than 2007 (2.2). During the campaign, Hamon promoted a greened left-leaning platform combining universalistic redistribution with a range of environmentally friendly policies and a culturally liberal agenda. Central to his bid was the radical proposal of a 'universal basic income' which acted as a potent marker for his ideological positioning to the left of the socialist primary, contrasting with the more pro-business positions in Valls's and, to a lesser extent, Montebourg's bids. As had already been the case in 2011, the latter entered the primary race opposing austerity and advocating economically protectionist and anti-globalization policies, a line which was subsumed in his 'Project France'. Like Hamon, Montebourg opposed the government's labour law of 2016 and formulated a soft criticism of the EU, promising to review France's commitment to the EU's budget deficit rules. His project included also his long-established claim for institutional reform embedded in his notion of the 'Sixth Republic'.

Following Hollande's decision to step down, Valls entered the race in early December 2016 relatively unprepared. As polls suggested, the former prime minister was likely to be blamed for what was perceived by many left-wing voters as the legacy of Hollande's broken promises of Le Bourget in 2012. As well as being an appeal to pursue his government social–liberal agenda, Valls's bid was devoid of any major policy proposal. It focused mostly on his personal attributes, putting forward his personal qualities of statesmanship, pragmatism and fighting spirit. His tough Republican stance on security and identity, attacking Hamon for his alleged softness on immigration and communitarianism among French Muslims, placed Valls on the right of the socialist primary spectrum.

Turning to the right, the LR primary bore some of the political stigmas of the internal crisis that had occurred in 2012, de facto institutionalizing internal competition, and acknowledging the factional make-up of the party through the official recognition of 'movements' (Haegel 2015). Against the backdrop of a disastrous leadership election, the UMP party congress of November 2012 had demonstrated a high degree of fractionalization, with no less than 5.2 movements effectively competing. The membership vote had also shown the victory of the party's hardliners in the pro-Sarkozy *Droite Forte* (Strong Right) with 27.8 per cent of the vote, together with the *Droite Populaire* (Popular Right), the group of FN-leaning elites in the UMP, at 10.9 per cent. In 2016, the structure of competition in the primary demonstrated that the party was split in three, representing diverging styles, policies and strategies, perhaps as a distant echo to the three main historical tendencies that have traditionally structured the French Right, that is *orléanisme*, *légitimisme* and *bonapartisme* (Rémond 1982).

Juppé entered the LR primary proposing a moderate secularist right-wing platform mixing a culturally liberal approach—embedded in his concept of 'positive identity' (*identité heureuse*)—with more balanced economic policies that could win him the bulk of social–liberal voters in the general election. As noted earlier, Juppé's moderate and pro-EU campaign received support from all major centre–right parties, including the majority of the UDI, Bayrou's Modem and Borloo's *Parti Radical*. In contrast, Sarkozy kept with the so-called Buisson hardline strategy of emulating FN themes and policies, which he had successfully employed in 2007 and then again, albeit with varying degrees of success, between 2010 and 2012. Finally, Fillon's candidacy was based on a more traditional right-wing agenda combining strong market liberal policies with Catholicism and social-conservatism. This in particular brought him the support from neo-conservative groups and networks that had mobilized against the same-sex marriage law in 2013, while simultaneously alienating support from liberals and moderates on the centre–right.

## 3 The Dynamics of the 2017 Nominations

Whilst taking place within the parties, different candidate selection methods may have an impact on important aspects of democracy such as participation, representation, competition, and responsiveness (Kenig 2008; Hazan and Rahat 2010). While interacting with intra-party dynamics, the

2017 French presidential primaries were also held by governing parties as a means of re-establishing their ties with civil society and improving their image, to create political momentum and mobilize voters into the presidential electoral arena. Recent elections in France have seen a decline in turnout, reflecting political disenfranchisement, voter distrust of traditional party alternatives and the general closure of the political system. In their recent study of French primaries, De Luca and Venturino (2017) suggest that the outcome of the general election is indeed affected by turnout and competition in the corresponding primary. Most notably, they find that turnout does enhance the electoral performance of the winning primary contestant. As will be discussed below, the nomination races in 2017 equally produced unexpected outcomes which deeply reshaped the entire structure of presidential competition, and thereby its outcome.

### *3.1 Primary Voter Mobilization*

While dealing with highly divisive issues of leadership and factionalism, an important rationale behind the Republican primary of November 2016 was to mobilize voters and create political momentum for LR's candidate in the presidential. The election was opened to all centre–right and right-wing sympathizers among registered French voters and it was held under a two-ballot majoritarian system which clearly mimicked the PS nomination race of 2011. In their major cross-national study of party leadership selection, Cross and Blais (2012) find a strong contagion effect within party systems. In the French case, LR's move towards an open primary certainly was encouraged by the perceived success of the 2011 socialist nomination in delivering a 'winning' candidate, namely François Hollande.

Indeed, the Republican primary proved a major success for the right, attracting over four million voters across its two rounds—4.3 and 4.4 million, respectively—that is about 9 per cent of the registered electorate, thus producing a far more expansive selectorate than the 238,000 party members registered with LR as of 2016. The exceptionally high turnout in the primary confirmed LR's status as main party of the opposition, as well as demonstrating its electoral and organizational strengths. As had been the case for Hollande in 2011, the size of the popular support for the primary increased the political legitimacy of the LR's winning candidate, François Fillon, giving him a strong democratic mandate to enter the presidential race. Incidentally, the compulsory 2 Euro fee per vote levied in the primary—twice the amount asked from voters in the PS races of 2011 and

2017—helped the party amass over 17 million Euros, providing a substantial war chest for the presidential campaign.

As had been anticipated, the primary win created political momentum for the newly nominated champion of the right, giving him a typical 'convention bounce'. As Fig. 3.1 illustrates, immediately after the vote, Fillon gained a 18-point bounce in popularity, from 23 per cent of approvals in October 2016 to 41 per cent in December, much of which evaporated, however, going into the general election campaign, a plunge in the candidate's standing in the polls which demonstrated the devastating political impact of the Penelopegate political scandal (see Chap. 5). Similarly, a short-lived bump was discernible in voting intention polls with presidential support for Fillon climbing to 29 per cent from a previous 20 per cent, yet only to return to its 20 per cent plateau in early February 2017.[6]

In sharp contrast, primary elections on the left showed much less enthusiasm among the *peuple de gauche*, indicating the size of voter discontent with Hollande and the socialist-led parliamentary majority in his

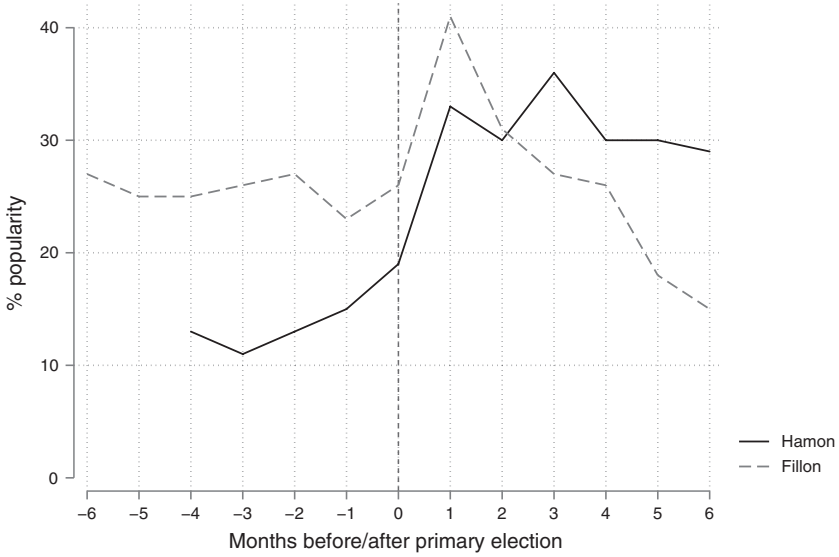


**Fig. 3.1** Post-primary popularity bounce for Fillon (LR) and Hamon (PS). Note: TNS-SOFRES monthly popularity data; per cent of respondents who say they 'want Fillon / Hamon to play an important role in the future'. Source: http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites

presidency. Beginning with EELV's Greens, the nomination race of October–November 2016 failed to spur public interest, reflecting the political marginalization of the Ecologist movement since 2014. In June 2011, the Greens had been successful in attracting high-profile candidates from outside the party, most notably popular TV host Nicolas Hulot, substantially increasing the visibility and media coverage of the nomination. Also, the alliance with Cohn-Bendit's *Europe Ecologie* and Antoine Waechter's MEI had opened the primary race to a potentially larger pool of voters, extending the selection body beyond the narrow limits of EELV's membership.

In contrast, the 2016 primary featured a roster of party apparatchiks, including former National Secretary Cécile Duflot who, in the eyes of many voters, would represent the typical 'institutionalized' and office-seeking Green detached from the social base of the movement. Despite receiving official support from prominent EELV leaders such as Noël Mamère, Yannick Jadot and Duflot herself, Nicolas Hulot had eventually renounced his candidacy in July, undoubtedly wary of the unpredictability of primary outcomes in the Green party. The primary was held under the mixed electoral system combining votes by party members with those by affiliated *coopérateurs* and EELV's sympathizers in the general electorate, which had been introduced five years earlier. Contrasting with the 2011 election, the 2016 race was marked, however, by a significant drop in participation, attracting a mere 13,000 voters compared with about 25,000 five years earlier. In the wake of his nomination, Jadot received a negligible primary bump of about one percentage point, yet his level of presidential support would constantly remain around 3 per cent, indicative of the marginalization of the Green movement in French politics.

Similarly, despite Hollande's renunciation, the socialists evidently failed to mobilize popular support among the *peuple de gauche*, a drop in support which was mirrored by the dramatic decline in PS membership, down to 86,000 in 2016 from 280,000 ten years earlier. Unlike 2011, where the nomination race had been well prepared in advance, the 2017 primary was marked by improvisation and political amateurism, epitomized by the controversy over the actual number of voters in the first round. The election was held in January 2017 and replicated the two-ballot majoritarian system and electoral procedures of 2011. The race attracted a total of 1.6 and 2 million voters in the first and second rounds, respectively, significantly less than the 2.7 and 2.9 million who had turned out for Hollande's nomination five years earlier. The decrease in participation was regarded as

another manifestation of the profound distrust of the Socialist Party among large swathes of the left-wing electorate. Hamon nevertheless enjoyed political momentum after winning the primary (see Fig. 3.1 above), whereby he received a 14-point boost in popularity, from 19 per cent in early January to 33 per cent in February.[7] Meanwhile, overall support for his presidential candidacy would rise from a mere 6 per cent to 18 per cent, only to drop again in the course of the election campaign.[8]

Across all three cases, then, and partly as a consequence of the primaries, presidential nominees emerged at a relatively later stage during the campaign. This contrasted with the situation in the more peripheral candidates, most of whom had entered the presidential race earlier. This was the case for Macron whose candidacy, whilst officially announced in November 2016, had materialized immediately after his leaving Valls's government in the summer. Further to the left, Mélenchon had launched his presidential campaign as early as February 2016. On the radical right, Marine Le Pen had also officially announced her intention to run in February 2016, although her presidential nomination had been explicitly associated with her unanimous re-election as party leader at the FN's party congress in Lyon in November 2014. Similarly, in DLF, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan had been re-elected as party chairman in October 2013, officially launching his presidential campaign in March 2016.

### *3.2 Time for a Change: Anti-establishment Vote and the Rise of 'Insurgent' Candidates*

Common to all three mainstream presidential primaries was the somewhat unanticipated rise of 'insurgent' candidates—that is Benoît Hamon (PS), François Fillon (LR) and Yannick Jadot (EELV). The electoral collapse of more established candidate alternatives and the surge of political outsiders were an indication of the depth of voter discontent and aspiration for political change.

Beginning with the Greens, Jadot, a former Greenpeace activist, captured an unanticipated 35.6 per cent of the first-round vote, as opposed to 30.2 per cent for Michèle Rivasi, and 9.8 per cent for Karima Delli. Most importantly, former party leader and Minister Cécile Duflot was eliminated as early as the first round at 24.4 per cent for, a severe setback which showed grassroots anger with Duflot's participation in Hollande's government between May 2012 and April 2014. In the second round, Jadot received support from Delli and won a total 57.1 per cent of the valid vote

cast on what he would describe as a 'subversive, exhilarating and pragmatic discourse of ecology (…) so that the Greens could come to terms with themselves'.

The Republican primary brought a few shocks and surprises, most notably the end of Sarkozy's leadership over the French right and the bursting of Alain Juppé's popularity bubble. Since 2012, Juppé had played an important role, acting officially as justice of the peace to arbitrate the leadership war between Fillon and Copé in 2012. Juppé had announced his intention to run in the primary as early as August 2014, in the wake of his personal success in the 2014 mayorship election in Bordeaux with 60.9 per cent of the first-round vote. By 2015, he had become the most popular UMP politician, taking a substantial lead over Sarkozy and the rest of his future rivals most of whom were facing heavy political weather in the storm provoked by the Bygmalion scandal and allegations of fraud in Sarkozy's 2012 campaign.

Primary polls (see Figs. 6.1 and 6.2 in Chap. 6) published in the course of 2016 showed a consistent lead for Juppé at an average 39 per cent, with Sarkozy trailing second at an average of 28.8 per cent and Bruno Le Maire as 'third man' in the race, polling an average 13.7 per cent. In contrast, François Fillon would only capture the fourth place picking up 10.7 per cent on average of the primary vote. Juppé's *état de grâce* persisted into the official campaign from September to November 2016, making him the frontrunner at an average 37.6 per cent, as opposed to 29.7 and 16 per cent for Sarkozy and Fillon, respectively. While showing an increase in voting intentions for Fillon in the second week of November, polls notably failed to predict how many voters would break for Fillon in the final hours of the campaign, however. As suggested by a Harris Interactive poll conducted after the first round, 41 per cent of Fillon's primary voters said they had made their decision a few days before the election, which compared with only 24 and 16 per cent amongst Sarkozy and Juppé's supporters, respectively.[9]

Fillon's first-round support amounted eventually to 44.1 per cent of vote, leaving Juppé second at 28.6 per cent and knocking Sarkozy out of the presidential race at a mere 20.7 per cent, well behind the two finalists. Anti-Sarkozy feelings and tactical votes were predominant among LR primary voters: according to Harris Interactive, no less than 42 per cent of those who had participated in the primary said they wanted essentially to stop Sarkozy from winning the nomination.[10] As the data in Table 3.2 suggest, Fillon's support was significantly older, with 47 per cent of his voters

**Table 3.2** Socio-demographic and political composition of LR primary electorates

| | *Fillon* | *Juppé* | *Sarkozy* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Socio-demographic characteristics | | | |
| % women | 37 | 38 | 46 |
| % under 35 | 12 | 12 | 26 |
| % 65 and over | 47 | 39 | 28 |
| % lower occupation | 11 | 14 | 31 |
| % inactive | 56 | 51 | 40 |
| Political affiliation | | | |
| % Left | 6 | 23 | 6 |
| % UDI, Modem | 12 | 25 | 2 |
| % Republicans | 49 | 31 | 68 |
| % FN | 10 | 3 | 14 |
| % None | 15 | 16 | 8 |

Source: Harris Interactive (http://harris-interactive.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/11/Rapport-Harris-20h30-Sondage-Jour-du-vote-1er-tour-de-la-Primaire-de-la-droite-et-du-centre-LCP-Public-Sénat.pdf)

aged 65 years and over, compared with 39 and 28 per cent in Juppé and Sarkozy, respectively. Reflecting this, a majority (56 per cent) of those who had supported Fillon were inactives, that is pensioners and housewives. His base of support was also more bourgeois, with only 11 per cent coming from the lower occupational groups, as compared with 28 per cent, for instance, amongst Sarkozy's voters. Finally, as regards primary voter political affiliation, nearly half (49 per cent) of Fillon's supporters were Republicans, likely representing the social conservative wing of the party. In sharp contrast with Juppé whose support base showed a high proportion of left-wing and centrist voters—23 and 25 per cent, respectively—Fillon's rightist campaign seemed to have acted as a strong deterrent for those more moderate voters who represented only 6 and 12 per cent of his primary support, respectively.

Whilst pollsters had clearly understated the Fillon vote in the first round—something we discuss more in Chap. 6—there was little doubt about what the second-round outcome would be. Fillon was consistently the preferred candidate for the right at an average 62 per cent of the vote, showing a strong lead over Juppé across all second-round polls. Between the two rounds, Fillon had received official support from Sarkozy and Bruno Le Maire, which largely cleared the way for his presidential nomination. According to polls conducted a few days ahead of

the run-off, 67 and 56 per cent, respectively, of Sarkozy and Le Maire's supporters said they would go to Fillon in the second round (OpinionWay, 21 November 2016), eventually giving him an easy win at 66.5 per cent of the total vote cast.

Finally, in the PS, the primary produced a similar outcome with Benoît Hamon topping the first round at 36.5 per cent of the vote, taking the lead over former Prime Minister Manuel Valls at 31.9 per cent. Unlike the Republican race, few polls were published ahead of the first round, most of which would have Valls in the lead at an average 38 per cent, with Hamon trailing at 25 per cent, showing nothing but a limited surge in support for Hamon in the final week of the campaign. As had been the case in 2011, Arnaud Montebourg came in third place with 17.8 per cent of the vote, failing to capture the bulk of the anti-Hollande primary vote. Immediately after the first round, Montebourg indicated that he would endorse Hamon in the run-off, which was consistent with both his policy orientation and previous alliance with Hamon in the *Nouveau Parti Socialiste* (NPS), a leftist faction of the PS, in the early 2000s. Montebourg's support gave Hamon a decisive advantage against Valls, allowing him to win the primary at 58.7 per cent of the second-round vote.

### *3.3 Valence, Policy and Candidate Viability*

The triumph of 'third' candidates in the primaries demonstrated that voters were eager to put change at the forefront of French politics, decidedly ousting the more established and potentially more competitive candidates in the general election, such as Juppé or Valls. Primary voters traditionally establish a trade-off between strategic considerations of candidate ideology, valence and viability in the general election (Stone et al. 1995). As recent research suggests, electability is an important primary decision factor which can increase the likelihood of a voter supporting a more ideologically distant candidate (Simas 2017). In that respect, voting intention polls play an important role in providing voters with cues about the candidates' anticipated levels of competitiveness in the general election.

If anything, the 2017 French primary season indicated that primary voters were essentially contemplating policy-oriented issues and personal traits, most notably the candidate's ability to effectuate change, and that considerations of political viability and electability were losing some of their salience, playing only a minor role in their final decision.

In EELV, there were simply no cues for voters to assess candidate electability. Because of her national profile as former minister and party leader, Cécile Duflot was the only candidate considered by pollsters after Nicolas Hulot had stepped down from the race in July 2016, whilst neither of her rivals were included in polls. In the PS, the few polls that included the full roster of primary contestants in January 2017 suggested that none of the frontrunners would receive more than 10 per cent of the vote in the presidential, indicating low electability across all three main candidates, namely Valls, Hamon and Montebourg. As Table 3.3 illustrates, amongst primary candidates, Valls had the highest general election potential in the eyes of left-wing and, more evidently, PS supporters, as, respectively, 35 and 52 per cent of those said he had 'the capacity to confront Fillon and Le Pen' in the 2017 presidential election, as opposed, for instance, to 13 and 8 per cent for Hamon, respectively.

That considerations of candidate viability in the general election were undermined by the dynamics of change in the 2017 primary vote was perhaps best exemplified in the LR nomination, where Juppé lost to Fillon despite showing a strong lead over his future presidential rival across all polls published during the Republican primary campaign. Interestingly, in most cases, the hypothesis of a Fillon candidacy would simply be ignored

**Table 3.3** Candidate traits and valence attributes in the 2017 socialist primary

| | *Hamon* | *Montebourg* | *Valls* | *None* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Left-wing voters | | | | |
| Has the capacity to challenge Fillon and Le Pen in the presidential election | 13 | 20 | 35 | 28 |
| Has presidential stature | 12 | 18 | 35 | 29 |
| Is sensitive to the concerns of the French | 28 | 20 | 15 | 28 |
| Has the capacity to bring the left together | 19 | 19 | 19 | 36 |
| Is capable of reforming the country | 22 | 17 | 25 | 31 |
| PS voters | | | | |
| Has the capacity to challenge Fillon and Le Pen in the presidential election | 8 | 18 | 52 | 17 |
| Has presidential stature | 7 | 14 | 54 | 18 |
| Is sensitive to the concerns of the French | 28 | 24 | 24 | 15 |
| Has the capacity to bring the left together | 16 | 19 | 27 | 28 |
| Is capable of reforming the country | 18 | 16 | 40 | 21 |

% of left-wing and PS voters who said 'the candidate has the following personal quality or capacity'

Source: Ifop (http://www.ifop.com/?option=com_publication&type=poll&id=3620)

by pollsters, depriving voters of the necessary information about his general election prospects. Not even the increasing threat of Le Pen would substantially change the outcome: an IFOP poll conducted just before the primary on 16 November indicated that Juppé could win as much 26 per cent of the presidential vote as opposed to 20 per cent for Fillon and 17.5 per cent for Sarkozy, thus representing the best chance for the right to progress into the run-off, which did not deter LR primary voters from turning *en masse* to Fillon, however.

Mainstream parties were increasingly polarized in terms of policy and strategy. Policy issues and personality traits gained greater prominence in the primaries. In the PS, nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of Hamon's primary voters said that his policies were the most important factor in their decision, compared with only 53 and 28 per cent among Montebourg and Valls's supporters, respectively (BVA, Sondage POP 2017, January 2017). Character-based valence attributes mattered less, however (see Table 3.3 above): among left-wing sympathizers, Hamon would take a narrow lead on being perceived as most sensitive to the concerns of the French (28 as opposed to 24 per cent for Valls), whilst Valls would top the polls on valence items concerning presidential stature (35 against 12 per cent for Hamon) and the capacity to reform the country (25/22). Valls's profile as high-valence candidate was even stronger amongst PS voters where the former prime minister enjoyed a 47- and 22-point lead over Hamon on presidential stature and the capacity to reform the country, respectively.

Turning to the right, similar evidence was found that Republican primary voters had been strongly influenced both by policy and the candidates' personal character. According to polls conducted immediately after the first round, 71 and 64 per cent of Fillon and Sarkozy's supporters, respectively, said that policies were an important factor in choosing their preferred candidate, as opposed to only 46 per cent amongst those who said they had voted for Juppé. Candidates were also judged on their personal characteristics, most notably 'honesty' which was quoted as an important trait by 79 per cent of Fillon's voters against 50 and 45 per cent in Juppé and Sarkozy, respectively (Harris Interactive, 20 November 2016). This reflected Fillon's campaign on socially conservative moral values, political integrity and probity, as a means of distinguishing himself from both Sarkozy and Juppé's alleged or proven involvement in past or current corruption scandals. As Fillon declared in the lead-up to the primary: 'exemplariness is necessary to govern our country, and even more necessary given we will need to reform it, which means asking for effort

from the French people' (RTL, 5 September 2016). The predominance of candidate personal traits was even more evident in the run-off, conferring a clear advantage to Fillon among right-wing sympathizers. No less than 73 per cent of the latter would see him as the 'candidate for change' as opposed to only 25 per cent for Juppé (Elabe, 23 November 2016).

Finally, the LR nomination race showed that the primary voters would strongly support Fillon's right-wing market liberal and socially conservative agenda, diverging in that respect from the general electorate. According to polls, Fillon's policies received an overwhelming support of 76 per cent of right-wing sympathizers, whilst his platform was opposed by 56 per cent of voters in the wider electorate.[11] This is corroborated by Jaffré (2016) who shows that LR primary voters held more extreme attitudes than their non-voting counterparts in the Republican-UDI electorate, most notably with regard to market liberal preferences in the economy which were more pronounced amongst those who indicated they would take part in the November primary. Therefore, Fillon's victory corroborated that right-wing primary voters were more ideologically extreme than the general electorate, indicating a rightist turn by the Republicans (Haegel 2016), thus contributing to higher polarization in the 2017 presidential election.

## 4 Conclusion

Following a trend in party democratization in French politics since the mid-1990s, the 2017 presidential primaries represented a step further towards more openness and participatory democracy, most notably among established parties. Mainstream parties in France have been increasingly seen as detached from civil society and cut off from 'ordinary citizens'. Addressing their lack of social presence, the main governing parties have used democratic procedures concerning leadership selection, policy making and candidate nomination as strategic resources to compensate for their loss of capacity for political mobilization.

Whilst originally conceived by parties primarily as a means of resolving internal issues of leadership and factionalism, there is some evidence that the 2017 primaries served as a tactical vehicle for voters to impose political change, however. As this chapter suggests, all three mainstream nomination races in EELV, LR and the PS were dominated by the anti-establishment vote and aspiration to political renewal in the citizenry,

showing strong support for 'insurgent' candidates, that is Jadot, Fillon and Hamon. Political contestation in the mainstream operated against the more established party leaders such as Valls, Hollande, Duflot, Sarkozy and Juppé, who were judged on their previous performances, while also taking the blame for the dysfunctionality of their respective parties both in government and opposition. As Hopkin suggests, primaries may favour 'retrospective' responsiveness by presenting voters with 'a useful means of calling incumbent politicians to account retrospectively' where the party's ideological objectives have been abandoned or de-emphasized (2001: 346).

The 2017 primary races challenged leadership authority in both the PS and LR, and also undermined party cohesion, thus going directly against the parties' initial objectives of resolving factionalism and arbitrating between diverging sets of policies and strategies through the primaries. Moreover, consistent with the literature on the negative carryover effects and destabilizing potential of presidential primaries (Pennings and Hazan 2001; Stone 1986; Southwell 1986), both the PS and LR subsequently would confront a significant amount of disloyalty among disgruntled candidates and supporters, as evidenced, for instance, by Valls and De Rugy turning to Macron in the presidential campaign (see Chap. 4). While not directly attributable to the primary process per se, the nomination of Fillon led not just to a move away from the centre–right space Macron would come to occupy; it also overrode the likely elitist choice—Juppé—with a candidate who was to lose credibility outside his core support as a renovator, and indeed as a politician, through the scandal we consider in Chap. 5, emerging shortly after his nomination.

Indeed, general election viability took a backseat to the candidates' policies and valence attributes for both the PS and the Republicans. As regards character-based attributes, the candidates' ability to embody political renewal and 'novelty'—notwithstanding an already long political career, for example Fillon and Hamon—was an important factor, at a time when a majority of voters were eager to impose change in France politics. Alongside personal valence, policies mattered the most, taking precedence over strategic voting and the candidates' general election potential. As we have argued elsewhere (Evans and Ivaldi 2017), both the socialist and Republican races delivered more ideologically extreme candidates, resulting in higher mainstream policy polarization, which

opened a wider political opportunity space for Macron at the centre-ground of French politics, setting the 2017 political reformation into motion.

## Notes

1. A similar movement towards democratic local candidate selection procedures was found in the 2014 municipal elections where 'closed' primaries—that is, a party membership vote—were held by both the UMP and the PS across a number of large cities such as Paris, Lyon, Marseille and Lille.
2. 'Pour 78% des Français, François Hollande est trop bavard avec les journalistes', http://www.lejdd.fr/Politique/Pour-78-des-Francais-Francois-Hollande-est-trop-bavard-avec-les-journalistes-817240.
3. In the November 2012 UMP party congress, the 325,000 registered party members were given the opportunity to elect Sarkozy's successor, as well as to arbitrate between newly officially recognized factions (*mouvements*), and to endorse the party's new Charter of Values.
4. In November 2014, Nicolas Sarkozy had won the UMP leadership election, receiving a sizeable majority of 64.5 per cent of the first-round vote, which had allowed him to retake control of his former party following what was a short period of political retirement.
5. '"Nos ancêtres sont Gaulois": Sarkozy sous le feu des critiques', http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2016/09/20/25002-20160920ARTFIG00084-nos-ancetres-sont-gaulois-sarkozy-sous-le-feu-des-critiques.php.
6. 'Rolling 2017. L'élection présidentielle en temps réel', http://www.parismatch.com/var/partenaire/ifop/rapport-presidentielle-2017/01-02-2017.pdf.
7. TNS-Kantar political popularity trends, http://www.tns-sofres.com/dataviz?type=2&code_nom=hamon.
8. Ibid., http://www.parismatch.com/var/partenaire/ifop/rapport-presidentielle-2017/01-02-2017.pdf.
9. 'Le 1er tour de la primaire de la droite et du centre', http://harris-interactive.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/11/Rapport-Harris-20h30-Sondage-Jour-du-vote-1er-tour-de-la-Primaire-de-la-droite-et-du-centre-LCP-Public-Sénat.pdf.
10. Ibid.
11. '69% des sympathisants de droite pensent que Fillon est. le meilleur candidat pour 2017', http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/69percent-des-sympathisants-de-droite-pensent-que-fillon-est-le-meilleur-candidat-pour-2017-1062744.html.

## References


Bachelot, C., & Haegel, F. (2015). The presidentialization of dominant parties in France. In G. Passarelli (Ed.), *The presidentialization of political parties: Organizations, institutions and leaders* (pp. 88–106). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bucur, C., & Elgie, R. (2012). The development of the French executive: Endogenous Americanization. *French Politics, 10*(4), 389–402.

Cross, W., & Blais, A. (2012). Who selects the party leader? *Party Politics, 18*(2), 127–150.

De Luca, M., & Venturino, F. (2015). Democratising candidate selection in Italy and France. In G. Sandri, A. Seddone, & F. Venturino (Eds.), *Party primaries in comparative perspective* (pp. 129–144). Farnham: Ashgate.

De Luca, M., & Venturino, F. (2017). The effects of primaries on electoral performance: France and Italy in comparative perspective. *French Politics, 15*(1), 43–56.

Haegel, F. (2012). *Les Droites en fusion. Transformations de l'UMP*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Haegel, F. (2015). La primaire à l'UMP: genèse et enjeux. *Pouvoirs, 154*, 89–98.

Haegel, F. (2016, November 28). La primaire a nourri une dynamique de droitisation. *Le Monde*.

Hazan, R. Y., & Rahat, G. (2010). *Democracy within parties. Candidate selection methods and their political consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hopkin, J. (2001). Bringing the members back in? *Party Politics, 7*(3), 343–361.

Ivaldi, G., Akkerman, A., & Zaslove, A. (2017). La France populiste? CEVIPOF-Sciences Po, ENEF Note #30. Retrieved from https://s473c501d3c091e9a.jimcontent.com/download/version/1501506171/module/15360616425/name/LA_NOTE%2330_vague7.pdf

Ivaldi, G., & Lanzone, M. E. (2016). From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: Organizational change and adaptation in the French Front National. In R. Heinisch & O. Mazzoleni (Eds.), *Understanding populist party organization: A comparative analysis* (pp. 131–158). London: Palgrave.

Jaffré, J. (2016). Le corps électoral déformé de la primaire de la droite, CEVIPOF-ENEF, Note #11/vague 2/February. Retrieved from https://www.enef.fr/app/download/13328632125/LA_NOTE_%2311_vague2.pdf?t=1458746867

Katz, R. S. (2001). The problem of candidate selection and models of party democracy. *Party Politics, 7*(3), 277–296.

Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1995). Changing models of party organisation and party democracy. The emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party. Politics, 1*, 5–28.

Kenig, O. (2008). Democratization of party leadership selection: Do wide selectorates produce more competitive contests? *Electoral Studies, 28*(2), 240–247.

Laakso, M., & Taagepera, R. (1979). "Effective" number of parties. A measure with application to Western Europe. *Comparative Political Studies, 12*(1), 3–27.

Lefebvre, R. (2011). *Les primaires socialistes. La fin du parti militant*. Paris: Raison d'Agir.

Mény, Y. (2017). A tale of party primaries and outsider candidates: The 2017 French presidential election. *French Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-017-0038-5.

Rémond, R. (1982). *Les Droites en France*. Paris: Aubier-Montaigne.

Samuels, D. J., & Shugart, M. S. (2010). *Presidents, parties, and prime ministers: How the separation of powers affects party organization and behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sandri, G., Seddone, A., & Venturino, F. (Eds.). (2016). *Party primaries in comparative perspective*. pp. 129–144. Farnham: Ashgate.

Simas, E. N. (2017). The effects of electability on US primary voters. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 27*(3), 274–290.

Southwell, P. L. (1986). The politics of disgruntlement: Nonvoting and defection among supporters of nomination losers, 1968–1984. *Political Behavior, 8*, 81–95.

Stone, W. J. (1986). The carryover effect in presidential elections. *American Political Science Review, 80*, 271–279.

Villalba, B. (2008). The French greens: Changes in activist culture and practices in a constraining environment. In G. E. Frankland, P. Lucardie, & B. Rihoux (Eds.), *Green parties in transition. The end of grass-roots democracy?* (pp. 43–60). Abingdon: Ashgate.

CHAPTER 4

# Party Strategy and Cooperation

Since the early 2000s, the two dominant governing parties of the left and right have progressed towards greater intra-bloc cohesion, regularly securing competitive electoral coalitions, notably in presidential and legislative elections. A clear duopolistic party system had emerged from the outcome of the 2007 elections, reflecting the political hegemony of the PS and the UMP over their respective camps, while also contrasting sharply with the more centrifugal dynamics that had dominated the 2002 elections (Grunberg and Haegel 2007). This two-pole system had carried over into the 2012 elections, which nonetheless exhibited higher levels of fragmentation and ideological polarization as radical alternatives on both the left and the right of the spectrum had gained substantial traction during Sarkozy's presidency.

The period leading to the 2017 elections was marked by a significant reshuffling of party competition. As discussed in Chap. 3, the unanticipated outcomes of the primaries had a major impact on the ideological and competitive dynamics of the 2017 presidential race. The nominations resulted in a substantial reshaping of the array of parties and candidates, with an impact on both their ideological position and their strategies for cooperation, most visibly on the left of French politics, where challenges to previous socialist dominance were clearly in evidence. New alternatives emerged outside the main party channels, both at the centre of the party system and on its fringes, producing a more complex political landscape.



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_4

With a focus on the electoral cycle preceding the 2017 elections, this chapter examines how parties and candidates navigated the period of successive mid-term elections that punctuated Hollande's presidency, looking at changes that took place in the structure of competition. We look at the relationships between parties and blocks in the lead-up to the 2017 presidential election, and how cooperative strategies may have enhanced the parties' capacity to mobilize support. The positions and intersections of political parties, both as presidential support groups and as independent electoral competitors, are summarized in Table 4.1. Each party and/or bloc is examined in the following sections. In the last section, we look at the making of the *Front Républicain* against Marine Le Pen in the presidential run-off of May 2017.

## 1 Reconfiguration of the French Left

A first significant reshaping of party competition occurred on the left of the political spectrum. The failure by Hollande to effectively curb unemployment and respond to the many challenges of the French economy post-crisis fuelled public discontent with the ruling Socialist Party, as well as with their ecologist allies throughout Hollande's presidency. This

**Table 4.1** Summary of party positions and intersections in 2017

| *Candidate* | *Sector* | *Party* | *Support* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mélenchon | Radical Left | LFI | *Nouvelle Gauche Socialiste*, *Ensemble!*, individual EELV members such as Francine Bavay and Sergio Coronado<br>PCF |
| Hamon | Left | PS | EELV, Yannick Jadot, PRG, Christiane Taubira, José Bové |
| Macron | Centre | EM! | Gérard Collomb (PS)<br>François Bayrou's Modem<br>François de Rugy (Parti Ecologiste)<br>Manuel Valls (PS) |
| Fillon | Moderate Right | LR | UDI<br>*Parti Chrétien-Démocrate* (PCD)<br>*Centre national des indépendants et paysans* (CNIP) |
| Dupont-Aignan | Sovereigntist Right | DLF | Politically isolated |
| Le Pen | Radical Right | FN | Politically isolated |

opened up a political opportunity space for non-traditional alternatives both to the left and to the right of the PS, producing party fragmentation and polarization, and ultimately resulting in the collapse of socialist dominance over the left pole of French politics.

### *1.1 The Rise of La France Insoumise*

Among the important events of the 2012–2017 political cycle was the rise of Mélenchon's new force of the radical left, *La France Insoumise* (LFI), which emerged from the rubble of the previous *Front de Gauche* (FG). The making of a unified left front to the left of the PS had crystallized during the 2008 campaign against the Lisbon Treaty, based on an alliance between the communists and Mélenchon's newly created *Parti de Gauche* (PG), with a view to establishing leadership over the constellation of left-wing anti-globalization and anti-liberal groups movements. The FG had operated throughout Sarkozy's presidency, but in 2012, the presidential marginalization of Mélenchon and his personal defeat against Marine Le Pen in the legislatives had revealed a lack of unity within the group, particularly in diverging strategic objectives. As Mélenchon had reluctantly endorsed Hollande against Sarkozy in the run-off, the core divisive issue of political cooperation with the socialists had continued to poison relations between the PCF and the PG during the legislative campaign, where the balance of organizational strength remained largely favourable to the communists.

The 2014 municipal elections showed the first cracks within the coalition. The PCF adopted a more conciliatory approach, arising from the need for the communists to preserve whatever was left of their former municipal glory, an objective which could only be achieved with the goodwill and trust of the PS and the perpetuation of previous local agreements. This resulted in the PCF allying with the PS across a number of French cities, most notably in Paris where the previous October the local communist membership voted by 57 per cent to run on the socialist list led by Anne Hidalgo. With virtually no municipal incumbents, the PG had, on the other hand, much less to lose than its communist allies in the 2014 elections, which allowed Mélenchon to continue on his anti-PS trajectory. In 2014, the PCF lost more than 80 of its previous municipalities with more than 3500 inhabitants, including some of its historical strongholds in the 'red suburbs' around Paris such as Bagnolet, Saint-Ouen, Bobigny, Le Blanc-Mesnil and Villejuif. The outcome of the municipals proved

equally disappointing in the 607 cities where the FG had presented a unitary front, with an average 6.9 per cent in the first-round.

Whilst providing a more favourable electoral context, the 2014 European elections confirmed the decline of the FG despite its running unitary lists across all seven European constituencies, winning a total 6.3 per cent of the national vote and three seats. The mediocre performance by FG candidates was largely seen as a consequence of the communists' erratic municipal moves a few months earlier. Internal infighting had also intensified in the lead-up to the European elections of May, as the *Gauche Unitaire* (GU), a minor component of the FG, had left the coalition over disagreement with what they claimed was an unfair distribution of winnable seats on the FG's European lists. Immediately after the EU ballot, Mélenchon announced his stepping down from leading the PG, marking the beginning of his process of emancipation and autonomy. The FG was nevertheless maintained in the 2015 departmental elections where the PG cooperated with the PCF in 1539 cantons, including 342 cases of joint *binômes*—the dual candidacies introduced for the first time in this election—with EELV's Greens, totalling 8.8 per cent of the first-round vote (De Boissieu 2015).

Strategic differences resurfaced in the regional elections of December 2015, heralding the political divorce between Mélenchon and the communists. The latter ran independently in 4 of the 12 new metropolitan regions, and together with the PG in another 7 regions, while the FG allied with the Greens in another four cases. The regional elections saw the FG significantly damaged electorally with just over 4 per cent of the vote nationally, illustrating the political cost of internal division.

Internal disagreement and positional conflicts eventually resulted in the breakup of the FG, with Mélenchon announcing the founding of his new movement, LFI, in February 2016. The LFI movement took its inspiration from Podemos in Spain, seeking to replicate Pablo Iglesias's ideological radical left populist idiosyncrasy, which signalled substantial change in Mélenchon's presidential and organizational strategy. LFI endorsed Podemos's organizational model of grassroots democracy which primarily rested on horizontal processes based on local participatory assemblies (*Groupes d'appui*), bottom-up decision making and free online membership. As Scarrow (2014) suggests, parties have become keener to offer party members more opportunities to participate in party decisions, as well as lower-cost modes of affiliation, producing multi-speed membership parties. LFI's platform *L'avenir en commun* was adopted at the party conven-

tion in Lille in October 2016 by an Internet vote by 77,000 party sympathizers. This was followed with the experimentation of various web platforms and social media venues, including a new online discussion forum named *Discord* which claimed up to 270,000 supporters in February 2017.

LFI policies featured most of Mélenchon's previous campaigning themes of 2012 such as economic redistribution and state intervention, inspired by 'alternative' economists such as Jacques Généreux, and the founding of a Sixth Republic, while simultaneously endorsing a 'greener' environmentalist platform, most notably a phase-out of nuclear energy, one of the divisive policy issues that has opposed Mélenchon and the communists. The new programme demonstrated strong anti-globalization stances against international trade agreements such as the Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) and Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU, as well as intensifying patriotism and Eurosceptic policies by pledging that France should reject EU treaties and hold a referendum on the Euro.

A clear populist tone was central to Mélenchon's presidential bid in 2017, which called for an 'era of the people' (*L'ère du peuple*) pledging that LFI would 'sweep away the oligarchy and abolish the privileges of the political caste', notably denouncing political corruption and collusion with the world of finance.[1] Anti-establishment strategies were perceptible in Mélenchon's concept of *dégagisme* (getting rid of politicians),[2] which, at policy level, was complemented by a strong anti-corruption and political transparency agenda.

LFI's strategy of radical opposition to the socialists intensified during 2016, while Mélenchon's popularity rose in the polls attesting to his leadership over the 'left of the left'. Together with Mélenchon's previous PG, LFI was able to accommodate a number of its former radical left allies such as the *Nouvelle Gauche Socialiste* and *Ensemble!*, and also received support from disgruntled members of EELV such as Francine Bavay and Sergio Coronado, as well as from PCF leaders such as Pierre Laurent and Marie-George Buffet. In November 2016, 54 per cent of the communist membership—at about 40,000—went against the previous vote by the party's cadres and endorsed Mélenchon's presidential bid, sealing the irrevocable decline of communist influence in French politics.

### *1.2 A Socialist Party Requiem*

Turning to the mainstream left, the array of candidates and dynamics of competition between them indicated the profound fragmentation of the

socialist camp, which also affected its neighbouring parties and traditional allies such as the Greens and, to a lesser extent, the PRG. Hollande's presidency was plagued with internal divisions over the government's economic strategy amidst economic difficulties and persistently high unemployment. From 2015 onwards, the socialist executive also had to confront immigration and national issues arising from a wave of Islamic terrorism as well as the unfolding of the EU refugee crisis. Politically, the socialists were faced with revelations of corruption such as the Cahuzac tax evasion scandal, not to mention Hollande's secret love affair with French actress Julie Gayet, which was publicly exposed in January 2014. All this fuelled public distrust of the ruling socialists and voter discontent with the presidency. Beyond contextual factors, however, the political crisis faced by Hollande's PS was rooted in the more structural weaknesses and dysfunctionality of the party since the early 2000s, which concerned socialist identity, policy and leadership.

Ideologically, the opposition between the old protest culture of economic utopia and a more pragmatic social–democratic policy framework has endured since the early 2000s. The PS after 2002 had notably failed to arbitrate between a modernist social–liberal faction, and the more conservative anti-liberal groups operating within the party, a distant echo of the traditional divide between the 'first' and 'second' lefts embodied by François Mitterrand and Michel Rocard during the 1970s and the 1980s. The EU refugee crisis and Islamic attacks of 2015 triggered a cultural conflict, pitting the government's strong agenda of national security against the culturally liberal sectors of the French left. Division over cultural issues had already occurred in the early stages of the presidency, particularly in the political controversy surrounding the order by Interior Minister Manuel Valls to dismantle Roma camps, a decision which had been heavily criticized by NGOs and other parties of the left. Tensions over immigration were to escalate throughout the second half of Hollande's term.

Both economic and cultural conflicts crystallized during Hollande's presidency. As early as October 2012, a number of recalcitrant socialist MPs such as Jérôme Guedj, Christian Paul and Laurent Baumel had fomented revolt in parliament opposing the government's budgetary and economic policies, most notably the adoption of the European Fiscal Compact, which Hollande had pledged he would renegotiate during the 2012 campaign. The rebellion of the so-called *frondeurs* had been amplified by the announcement by the government of austerity measures to

eliminate the public deficit by 2017. From 2014 onwards, socialist infighting intensified over what was perceived as Hollande's social–liberal policy U-turn and shift towards supply-side economics.

The 2014 municipal setback prompted a cabinet reshuffle, with the appointment of Manuel Valls as Prime Minister on 31 March 2014. Valls's profile as a right-winger in the PS exacerbated further the opposition between two irreconcilable camps within the French left, leading to EELV's departure from the government. Factionalism surfaced in the PS party congress in Poitiers in June 2015, although it did not yet disturb the balance of power established in the Toulouse congress five years earlier. The majority motion defended by PS first secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis—which had the support of Valls, Hollande and, at the time, Martine Aubry—received 60 per cent of the membership vote (about 71,000 voters) as opposed to 28.5 per cent for the *frondeurs* who had rallied behind the motion presented by Christian Paul. Out of four competing motions, the effective number was 2.2, showing a party split similar to that of the 2012 congress immediately after Hollande's election. Jean-Christophe Cambadélis was also re-elected as party leader with 70.1 per cent of the vote against Paul.

The internal crisis of the PS culminated after the passing of the highly controversial and divisive labour legislation in July 2016 through the special procedure of article 49.3 that sidestepped the parliamentary vote. The so-called El Khomri Law was rejected by the *frondeurs* as well as the other parties of the left, which all saw it as an attempt to deregulate the job market and introduce more flexibility in France's labour law. In May 2016, a total of 56 left-wing MPs signed a motion of no confidence against Valls's government—a clear indication of the depth of grassroots discontent with the socio-economic orientation of the executive. Moreover, the El Khomri Law accentuated further internal opposition to Valls, with socialist heavyweights such as Martine Aubry publicly expressing criticism of the new labour bill, and withdrawing their support from the government.

A second line of fracture emerged from cultural issues and concerned the package of strong security and anti-terrorist laws adopted in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015. Following the events of November 2015, Hollande had shifted the government's national security agenda and proposed to toughen anti-terrorist laws. Key to Hollande's list of measures was his intention to strip terrorists with dual citizenship of their French nationality. The latter proposal was met with strong opposition among parties of the left, infuriating Mélenchon's FG and the Greens,

as well as members of Valls's government, and most notably led to PRG Justice Minister Christiane Taubira's resignation in January 2016.

Political fragmentation cast doubt about future cooperation on the left in the 2017 presidentials. In January 2017, the socialist presidential nomination confirmed the split of the PS. Benoît Hamon's victory took the party further to the left, allowing him to unite all leftist factions within the PS, most notably the previous *frondeurs*, including Montebourg's and Martine Aubry's supporters, as well as traditional PS allies who had deserted the majority half-way through Hollande's presidency. This was true in particular of EELV's Greens. During Hollande's presidency, the Greens underwent significant political schisms, seeing the left wing of the party joining the socialist *frondeurs* in opposition to the ruling PS. In April 2014, Cécile Duflot had refused to enter Valls's government, accentuating EELV's profile as a protest force to the left while seeking tactical alliances with Mélenchon's FG. The results of the 2014 and 2015 elections had proved catastrophic for the Greens, however, provoking the split from the right wing of the party in the fall of 2015 and the dissolution of the EELV parliamentary group in May 2016. EELV also suffered substantial losses in grassroots support, with an estimated membership of about 6000 on the eve of the 2017 elections, down from 16,000 in 2010.

That the Greens were increasingly marginalized politically was reflected in the drop in presidential support for Yannick Jadot after the nomination, at less than 2 per cent on average, which was reminiscent of Eva Joly's disastrous performance in the 2012 election (2.3 per cent of the vote). On 23 February 2017, Jadot stepped down from the presidential race to endorse the socialist winner, Hamon. This signalled a significant shift from the previous centrifugal tendency of the Greens, a move which was justified by the need to consolidate support for Hamon's presidential bid against both the radical and social–liberal challenges embodied by Mélenchon and Macron. At the policy level, the rapprochement was made possible by the leftist orientation and strong pro-environment policies endorsed by Hamon in the primary. Tactically, the 2017 electoral deal between Hamon's PS and EELV replicated the 2011 accords which had allowed the Greens to form their own parliamentary group in June 2012. In 2017, the EELV/PS agreement included a total of 42 constituencies reserved by the socialists for their ecologist allies, including the 10 outgoing Green MPs, a deal which was immediately approved by an overwhelming majority (79.5 per cent) of EELV primary voters.

The repositioning of the PS further to the left by Hamon also helped bring most of the PRG back into the socialist fold, with the notable exception of four radical MPs turning to Macron, namely Alain Tourret, Paul Giacobbi, Jacques Krabal and Joël Giraud. More importantly, whilst she had refused to endorse any of the candidates in the primary, Christiane Taubira returned to the socialist campaign in early March 2017. This was followed by the PRG lending official support to Hamon in exchange for the typical PS-PRG legislative agreement, whereby the radicals would secure their previous 12 constituencies in the 2017 legislatives.

Simultaneously, the crowding of the party sub-system of the left narrowed the political space available to Hamon, however. To Hamon's left, Mélenchon had long closed the door on cooperation with his former socialist peers, a decision which he publicly confirmed on 29 March 2017. His performance in the first TV debate on 20 March had boosted his polling numbers, showing him clinging to fourth place ahead of Hamon, from an average 11.5 per cent before the debate, running neck-and-neck with the socialist candidate, up to 14 per cent immediately after the debate.

Equally, Hamon's political isolation was reflected in his situation within his own party. The socialist nominee failed notably to unify Valls's supporters in the government, despite receiving support from a number of socialist 'heavyweights' such as Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, primary candidate Vincent Peillon, Family and Women's Rights Minister Laurence Rossignol and Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo. That PS leaders would mostly act out of party loyalty was evidenced further by Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, a former Vallsiste, reluctantly joining Hamon's campaign in March 2017. Hollande, on the other hand, maintained a safe distance from the sinking socialist vessel, indicating that he would only speak after the first round, which evoked the possibility that he could endorse Macron. As exemplified by Valls and De Rugy (see Sect. 1.3), disgruntled social–liberals among previous *rocardiens* and *strauss-kahniens* in the PS disengaged from Hamon's campaign, reflecting the negative carry-over effect of Hamon's victory among these groups, and instilling doubt as to the viability of holding open primary elections in the future.

### *1.3 Macron and the Centrist Hostile Takeover*

The organizational and strategic weaknesses of Hamon's campaign contrasted sharply with Macron's political momentum. Macron's presidential bid had originated in his role as Elysée's deputy secretary general and

economic adviser to President Hollande between 2012 and 2014. Macron was one of the spin doctors behind the social–liberal turn of Hollande's presidency, which led to his catapulting by Hollande to economy minister in August 2014. Getting into ministerial office helped Macron build a national political profile and gain media presence. Macron's popularity began to rise immediately after he had entered Valls's government, from 11 per cent of positive ratings in October 2014 to 34 per cent in February 2016 (see Fig. 4.1), making him an attractive and increasingly credible alternative to an unpopular executive.

Notably, Macron's social–liberal orientation would appeal to moderates to both left and right of the spectrum, whereas Hollande could only rely on a small core of socialist supporters. As polls suggested, the minister for the economy was seen as the 'best' candidate for the left among all French voters, with 29 per cent of support as opposed to only 7 per cent for Hollande, and 11 per cent for both candidates among left-wing voters and 21 per cent for Hollande amongst supporters of the PS.[3] Macron entered

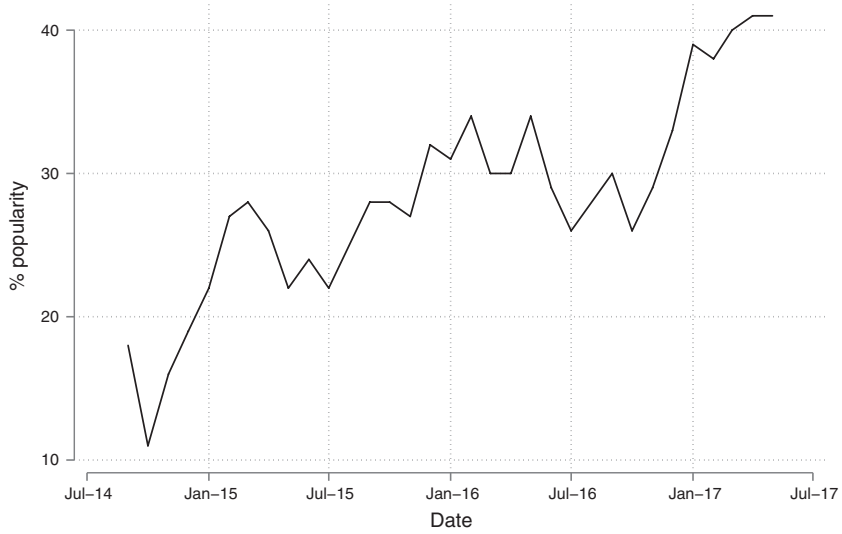


**Fig. 4.1** Emmanuel Macron's popularity scores (2014–2017). Note: TNS-SOFRES monthly popularity data; per cent of respondents who say they 'want Macron to play a more important role in the future' (2014–2017). Source: http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites

presidential polls for the first time in January 2016 with 22 per cent of the vote, a level of support similar to Hollande at the time. By April 2016, voting intentions for Hollande had dropped to an average 16 per cent, whereas support for Macron would rise up to 25 per cent. Macron's presidential ambition was unveiled by the founding of his own movement *En Marche!* (EM!) in April 2016. The movement developed primarily as a 'virtual' personal party across social networks and the web, showing a hybrid form of highly personalized leadership and participatory democracy, clearly resembling Ségolène Royal's *Désirs d'avenir* movement in 2007. Despite claims of bottom-up democratic procedures, EM! operated almost exclusively as an empty shell organizationally, via free online membership, thus remaining first and foremost a political vehicle for Macron's personal ambitions.

Politically, Macron's strategy was one of publicizing soft criticism of what he deemed was Hollande's too-timid reformist agenda, while simultaneously tactically expressing loyalty to the president and support for his re-election bid. Macron's strategy of being 'one foot in, one foot out' of the government left him relatively untouched by the political turmoil caused by the debates around the El Khomri labour law between February and August 2016, leaving Valls and Hollande to face voter discontent and anger among parties of the left. During that period, Macron's popularity ratings dropped by about 8 points, from 34 down to 26, which compared with a decrease in about 16 points in Valls, from 36 down to 20 per cent over the same period.[4] The realization of the risk of being held accountable for Hollande's economic record was key to Macron's decision to leave the government in August 2016. As polls showed, Macron was increasingly becoming a viable presidential candidate, outperforming all his socialist rivals, attracting support not only amongst socialist voters but also, and perhaps most importantly, amongst independents and moderates in the centre–right.

Macron announced his running for the presidency in November. His early supporters included the socialist Mayor of Lyon, Gérard Collomb, and Deputy Mayor of Forcalquier, Christophe Castaner, as well as personalities outside party politics such as Pierre Bergé, Alain Minc and Jacques Attali. In February, Macron received crucial support from François Bayrou. The latter had publicly supported Juppé in the *Les Républicains* (LR) primary in November 2016 and he had expressed strong criticism of Fillon's decision to maintain his candidacy amidst the Penelopegate scandal. Macron's competitive position bridging France's

traditional cleavages was clearly reminiscent of Bayrou's previous attempts to build a centrist pole in French politics, independent from both left and right. Strategically, Bayrou's decision was motivated by his poor showings in polls, at an average 5 per cent of voting intentions, which cast doubt on his own viability as a presidential runner. Bayrou announced his support to Macron on 22 February, which sealed the tactical alliance between EM! and Modem, giving Macron a boost of about 5 percentage points in polls.

During March 2017, Macron garnered support from across the partisan spectrum, including supporters of Juppé among young Republicans, progressive reformists such as former PCF leader Robert Hue, ecologists such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit and François de Rugy, as well as from a number of right-wing personalities, mostly from whatever was left of the old *Chiraquie,* for example, Jean-Paul Delevoye, Jean-Jacques Aillagon, Philippe Douste-Blazy, Dominique Perben and Renaud Dutreil. Reflecting diverging lines in the PS, Macron was officially endorsed by socialists such as Gilles Savary, Christophe Caresche and the former Mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, and members of the government such as Geneviève Fioraso, Barbara Pompili and Jean-Yves Le Drian. On 29 March 2017, former Prime Minister Valls announced that he would cast his vote for Macron in the first round, a decision which, he argued, was primarily justified by tactical considerations and the need to secure the presence of the left in the presidential run-off.

Whilst certainly helping Macron build his presidential stature and momentum, the variety of political endorsements could potentially have been a double-edged sword, undermining policy coherence and, most importantly, frustrating the efforts of Macron to set himself free from the legacy of Hollande's presidency. For instance, Macron turned down support from high-ranking ministers of the Cazeneuve government such as Ségolène Royal and Marisol Touraine, arguing in March 2017 that EM! should not become a 'guest house' for disgruntled socialists.[5] The political break from Hollande was manifest in an interview on 3 April 2017, in which Macron strongly criticized his former mentor, while simultaneously indicating that Valls would not become a member of his government. 'I do not pretend that I will be a 'normal' president', Macron argued. 'I will be a president effectively committed to running the country, not a president of political anecdotes (…) I want to turn the page on two things: the last five and the last twenty years.'[6]

## 2 The French Right: From Reunification to Polarization

Turning to the right of the political spectrum, strategies of cooperation by the Republicans were clearly put under great strain by the unfolding of the 'Penelopegate' scandal (see Chap. 5), which increased party division both inside LR and amongst its allies on the centre–right. The political turmoil and fragmentation of Republican support caused by the revelation of Fillon's alleged financial irregularities came in sharp contrast with the continuing progression towards greater intra-bloc cohesion since 2012, which had most notably seen Bayrou's Modem returning to the bosom of the French right.

### *2.1 The Road to Mainstream Right-Wing Unity*

In the lead-up to the 2012 elections, the UMP's centre–right allies in the *Nouveau Centre* (NC) and the *Parti Radical* (PR) had moved away from Sarkozy's campaign, criticizing the candidate's shift to the right. Centrist leaders such as Jean Arthuis, Hervé Morin, Jean-Louis Borloo and Rama Yade, for instance, had expressed disapproval of the so-called Grenoble strategy of national identity politics, distancing themselves from the hard line taken by the outgoing president on immigration and European issues. Immediately after the legislatives, the centre–right had reunified independently from the UMP, which had resulted in the formation of the *Union des démocrates et indépendants* (UDI) both as a party and a parliamentary group in September 2012.

The foundation of an independent centre–right coalition was clearly reminiscent of the defunct UDF. First and foremost, it allowed the re-establishing of dialogue and political relationships with Bayrou's Modem, a reunification which, at that time, would occur outside the UMP's zone of influence. Bayrou had clearly distanced himself from Sarkozy's hard right in 2012, heavily criticizing the Grenoble strategy and eventually endorsing the socialist candidate, François Hollande, in the presidential run-off, which had infuriated his former right-wing partners. Organizationally, Bayrou's move to the left was also a product of the growing connection established by local Modem leaders with the socialists in collaborating with PS executives at the municipal level since 2008.

The UMP had retaliated heavily by launching a blistering attack on Bayrou's candidacy in the 2012 legislatives in the city of Pau, allowing a

politically ungrateful PS to win the constituency, which undermined Bayrou's national profile and Modem's influence within the centre–right. The rapprochement between Borloo's UDI and Modem occurred during the 2012 legislatives, whereby Bayrou would lend his support to former UMP candidates running under the UDI banner locally, such as Rama Yade. In November 2013, a more formal pact was signed by the two parties to run on a common electoral platform, *L'Alternative*, in all subsequent elections, with a view to organizing a centrist presidential primary ahead of the 2017 elections. Together, the UDI and Modem ran joint lists across all eight European constituencies in the 2014 European elections under the banner of 'UDI-MODEM *Les Européens*', winning 9.9 per cent of the vote and seven seats in the European Parliament.

Claims of political independence dominated centrist narratives throughout the first half of the electoral cycle, rejecting in particular any proposal to merge with their former UMP partners. Incidentally, centrist postures of independence allowed the UDI–Modem alliance to keep a salutary distance from the raging UMP leadership war between François Fillon and Jean-François Copé. Following Sarkozy's withdrawal from national politics, the UMP had entered political turmoil and factionalism, exhibiting a profound divide between moderates such as Alain Juppé and hardliners such as Copé. As discussed in the previous chapter, the November 2012 party congress showed a great deal of fragmentation. Whilst abandoning the UMP presidency to Copé in January 2013, Fillon embarked on an independent presidential run, distancing himself from the political legacy of Sarkozy and announcing his firm intention to stand in the 2017 presidential nomination race.

However, as had already been the case in 2012, the growing electoral popularity of the FN provided strong incentives for all parties of the moderate right to build a more cohesive and competitive bloc in preparation for the 2017 elections. The UMP political truce of 2013 allowed the party to perform relatively well in the 2014 municipal elections, where local agreements with the UDI–Modem centrist bloc were made, most notably in Pau where Bayrou would run a successful municipal bid, this time with sympathetic support from the right. As exemplified by Juppé in Bordeaux, UMP frontrunners were able to capitalize on such pacts to consolidate their local strongholds and majorities.

In contrast, the 2014 European election campaign was less conducive to right-wing unity. Amidst the political turmoil caused by the Bygmalion financial scandal and allegations of fraud in Sarkozy's presidential campaign

of 2012, the UMP confronted internal challenges arising from the divide between its traditionally Europeanist elites such as Alain Juppé and Eurosceptic right-wingers such as Henri Guaino. In May 2014, the UMP was beaten by the FN into second place in the European election at 20.8 per cent of the vote, winning a total 20 seats. Immediately afterwards, Copé was forced to resign by investigations into his role in the Bygmalion party funding scandal—ironically helping pave the way for Sarkozy's comeback. The latter won the party leadership election of November 2014 at 64.5 per cent of the membership vote against his two rival candidates Hervé Mariton and Bruno Le Maire. Sarkozy's return led to a profound reshaping of the national executive bodies and a more balanced distribution of posts between moderates such as Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Valérie Pécresse and Luc Chatel, and right-wingers such as Laurent Wauquiez and Eric Ciotti, as well as *sarkozystes* such as Christian Estrosi, Brice Hortefeux and Gérald Darmanin.

The new national balance of power within the UMP was met with a change in UDI leadership, after Borloo stepped down for health reasons. The UDI's move towards right-wing unity was facilitated by the election of Jean-Christophe Lagarde as party leader in November 2014. Unlike Borloo, Lagarde was more supportive of a broad coalition encompassing all centrist, liberal and conservative forces, a proposal which was also pushed forward by Sarkozy. Prefiguring a possible union of all right-wing forces in 2017, and despite diverging views about which strategy to adopt in PS-FN run-offs—where the UMP would continue its 'neither nor' strategy, whereas the UDI would endorse a more systematic republican front—right-wing reunification was effectively achieved in the 2015 departmental elections where the UDI, Modem and UMP ran joint *binômes* in the vast majority of the 2024 cantons, demonstrating continuing UMP dominance. Meanwhile, Sarkozy's UMP would undergo significant organizational reforms, including changing its name to *Les Républicains*, essentially to distance itself from the financial scandals associated with the previous party.[7]

A broad alliance of the right was consolidated further in the December regional election where common lists were found across all 13 metropolitan regions, with the UDI taking the lead in three of those (Normandie, Centre-Val de Loire and Bourgogne-Franche-Comté), and Bayrou's Modem joining the alliance in all but one region. If anything, the mixed outcomes of the 2015 regional elections created stronger incentives for parties of the right to achieve unity against an electorally galvanized FN. In

the course of 2016, the UMP and its partners moved towards greater cooperation, laying the foundations for what would ultimately resemble the model of asymmetric intra-bloc cooperation that had dominated the 2012 elections, which at the time had been to the advantage of the socialist candidate. With an increasingly fragmented and divided left, a truly unified right would in all probability take a decisive lead in the 2017 elections, whereas Hollande and the socialists could only contemplate the possibility of another 21 April 2002.

As discussed in Chap. 3, the LR primary campaign produced the first cracks in the right-wing alliance, however, showing a significant deterioration of intra-bloc cohesion ahead of the first round of the presidentials. Whilst the UDI had renounced from fielding its own presidential candidate—primarily with a view to supporting their preferred candidate, Alain Juppé—Bayrou clearly indicated that he would run against Sarkozy were the latter to win the Republican endorsement. Fillon's victory and the revelation of the Penelopegate accelerated Bayrou's emancipation, as well as creating political unease within the ranks of LR, as revealed, for instance, in Bruno Le Maire's decision to step down from the campaign, and amongst those of their UDI allies (see Chap. 5).

The disastrous impact of the Fillon scandal and the marginalization of the candidate within his own party produced new opportunities for the younger generation of LR elites such as François Baroin, Luc Chatel and Laurent Wauquiez, who all came to rescue whatever was left of the presidential campaign, but primarily as a means of advancing their personal agenda, thus already projecting themselves into another lost election. On the eve of the first round, despite a timid endorsement both by Sarkozy and Juppé, the Fillon campaign had become a beleaguered armed camp defended by a few loyal supporters such as Valérie Boyer, Bruno Retailleau and Jérôme Chartier, as well as right-wing conservative organizations such as *Sens Commun* (Common Sense) which had emerged from the catholic opposition to Taubira's law on same-sex marriage in 2013. Most Republican heavyweights remained conspicuously absent from the campaign trail, however, already envisaging a post-Fillon future for the French right.

### *2.2 Front National: A Strategic Deadlock?*

As discussed in the previous chapters, entering the 2017 campaign, Marine Le Pen was able to build on the electoral strength and popularity that the FN had demonstrated throughout the electoral cycle, showing electoral

consolidation and steady progression in terms of overall vote but also in terms of representatives in all levels of governance across France.

Following Le Pen's accession to the party leadership in 2011, each election had seen an increase in support for the FN, whereby the party had bested all its previous performances in comparable elections, patiently building a local power base of party cadres and grassroots networks which would be key to Le Pen's successful presidential bid in 2017. FN success was the product of both internal and contextual factors. Internally, Marine Le Pen's strategy of 'de-demonization' helped detoxify the party's extremist reputation, increasing its electoral appeal to voters who were previously less amenable to voting for the FN. Marine Le Pen's steering away from the previous FN had been most evidenced in August 2015 after she had expelled Jean-Marie Le Pen from his own party for repeating his controversial views that Nazi gas chambers were a 'detail of the Second World War'.[8] Externally, support for the radical right was fuelled by social pessimism and political discontent with Hollande's presidency amidst continuing unemployment and economic instability (Jaffré 2016). During 2015, the unfolding of the EU refugee crisis together with the wave of Islamic terrorist attacks had dramatically increased the salience of immigration issues, also giving a substantial electoral boost to the FN.

Despite consolidated electoral returns, the 2014–2015 sequence of elections had confirmed the FN's continuing political isolation and lack of coalition potential, however, which also suggested that Le Pen's many efforts to change the cosmetics of her party had not yet allowed the FN to achieve a profile as a credible alternative to the mainstream. As the 2015 departmental and regional run-offs had amply demonstrated, an apparently 'de-demonized' FN would still represent a threat in the eyes of a majority of voters, driving them to ensure its defeat in decisive run-offs. In the March 2015 departmental elections, the FN had failed completely to translate its surge in first-round support into concrete majorities. Running in over 1100 cantonal run-offs, the party had been very far from reaching its objective of establishing a nationwide power base and had won a mere 62 seats of councillors—that is only 1.5 per cent of all 4108 available seats—failing most notably to take departmental councils which were seen as within the FN's reach, such as Aisne, Gard and Vaucluse.

In December, the regional run-offs had delivered another political blow to the FN. Despite topping the polls in half the regions, at times with substantial first-round leads, the party had failed to take any regional council, confronting a blockade both by parties and voters. In the two

regions where a FN win was a clear possibility, namely Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Nord-Pas-de-Calais-Picardie, the revitalization by the PS of the *front républicain*—whereby socialist candidates had stepped down to support the Republicans against the radical right—had allowed voters to stem the tide of the FN and keep regional power out of its hands.

In the lead-up to the 2017 presidentials, the FN would find itself a strategic deadlock, once again confronting the complex trade-off between the continuation of its populist radical right strategies, on the one hand, and the attempt to achieve credibility as governing party and alternative to the PS and LR, on the other hand. Throughout Hollande's presidency, populist anti-establishment strategies had proved successful in mobilizing on political distrust, socio-economic grievances and, increasingly, cultural fears of immigration and Islam, which had dominated in particular the 2015 regional election agenda. The capacity of the FN to mobilize at grassroots level across significant regions in France provided a solid and stable support base for the personalized leadership challenge of the presidential elections which Jean-Marie Le Pen generally lacked. Mixed second-round results had, on the other hand, illustrated the FN's lack of coalition potential and credibility, both missing from Marine Le Pen's presidential bid in 2017.

## 3 Reshuffling the Cards: Party Politics in the 2017 Presidential Run-Off

The atypical presidential run-off that emerged from the outcome of the 2017 election posed new challenges to traditional parties both in the mainstream and in the periphery of French politics. The fragmented outcome of the first round confirmed the collapse of the 'old' party system structured around the PS and the Republicans, whereby neither of the two previously dominant parties had managed to challenge the electoral supremacy of Macron and Le Pen. Whilst largely anticipated by pre-election polls, Marine Le Pen's presence in the second-round run-off considerably disrupted the cooperative and competitive strategies that had prevailed in the lead-up to the first round, fundamentally reshaping how presidential parties and candidates would effectively cluster in support of one of the two finalists.

Looking at the politics of party blocs in the second-round campaign shows clearly diverging strategies among parties, contingent on their location in the party system, and also on how most leaders would already

project themselves into the legislatives, bypassing what was regarded by many as a foregone presidential election conclusion.

### *3.1 Mainstream Politics and Revitalization of the Front Républicain*

Most national political parties and leaders endorsed Macron immediately after the first round. The centrist candidate received support from a wide array of personalities, including his former presidential rivals, François Fillon and Benoît Hamon, Republican leaders such as Nicolas Sarkozy and Alain Juppé, Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve and all the members of his government, President François Hollande who publicly announced that he would vote for his former economic adviser, urging voters to defeat Marine Le Pen, as well as foreign leaders such as former American President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Mainstream parties such as the PS, EELV, LR, the UDI and the PCF officially lent support to Macron.

Politically, the making in 2017 of a large array of mainstream support for Macron heralded the revitalization of the nearly defunct republican front, showing similarities with the barrage strategy that had operated in the 2002 presidential run-off between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jacques Chirac. Fifteen years earlier, anti-Le Pen mobilization had been reinforced by the outcome of the previous 1997 legislative elections which had seen a notable deterioration of the republican front against the FN, resulting at the time in the proliferation of three-way run-offs. Similar trends had been observed during the national election cycle that preceded the 2017 election, most notably after the UMP had adopted in 2011 a 'neither, nor' strategy of maintaining its candidates in all three-way contests, while rejecting both the FN and the left. In the March 2015 departmental elections, the FN had contested 256 cantonal three-way run-offs yet failing to dislodge mainstream party dominance at the local level. In the regional elections of December, the Republicans had been criticized for their decision not to stand down in regions where they had come third such as Languedoc-Roussillon-Midi-Pyrénées, although the FN would again fail to win the decisive round.

There were, however, a number of discordant voices as a number of personalities refused to give their official endorsement to Macron. This was the case, for instance, for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the two Trotskyite candidates Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Arthaud, as well as other minor

defeated candidates such as François Asselineau and Jean Lassalle. A more ambivalent position was also found among mainstream right-wing leaders such as Laurent Wauquiez, Nadine Morano and Eric Ciotti, some of whom said they were complying with the 'neither, nor' principle drawn up by the former UMP. Finally, diverging views were found amongst trade unions: whilst Macron received the official endorsement of the CFDT, Medef and, albeit less explicitly, of the CGT, FO refused to take side in the presidential run-off, arguing that trade unions should remain politically neutral.

The early stage of Macron's second-round campaign showed signs of overconfidence and projection into the legislatives, bypassing the presidential run-off as a mere formality, as was illustrated by Macron's celebrating his victory in the Parisian café *La Rotonde*, a socialite rally reminiscent of Sarkozy's widely lambasted 'bourgeois party' at *Fouquet's* in 2007. On 26 April, Macron's whirlwind visit to a Whirlpool factory in Amiens, where he was booed by workers while also challenged by Marine Le Pen's own visit in her self-appointed role as defender of the working class, showed that he was still seen by many as a former banker representing the interests of the wealthy.

This led to Macron reorienting his campaign to tackle moral issues, and try to demonize the FN by sending Le Pen's party back to its extreme right roots, notably visiting the village of Oradour-sur-Glane and the Paris Holocaust Memorial, while attacking the FN as the party of 'anti-France', thus turning classic extreme right rhetoric against Le Pen. In policy terms, however, Macron's second-round campaign showed little departure from his initial platform, which confirmed that no concessions would be made on his programme despite calls from the left, notably Mélenchon, to soften his stance on the labour law of his future government.

### *3.2 Mélenchon's 'Last-Ditch' Opposition*

The most notable departure from the republican front was found from Mélenchon who traded on ambiguity between the two rounds, refusing to endorse either of the two finalists, which reflected his personal feelings of bitter disappointment as well as a strategic attempt to hold onto the radical ground in anticipation of Macron's expected victory. The game-changing performance by LFI's leader at 19.6 per cent of the presidential vote provided Mélenchon with the opportunity to challenge the FN in its traditional role of nuisance within the French party system. Whilst advis-

ing his supporters against the 'terrible mistake' that they would make supporting Le Pen, Mélenchon's message was much less clear as concerned supporting Macron, suggesting that he would probably cast a blank vote,[9] whereas his former communist allies officially called to vote for the centrist candidate against Le Pen.

Mélenchon's hesitancy also reflected the division within the ranks of LFI, as it was clear that a significant proportion of his first-round supporters were considering turning to Macron to block Le Pen in the run-off. The Internet vote by the 243,000 supporters of LFI, which took place between the two rounds of the presidential election, reflected diverging strategic views within the movement with 36.1 per cent favouring a blank ballot, 29.1 per cent in favour of abstaining, while another third (34.8 per cent) would officially endorse Macron.[10]

### *3.3 Forging the Eurosceptic Alliance: Le Pen and NDA*

Macron's broad appeal in the second round contrasted sharply with the political isolation faced by Le Pen, reflecting the strategic and ideological deadlock in which the FN would find itself despite the unprecedented level of presidential support Le Pen had received in the first round. Virtually none of the first-round candidates would back the FN leader. The two notable exceptions were the conservative catholic leader Christine Boutin and DLF's leader Nicolas Dupont-Aignan. In what was a somehow unanticipated move, Dupont-Aignan sealed a pact of 'national unity' with Le Pen between the two rounds, laying the foundations for a 'patriotic and republican alliance',[11] whereby he would become her prime minister, which led to widespread criticism while simultaneously provoking turmoil in his own party. The coalition was terminated, however, immediately after the presidential election, with the two parties competing against each other in the legislatives.

Along with the lack of coalition potential, the 2017 run-off exacerbated the strategic tension that exists in the FN between radical right politics and the search for credibility. As we examine in more detail in the next chapter, Le Pen's low presidential credibility and extremist profile were well in evidence during the TV debate in which she was found by most commentators unnecessarily aggressive and unconvincing in her attacks against Macron, which the FN leader would subsequently regret, publicly acknowledging 'too much fury'.[12] The presidential debate took place amidst the political controversy surrounding Jean-François Jalkh, the FN

acting president during the time of the campaign, over allegations that he had questioned the existence of gas chambers in a 2000 interview. Other campaign mistakes included accusations that Le Pen had plagiarized François Fillon, using phrases taken from a speech given by her rival.

More importantly, the run-off campaign revealed the paucity of FN economic policies to tackle unemployment, economic growth and deficits, while polls suggested that voters were increasingly sceptical of Le Pen's plan to shed the Euro. In the first round, Fillon and Macron had repeatedly attacked Le Pen's anti-Euro strategy as 'unrealistic' and 'dangerous', accusing her of fuelling 'nationalism' and preparing an 'economic war'.[13] In the run-off, Euroscepticism continued to impede significantly on FN credibility, provoking internal factionalism and alienating moderate voters. As polls showed public support for the single currency culminating at about 70 per cent,[14] Le Pen attempted to recalibrate her presidential bid by softening her stance on Europe, most notably signalling that leaving the Euro was no longer a priority.[15]

Finally, Le Pen playing down Euroscepticism demonstrated her difficulty in reformulating her presidential bid so that she could expand her second-round appeal to the disparate ideological constituency made up by Mélenchon and Fillon's first-round supporters. As the run-off campaign developed, it was clear that Le Pen was predominantly shifting to the left, however, seeking to attract those who had voted for the leader of LFI, which reflected policy convergence on a number of economic issues—largely as a result of the leftist economic shift by the FN (Ivaldi 2015)—and a common populist framework of castigating Macron as the candidate of the financial oligarchy. As will be discussed in Chap. 8, Le Pen failed eventually to rally Mélenchon's *Insoumis* and Fillon's social conservatives. More dramatically, polls suggest that only 36 per cent of Dupont-Aignan's first-round voters lent their support to Le Pen, as opposed to 37 per cent who turned to Macron.[16]

## 4 Conclusion

The competitive dynamics of the 2017 presidential showed a significant departure from the dominant model of bloc cohesion in presidential elections in France, which is embedded in multi-party bipolarism and the principle of *discipline républicaine* providing mainstream candidates with the array of reliable allies in their respective camp. Five years earlier, Hollande had been successful in aggregating all minor centre–left and ecologist parties

around the PS, providing a stable support base in order to progress into the decisive run-off where he had rallied parties and voters of the left, who were eager to oust Sarkozy's 'hard right' from the presidency. In contrast, Sarkozy had failed to secure support from his traditional centre–right allies as well as from the FN, falling short of both the mainstream and radical right-wing votes needed to win re-election.

A different picture emerged from the intersection of parties, candidates and blocs in the 2017 elections, which also changed dramatically across the two rounds. The roster of first-round candidates showed the persistence of significant elements of the left–right alignment traditionally operating in French presidential elections, with Macron as the main innovation at the centre of the French political spectrum, yet at a location closely resembling that of Bayrou in the 2007 and 2012 elections. Governing parties of both left and right of the mainstream would on the other hand find themselves challenged on an equal footing by their galvanized radical competitors and by an increasingly popular centrist candidate. Eventually, in a close-run first-round competition, Macron's ability to create and sustain political momentum, and secure critical support from Bayrou, proved a decisive advantage over Fillon and Mélenchon, giving Macron his entry ticket to the run-off.

Finally, with two candidates from outside traditional party alternatives, the second-round run-off produced a dramatic shift in voter and party alignments, decreasing the salience of the traditionally moderate bipolar competitive structure of French politics. As will be discussed in Chap. 8, the competitive dynamics of the 2017 run-off opposing Macron to Le Pen reflected deeply antagonistic ideological bases, as well as diverging competitive strategies, which were crucial to a revitalization of the ailing *front républicain* between the two rounds of the presidential race, and, ultimately, to reshaping the French party system in the 2017 elections.

## Notes

1. https://laec.fr/section/2/balayer-l-oligarchie-abolir-les-privileges-de-la-caste.
2. http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/03/18/melenchon-souhaite-la-vie-republique-pour-une-societe-dans-laquelle-on-veut-vivre_5096904_4854003.html.
3. http://www.tns-sofres.com/publications/les-francais-et-la-primaire-a-gauche.
4. TNS-Kantar political popularity trends, http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites.

5. 'Ralliements : Macron rappelle qu'En Marche! n'est pas "une maison d'hôte"', http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/2017/03/14/35003-20170314ARTFIG00299-ralliements-macron-rappelle-qu-en-marche-n-est-pas-une-maison-d-hote.php.
6. 'Emmanuel Macron: "Je ne prétends pas être un président normal"', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/04/03/emmanuel-macron-je-ne-pretends-pas-etre-un-president-normal_5104952_4854003.html.
7. In May 2015, the change of the party's name from UMP to the Republican was approved by an overwhelming 83.3 per cent the party grassroots through an Internet vote.
8. 'Jean-Marie Le Pen sur les chambres à gaz: "Ce que j'ai dit correspondait à ma pensée"', http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/jean-marie-le-pen-persiste-sur-les-chambres-a-gaz-873716.html.
9. A similar semantic difference had already been at play in the 2012 run-off where Mélenchon had urged FG voters to oppose Sarkozy unconditionally in the run-off, carefully avoiding vouching for Hollande candidacy.
10. Let us note that support for Le Pen was not considered as a voting option.
11. 'Pour une alliance patriote et républicaine', https://www.marine2017.fr/2017/04/29/alliance-patriote-republicaine/.
12. 'Marine Le Pen regrets "aggressive" debate performance against Macron', http://www.euronews.com/2017/05/19/marine-le-pen-regrets-aggressive-debate-performance-against-macron.
13. 'Macron et Fillon attaquent Le Pen sur la sortie de l'euro', http://www.europe1.fr/politique/macron-et-fillon-sen-prennent-a-le-pen-sur-la-sortie-de-leuro-3221132.
14. 'Trois Français sur quatre opposés à une sortie de l'euro', https://www.lesechos.fr/09/03/2017/lesechos.fr/0211864164061_trois-francais-sur-quatre-opposes-a-une-sortie-de-l-euro.htm.
15. In a joint statement released between the two rounds, Dupont-Aignan and Le Pen indicated that 'the transition from the single currency to the European common currency is not a prerequisite for any economic policy' (https://www.marine2017.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/alliance-marine-le-pen-nicolas-dupont-aignan.pdf).
16. See OpinionWay—*Sondage Jour du Vote—Tour 2 Présidentielle 2017*, 7 May 2017 (http://opinionlab.opinion-way.com/dokumenty/OpinionWay-SondageJourduVote-Tour2Presidentielle20177Mai2017.pdf).

## References

De Boissieu, L. (2015). Elections départementales 2015: la valse des étiquettes et la vérité des chiffres. *Revue politique et parlementaire, 117*(1075), 31–44.

Grunberg, G., & Haegel, F. (2007). *La France vers le bipartisme? La présidentialisation du PS et de l'UMP*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Jaffré, J. (2016). Les nouveaux électeurs du Front national. CEVIPOF-Sciences Po, ENEF Note #7. Retrieved from https://www.enef.fr/app/download/12983061325/LA_NOTE_%237_vague1.pdf?t=1498144334)

Scarrow, S. (2014). *Beyond party members: Changing approaches to partisan mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CHAPTER 5

# Campaign Events and Political Change

The role of campaigns, and events which occur during these, has been the subject of a significant literature in electoral studies (Johnston 2017). Campaign messages, media coverage, presidential debates and candidate behaviour all feature as part of the lead-up to election day, but whether these simply serve to activate voters' more deep-rooted preferences, or instead actively shape these preferences, is the key distinction between approaches. For a single election, it is almost impossible to ascertain which of these two schools of thought pertains. However, we can try to identify those events outside what might be called the 'normal' run of an election campaign which, even if they did not change the outcome of the election, nonetheless represented a 'shock'—an unforeseen occurrence which potentially constituted an inflection point in support for one or more candidates.

In comparison with 2012's presidential race, 2017 ostensibly featured a number of such events which could be seen to have had a direct or indirect impact on the presidential election outcome, particularly the first round. 2012 was perhaps notable in that the events preceding and during the presidential campaign apparently had so little effect on the outcome of the election. From Dominique Strauss-Kahn's disappearance from the French political scene in the spring of 2011, having been a widely touted possible victor in the following year's presidentials, to the terrorist atrocities of Mohammed Mérah in the weeks immediately before the election, party primary strategies and a generalized depoliticization of the issue, respectively, dampened any direct impact on the election outcome (Evans and Ivaldi 2013: 114ff).



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_5

As we have already explored in Chap. 3, the set-up of political competition in 2017 through the party primary process itself constituted a significant disruption to the expected dynamics, polarizing the two governing parties' candidates ideologically. Whatever the ideological positioning of Hamon and Fillon, the victory of two 'also-ran' candidates in the left and right primaries could be construed as shocks to the electoral process, particularly for the Socialist Party whose incumbents were left without a candidate, and one from the *frondeurs* who had been highly critical of the socialist incumbents for the majority of their term of office.

Similarly, Marine Le Pen's apparently unassailable lead in all first-round vote intention polls until March, and Emmanuel Macron's rise to second place almost immediately after the announcement of his candidacy, are revolutionary in their sidelining both the socialist and Republican parties—five years earlier, still the duopoly of executive power and once again expected to alternate power in 2017. However, the eventual second-round contestants' presence and performance were both strongly influenced by a range of exogenous factors beyond the outcome of what was an integral part of the electoral competitive process, whatever their impact.

In the sections which follow, we examine the 'shocks' in 2017 that were widely assumed to have affected the outcome, and look at their likely impact. While some of these events were all too familiar to French politics—financial scandals, in particular, but also the competitive 'fade' of the FN—others, such as the international context and coverage of the election, or the standing down of the incumbent President, represented novelty. Overall, however, we find that the main impact on the election outcome came from precisely the former, more quotidian elements of political life. As regards political corruption in particular, the revelation of the Fillon scandal, clearly a significant shock of the election, certainly reflected a more rampant phenomenon in French politics, which perversely encapsulated one of the key drivers of this election, namely the need for political renewal, and voters' disenchantment with the quality of political supply in the status quo.

## 1 Internationalization of the French Political Context

Unlike perhaps any other French presidential race, 2017 played host to a 'what if …?' phenomenon—the prospect of victory for Marine Le Pen, if not in the second round, then certainly in the first. While more sober

analyses pointed to an array of evidence that suggested overall victory was effectively impossible, the question, 'Could she win?' was a spectre hovering over many media pundits' analyses.

Marine Le Pen's position entering the presidential campaign was deemed by many to be strong not just because of high polling scores and weakened opposition from the parties of government, but also because of the perception, simplistic but prevalent, that a broader wave of right-wing populism was sweeping Western democracies in reaction to, amongst other things, globalization, economic instability, terrorist threats, and the refugee crisis. Most importantly, parties such as the FN were increasingly acting as a legitimized counter to the social liberal discourse of elites.

Such commentaries, while based on some observable phenomena, failed to take into account longer-term trends to contextualize such events. First, right-wing populist support predated all of these phenomena. Second, the 'wave' of populist support was predicated upon two recent events—the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's election, which we discuss below—and could be countered by the loss of the Austrian presidential election in December 2016 by the FPÖ's Norbert Hofer to the Green candidate Alexander Van der Bellen, or the Dutch PVV's relatively disappointing performance in March 2017.

### *1.1 The Growth of International Interference*

The internationalization of electoral context falls into a broader phenomenon of foreign 'intervention' in elections. Across all recent elections, a new phenomenon of candidate interference and disinformation has arisen. Elections have always been tarnished by smear campaigns, as well as more generalized negative campaigning of a more or less aggressive and factually incorrect tenor by candidates and parties. However, online and social media have expanded the reach of elections to include a global audience. There is increasing evidence in the French case, as elsewhere, of potential contamination of the country's sovereign electoral process. First, and perhaps more trivially, French election polls within 48 hours of the close of voting are banned, and no reporting of voting estimates is allowed before 8 pm on the night of the election. However, Belgian and Swiss media have released estimates before this time and, being outside French jurisdiction, there is little that can be done to prevent this. Moreover, the hashtag #RadioLondres has been used on Twitter and Facebook to release 'coded' messages indicating the result—often erroneously, deliberate or not.

A more pernicious effect, however, has been the expansion of disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks by groups outside France. While not on the scale or impact of the alleged hacking campaigns in the US election, the Macron campaign was allegedly targeted by Russian hackers looking to put malware on *En Marche!*'s website.[1] Inevitably, given coverage of Marine Le Pen receiving party funding from Russian banks, and the overt support for Le Pen that many Russian media outlets displayed during the campaign, rumours began that such attacks were for her benefit, if not instigated by her.[2] 4chan, an anonymous 'alt-right' Internet bulletin board, included posts trying to instigate disinformation campaigns about Macron, as well as groups creating pro-Le Pen memes.[3]

While the net effect of the online disinformation campaigns is difficult to assess, but likely small, they are symptomatic of a phenomenon of the globalization of elections. The irrelevance of borders and distance in information dissemination, in contrast to their relevance to national ballots, and the resultant discussions online exaggerates the perception of interlinkage between different political movements and their mutual influence. In particular, the notion of the 'wave' of populism sweeping democracies ties together independent phenomena occurring in vastly different institutional contexts.[4] Whilst there are undoubtedly similar socio-economic and cultural trends across countries which drive popular movements (e.g. Inglehart and Norris 2016), their likely influence could be described in modelling terms as 'under-specified'—relevant political and institutional factors are generally put to one side, as are precedent trends. Worse, causation akin to a geopolitical domino effect is often implicit.

The Brexit referendum and Trump's victory were clearly the two populist beacons which encouraged this sense of interconnectedness. In the latter case, it is difficult to see how the Republican Party candidate's victory in the United States could promote the likelihood of a populist surge in France, beyond common socio-economic trends which have been identified in France years before Trump's candidacy had been mooted. The extent of such an effect was probably limited to media coverage noting similarities between Le Pen's rhetoric and that of the US president,[5] together with some candidates' seemingly increased usage of more conspiracy-related polemics about establishment and media plots[6]—embraced by the party faithful, but not a vote-changer. The UK referendum, however, did have a tangible impact, if not on the election outcome, then on the intensity of the rhetoric of the FN candidate on the European issue.

### *1.2 The Brexit Referendum in the UK*

The referendum on 23 June 2016 which committed the UK to invoking Article 50 and leaving the European Union (EU) was welcomed in France by the FN, Marine Le Pen declaring it a 'victory for freedom'[7] and indicating that this provided the precedent for a similar French referendum. Media coverage echoed this, characterizing the presidential chances of Le Pen in terms of a post-Brexit political world—'*Plongée dans la France du Frexit', 'l'UE croise les doigts', 'Un Frexit ne ferait qu'écourter l'agonie de l'Euro et de l'UE*'[8]

As we will discuss in the next chapter, Le Pen's position on the European referendum had moderated slightly by the presidential campaign—whilst her position on the euro remained firmly to leave, EU membership would be put to a referendum only after a consultation with the EU about a number of policy areas. Nonetheless, the Brexit referendum clearly provided circumstantial evidence for Le Pen of the value of a strong line on Europe. For Le Pen supporters, attitudes to the EU are clearly more negative than for other mainstream candidates, although as many are ambivalent about France's membership rather than actively negative (see Fig. 5.1).

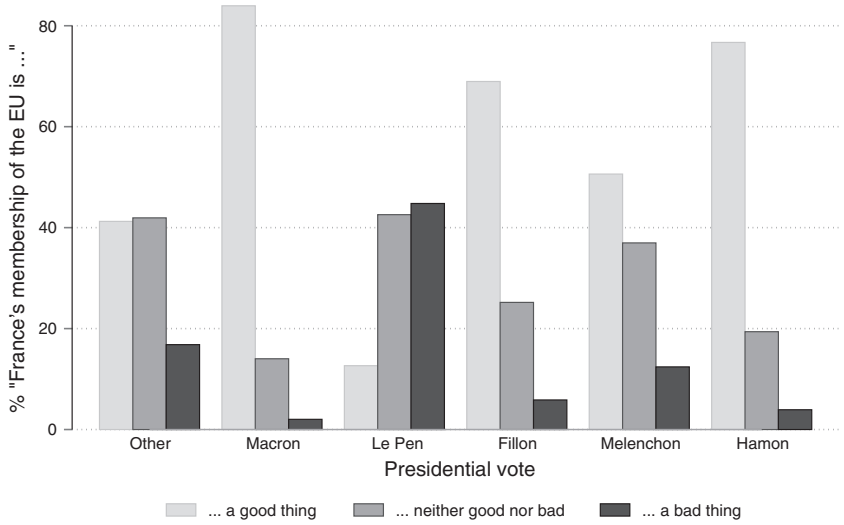


**Fig. 5.1** Voter support for France's membership of the EU, by presidential vote. Source: SCoRE survey

However, it is equally clear that hostility to European membership was not a vote winner across other candidates' voters.

Tempering the widely circulated view of the Pew Center research from June 2016 on Euroscepticism that found that France was only second behind Greece in the proportion of its population who had a negative view of the EU,[9] the difference between criticism of Europe and a desire to leave Europe is important. Whilst a large proportion of French were critical of aspects of Europe, the average position on leaving the EU and leaving the euro was very distant indeed from the other candidates' supporters, and the overall population's view (Fig. 5.2).

As we will consider in more detail in Chaps. 7 and 8, Le Pen made the European issue a key focus of her election campaign, emphasizing this over the more traditional strong messages on immigration and corruption. There may have been good reason for her to soft pedal the latter of these issues in 2017, despite the travails of François Fillon in this regard, as we discuss later in this chapter. Similarly, the European issue may have appeared an important topic upon which to differentiate herself from François Fillon, one of the more pro-European candidates. Moreover, in the eventuality of a second-round run-off against Emmanuel Macron, the most pro-European of the candidates, at worst Le Pen would be in a position to counter his arguments, and at best, an unwillingness by Macron to state his European position too strongly, for fear of demobilizing support in particular from Eurosceptic Mélenchonites, would give her a free space on this issue. In summary, the UK's decision to leave the EU the previous summer seemed to provide an auspicious backdrop to Le Pen's decision to push anti-European sentiment to the front of her agenda.

## 2 The Non-candidacy of François Hollande

There is little to say about François Hollande's decision not to stand for re-election in December 2016, at least in terms of its tangible impact upon the presidential election. As touched upon in Chap. 3, his absence from the BAP primaries clearly impacted upon candidate supply for the PS and the centre–left more broadly. However, the two touchstones of presidential success—opinion poll rating and solidity of parliamentary majority—both indicated that his chances of re-election were very slim indeed: his candidacy, as opposed to Hamon's or, counter-factually, Valls's might have made some difference to the PS's vote share. Beyond that is speculation. The expectation of alternation, mirroring Nicolas Sarkozy's defeat in

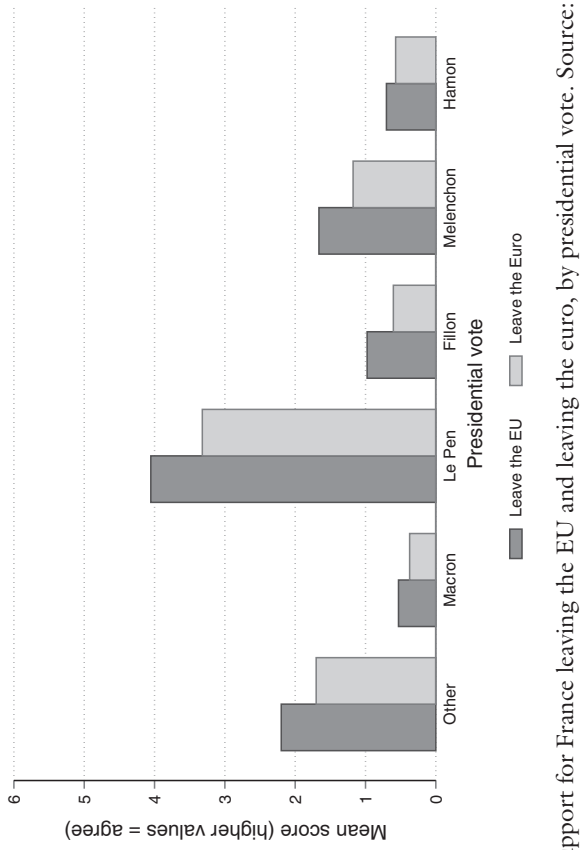


**Fig. 5.2** Voter support for France leaving the EU and leaving the euro, by presidential vote. Source: SCoRE survey

2012, had shifted debate to who would replace him as PS's candidate, rather than whether he would lose.

Initially, Hollande's apparent reticence in declaring himself a candidate in the race was interpreted as a strategic move, to ensure that the beginning of his campaign would not be overshadowed by the selection of LR's candidate in November, as well as a way of testing Macron's candidacy in its infancy. However, it rapidly became apparent that the delay might be similarly strategic, but rather to give eventual socialist candidates clear water from the LR primary before announcing his withdrawal. Manuel Valls's declaration of being ready to take Hollande's place in case of his standing down as early as October indicated as much Valls's own ambition as a knowledge of Hollande's true intentions.

While an exercise is counterfactual, it is tempting to speculate what a Hollande candidacy would have changed. His participation in the Left primary would not necessarily have resulted in his selection—some polls the year before had indicated he would lose to Arnaud Montebourg, for example. However, given both Valls and Montebourg's sound defeat, and more broadly the problems the polls had in identifying the winner for either LR or the Left, this seems less likely than an eventual defeat by Benoît Hamon, which would change nothing in the eventual race. Had Hollande made it to the first round of the election, his presence would likely have deprived Emmanuel Macron of a number of his first-round votes, but it is unknown whether these would have been sufficient to have allowed François Fillon through to the second round, and eventual victory over Le Pen. Hamon's absence would have certainly ensured a greater vote share for Mélenchon.

Undoubtedly, any centre–left candidate would have encroached upon Macron's political space and reduced his vote share, but not sufficiently to results in that left candidate's victory. In that regard, the importance of the left primary in nominating a relatively radical candidate, and displacing competition on the left to the wing, away from the centre space occupied by Macron, was substantial. However, what dynamics would have ensued among the other candidates as a result means that any permutation, including the one which occurred in reality, could have been possible. Our safest estimate, then, is that, although a shock given the uniqueness of an eligible incumbent president deciding not to stand, the impact of Hollande's withdrawal was limited, given his remaining in the race would in all probability have ended in the primary, as it in fact did for Manuel Valls.

## 3 Penelopegate

The singularity of François Fillon's presidential campaign lies in the rapidity with which his largely unexpected success in the Republican primaries and the political momentum he enjoyed immediately after the nomination, which one would have expected to rise further with endorsements from other centre–right *notables* and a strong campaigning position as the official opposition, in fact rapidly diminished to a flat line in vote intention polls as a result of the revelation of what was to become 'Penelopegate'.

The Fillon affair occurred against a backdrop of strong public scepticism about morality in politics—with more than a half (54 per cent) of the French saying that national politicians are 'mostly corrupt'[10]—which also resonated strongly with two important cases of political corruption during Hollande's presidency, namely the Cahuzac scandal in the PS in 2013 and the Bygmalion affair in the former UMP during 2014. These, and other previous financial scandals, were certainly on many voters' minds when *Le Canard Enchaîné* published its first exposé of Fillon's payment of 600,000 euros to his wife for work as a parliamentary assistant, as well as a contributor to *la Revue des Deux Mondes*, a monthly cultural affairs magazine, on 25 January 2017. Despite his denial of any wrong-doing in a television interview on TF1 the day after, and a promise to stand down if he was put under investigation, successive editions of the investigative newspaper made fresh allegations about payments to his children for work as Senate assistants, an undeclared loan from a business associate of 50,000 euros, as well as allegations by other media outlets regarding significant sums spent on suits and watches. On the same day as the *Canard Enchaîné*'s allegations, the *parquet national financier*, the formal fraud branch of the judiciary, opened an enquiry into misuse of public funds.

Fillon's position on the tenability of a presidential candidacy while under formal judicial investigation changed markedly across the campaign. In August 2016, during campaigning for the LR primary in his former constituency, Sarthe, Fillon asked '*Qui imagine un seul instant le général de Gaulle mis en examen?*' ('Can you imagine General de Gaulle being placed under investigation?') '*Ceux qui ne respectent pas les lois de la République ne devraient pas pouvoir se présenter devant les électeurs.*' ('Those who do not respect France's laws should not be able to stand for election.')[11] This directly attacked Nicolas Sarkozy as candidate for the primary, given his being placed under formal investigation for the Bygmalion affair, relating to funds for his 2012 campaign, and allegations

of undue influence over a member of the judiciary.[12] This also implicitly attacked Juppé, at the time the main primary frontrunner, who had been accused of corruption during his time with Jacques Chirac at the head of the Paris city council in the late 1980s. In 2004, Juppé had been found guilty of using the municipality's funds to pay members of his Gaullist party, the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), with an 18-month suspended sentence, while simultaneously barred from public office for one year, which had resulted in his resigning from the presidency of the UMP, clearing the way for Sarkozy.

Having requested two weeks from 1 February for matters to resolve themselves, Fillon came under pressure from his own party's deputies, led by Rhône deputy, Georges Fenech, to call a meeting of the party politburo to discuss his candidacy. Fillon refused, and on 1 March, announced that, despite a summons from a judge to place him under investigation, he would not in fact be standing down as the Republicans candidate, given he was the victim of a 'political assassination'.

Both within and outside his party, there were numerous calls for Alain Juppé, runner-up in the primary run-off, to replace Fillon. Juppé made it clear that he would not be running for the presidency under any circumstances, thus eliminating himself as the Republicans' 'Plan B'. Nevertheless, the selection of Juppé in Fillon's place would anyway not have been a realistic choice for the party. In the primary race, as we have discussed in Chap. 3, Juppé's defeat clearly marked the victory of the conservative wing of the party over the centre–right liberal wing. Juppé would not have been second choice candidate for the majority of Fillon supporters—among those candidates winning a significant proportion of the vote, Nicolas Sarkozy or even Bruno Le Maire would have been preferable for Fillon supporters. Perversely, a choice which would have presented a much greater threat to Emmanuel Macron, under other circumstances, would potentially have split the party and lost support on the right wing of the party to Le Pen or even to Dupont-Aignan.

In the event, Bruno Le Maire, who had joined Fillon's campaign team as spokesman on international affairs, resigned immediately after Fillon's announcement, citing the importance of being true to one's word, which his candidate evidently had not been.[13] Over the next two days, Patrick Stefanini, Fillon's campaign director, and Sébastien Cornu and Vincent Le Roux, the deputy campaign directors, resigned as well. A number of senior Republican deputies, senators and regional councillors also officially withdrew their support from Fillon, including Franck Riester, deputy for Seine-et-Marne, who would go on to advocate rapprochement of his party

with Macron's government; Thierry Solère, Fillon's first spokesman and organizer of the right primaries; and Fabienne Keller, former mayor of Strasbourg and Senator in Bas-Rhin, who was considered a possible minister in Macron's government. Even right-wing politicians, such as former minister and MEP, Nadine Morano, and former President of the *Parti Chrétien-Démocrate*, Christine Boutin, who might have been expected to remain loyal to the conservative right candidate, announced the withdrawal of their support for Fillon, but couched the rationale in terms of his having gone back on his word to stand down in the case of an investigation, rather than for the allegations themselves. Perhaps the most notable departure, in retrospect, was that of future Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, then deputy and mayor of Le Havre.

Fillon's tone and intransigence towards the accusations consolidated support among core LR voters, while demobilizing many Juppéiste activists and the centre–right electorate. Before a rally on 5 March at the Trocadéro in Paris—the site of Nicolas Sarkozy's second-round rally in 2012—Fillon's increasingly populist appeals to support his candidacy had concerned many, including Paris's socialist Mayor Anne Hidalgo, who criticized it as '*un acte grave de faillite morale et politique*', mobilizing an aggressive crowd against Republican institutions such as the magistrature, police and journalists. Christian Estrosi, president of the Republican-led council in PACA did likewise, explicitly naming *Sens commun* and *Manif' pour tous* as worrying hardline elements leading the rally. The extent to which the presence of these groups in Fillon's support group was perceived as a major issue by many in his own party perhaps became apparent only in the legislative campaign, when the programme announced on 9 May featured a significant softening of policy position on immigration and social policies, as well as a less entrenched position on austerity.

Across the entire 'active' period of scandal, Fillon's refusal to entertain standing down, with the support of his closest advisers, created a bubble of misinformation around the Republican candidate regarding his electoral chances. Convinced of a conspiracy against his candidacy, media reports of problems with his campaign, the desertion of former supporters, and indications of Macron, Le Pen and, in the latter stages of the campaign, Mélenchon drawing ahead were construed as part of a negative campaign designed to bring down his nomination.

The next chapter will provide a more detailed examination of presidential polls during the campaign, as well as an empirical evaluation of their accuracy. However, there is some evidence that the electoral impact of

Penelopegate may have been felt very early in the affair. As Fig. 5.3 shows, Fillon enjoyed a high level of support immediately after the November primary, with close to 30 per cent of the presidential vote, a typical post-convention bounce that we have noted in Chap. 3.

However, this was rapidly followed by a downward trend to 25 per cent by the New Year, a level of support similar to Sarkozy's performance in the 2012 elections at just over 27 per cent of the vote, despite his low popularity and nearly all parties across the spectrum coalescing to oust him from the Elysée palace. Whether support for Fillon would have continued to decline at the end of that month is a matter of speculation. There were growing concerns amongst Republicans at the time that their champion's economically neoliberal and socially conservative right-wing agenda could be alienating moderate voters at the centre, as had been illustrated by the controversy over Fillon's plan to cut down health benefits in the final days of the primary campaign. This largely accounted for his first drop in support during December 2016, prompting him to review

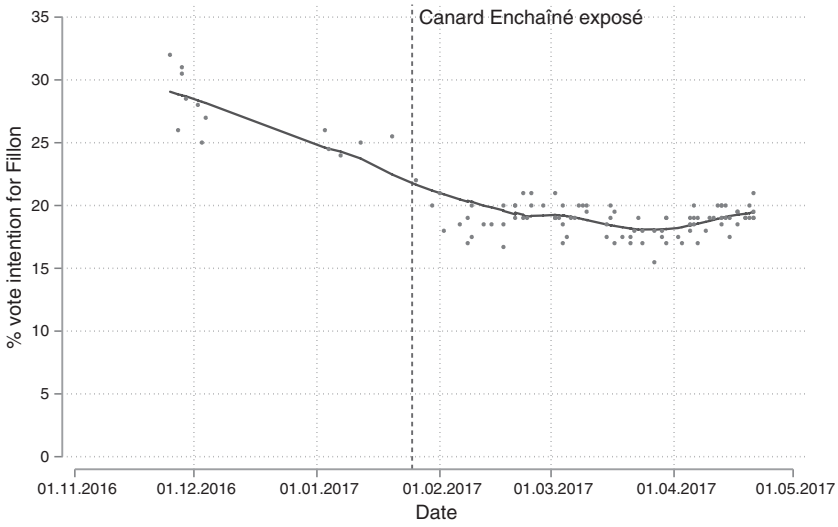


**Fig. 5.3** Trends in presidential voting intentions for François Fillon (November 2016—April 2017). Note: loess regression fitted curve (bandwidth = 0.4). Source: Authors' collation of vote intention polls, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_de_sondages_sur_l'élection_présidentielle_française_de_2017, polling institute archives, polling institute archives

his positions and come up with a more moderate package of welfare retrenchment policies.[14]

What seems clear from the data, nevertheless, is that the revelation of Penelopegate potentially cost Fillon anything up to an additional 5 percentage points from the initial *Canard Enchaîné* article, placing the Republicans candidate behind both Le Pen and Macron. The most deleterious effect the affair had on Fillon's chances was to prevent him from focusing on communicating a programme, and instead force him to defend his perceived right to contest the election at all. As the final outcome of the first round would later reveal, these few percentage points may have been critical in depriving Fillon of a possible second place in what was an extremely close presidential race on 23 April.

It is interesting that the unfolding of Fillon's scandal coincided with what was perhaps the largest electoral impact of this period, namely François Bayrou's declaration of support for Emmanuel Macron. On 15 February, Bayrou declared that it was 'impossible' to support Fillon. Until then, Bayrou had not ruled out support for Fillon, although his initial support had been for Alain Juppé in the primaries. As we will consider in the next chapter, Macron's polling figures subsequent to Bayrou's declaration leave little doubt as to the effect this had on the balance between the main frontrunners, potentially throwing the final outcome towards Macron.

## 4 Corruption Issues in Non-traditional Party Alternatives

François Fillon was not the only candidate to encounter judicial investigations during the presidential campaign, and allegations of corruption concerned other candidates outside the main party channels. Marine Le Pen was put under a *mise en examen* for misuse of public funds relating to European parliamentary assistants, but effectively blocked the investigation during the campaign by refusing to answer questions until the end of the legislative campaign.[15] The Nanterre *parquet* also requested the European parliament withdraw Le Pen's immunity to pursue an enquiry into the FN leader's tweeting of Islamic State images.[16] Revelations of Le Pen's possible misuse of European funds came against a backdrop of general suspicion concerning the FN's morality and financial activities, as Le Pen's party was faced with several investigations around the time of the presidential election.[17] Another separate financial scandal focused on suspicious campaign

funding since 2011 and a possible misuse of assets and complicity in fraud, which involved Le Pen's 'micro-party', *Jeanne*, set up to deal with party funding, as well as *Riwal*, a company run by Le Pen's associates Frédéric Chatillon and Axel Loustau, in charge of party communications and campaigns.

A lack of progress in these investigations, an FN electorate steadfastly backing their candidate through 'establishment plots', and the much higher profile of the Fillon investigation may have reduced the impact of those affairs on the level of presidential support for Le Pen. Eventually, the effect was minimized in her reaching the second round nonetheless. Looking at the final stage of the campaign, however, there is evidence that such issues may have flatlined and even perhaps diminished Le Pen's support similarly to Fillon. As will be discussed in the next chapter, polls published in March and April 2017 showed presidential support for the FN candidate dropping from above a quarter of the vote in early March, whereby Le Pen would almost systematically take the lead, down to an average 22 per cent in the final week, placing her behind Macron. Across all polls published in January and February, Le Pen would take the lead in over 90 per cent of the cases, which compares with than less than a third (32 per cent) in the last two months of the campaign. Let us note here that, amidst political scandals, the drop in support for the FN leader certainly accentuated in the final days after Le Pen made new controversial comments on 9 April, questioning the role and responsibility of the French state in the roundup of Jews in the Vel d'Hiv in Paris during the war.[18]

Overall, then, political corruption interfered strongly with the 2017 French presidential election, which not only affected the governing parties but also new political actors such as LRM. In the latter, the core machinery of Macron's political enterprise would, to quite a large extent, need to rely on more experienced politicians previously affiliated with the old regime and therefore likely to bear its stigma. Despite placing a significant premium on the moralization of politics during his presidential campaign, Emmanuel Macron could not escape investigations into members of his first government, as well as indirect investigations relating to his own activities, specifically the company organizing an event with start-up CEOs in Las Vegas while he was still a minister.[19] Richard Ferrand, minister for regional collaboration (*Ministre de la cohésion des territoires)*, had been the first deputy to join *En Marche!* in October 2016, becoming the movement's General Secretary, until his appointment to the Philippe government. In late May, *Le Canard Enchaîné* revealed possible evidence of

collusion in the purchase and rental of premises in Brest, his constituency, between his partner and the *Mutuelles de Bretagne*, a not-for-profit organization offering health services, of which Ferrand had been the Director General. Whilst potentially embarrassing, investigators declared this outside their sphere of competence. *Le Monde* also revealed a number of contracts awarded to his partner and to his ex-wife through the same organization while he was Director General, as well as concerns over the use of parliamentary aides, and a possible conflict of interest in voting on laws regarding not-for-profit organizations as a deputy while connected with *les Mutuelles de Bretagne*. On 2 June, a formal investigation (*enquête*) was opened into Ferrand.

This was made all the more uncomfortable for the president given the presentation of the law on the moralization of public life by François Bayrou on 1 June (who himself would resign after the election, together with the other Modem ministers, Marielle de Sarnez and Sylvie Goulard, over investigations into the activities of Modem European parliament aides), the same day that the investigating magistrates in Brest announced the beginning of a preliminary enquiry into Ferrand. Most symbolically, the law proposed the discontinuation of the *Cour de Justice de la République*. This body was set up by a constitutional amendment in 1993, in the wake of the contaminated blood scandal (Larivière 2000), and comprised 12 members from the National Assembly and Senate, elected by secret ballot, and three magistrates from the *Cour de Cassation*, to sit as a judicial body to prosecute any crimes committed by members of the government. The perception of a political body, rather than the usual judicial bodies, taking responsibility for the prosecution of members of the government had increasingly contributed to a sense of politicians being subject to a different level of justice—a suspicion bolstered by the apparent prevalence of suspended sentences for political crimes, also the target of Macron's campaign. Further themes of the Bayrou bill proposed additional restrictions on hiring family members, three-term maxima for incumbents and ten-year exclusion from public office for anyone convicted of corruption.

Despite the investigation and vociferous calls for Ferrand to resign from the government, this had apparently limited impact on his legislative election performance in the sixth *circonscription* in Finistère, where he won the first round with a third of the vote, and carrying the *ballottage* against the Republican candidate by almost 14 points, and on a turnout some six points higher than the national average. Ferrand himself finally resigned

from the government the day after the legislative elections, on 19 June, at the request of the president, but was offered instead the presidency of the LREM parliamentary group in the National Assembly.

## 5 The Spectre of Terrorist Attacks

The two years leading to the presidential election were marked by a series of terror attacks which were to frame many of the issues coming into the campaign. On 7 January 2015, two men attacked the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a monthly satirical magazine which had published cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, killing 12 people, including staff and policemen guarding the offices subsequent to a firebomb attack in 2011. Two days later, four hostages were killed in a siege of a kosher supermarket in eastern Paris. On 13 November of the same year, a series of attacks in Paris killed 130 people. Ninety people were killed in the Bataclan concert hall in Paris by three gunmen who took over the venue, with 40 more killed in other atrocities around the capital. On 14 July 2016, during a Bastille Day celebration in Nice, a man drove a goods lorry through crowds of people on the Promenade des Anglais, killing 84.

After the November attacks in Paris, a state of emergency (*état d'urgence*) was instated and was subsequently renewed five times by the National Assembly, most recently (at the time of writing) on 6 July 2017 for a period of four months until November 2017. Under law 55-385 of 3 April 1955, the powers of the minister of the interior and departmental prefects, amongst others, are strengthened in the domains of access to public spaces, right to assembly and security checks by the police and other officials, with the government required to inform the National Assembly and Senate of all measures taken under this law.[20]

The 2017 campaign was marked by one terrorist incident, namely the killing of Xavier Jugelé, a policeman on patrol in the Champs-Elysée who was shot in an ambush on 20 April—three days before the first round of the election—by a violent criminal recently suspected of having been radicalized. The leading candidates, with the exception of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, cancelled their final campaign events as a mark of respect (Mélenchon stated that he did not wish to give in to intimidation and terror[21]).

2017 was not the first election where a violent incident marked the campaign. In 1995, the Saint-Michel RER station bombing had occurred just before by-elections for the National Assembly, ostensibly benefiting FN candidates. In 2002, the so-called Papy Voise affair saw Jean-Marie Le

Pen, campaigning on a tough law-and-order policy, able to exploit the attack on a pensioner in Orléans. In March 2012, Toulouse suffered a series of shootings, first of members of the armed forces, and subsequently of three Jewish children and a father murdered outside their school. The attacker, Mohammed Mérah, contacted the media while on the run to give his motives as fighting for Islam. In this case, much media coverage had initially speculated that the then-unknown attacker might be a member of the far right, given his targets (the soldiers killed had been of North African descent), and police having originally arrested three former members of the French Parachute Regiment who had neo-Nazi links.[22] The leading candidates in 2012, François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, both interrupted their campaigns. Subsequently, Marine Le Pen explicitly noted that the killings were likely to shift the focus of the campaign towards her themes, for example raising the possibility of a referendum on the reintroduction of capital punishment.[23] However, the incident taking place at the height of the campaign meant that political response was reactive, rather than providing a context to the campaign themes. Indeed, many candidates were notable in their hesitancy in how to react to the tragedy (Evans and Ivaldi 2013: 123).

Under most circumstances, opinion polls are of little use in noting the effect of such an incident on voting. However, three points are worth making. First, Marine Le Pen's eventual score in the first round matched her opinion polls ratings which had been gently declining across the campaign. There was no knee-jerk move of voters to the radical right candidate as a result of the terror attack. Second, as in the case of Mérah in 2012, there was no sign of there having been any shift in support for a candidate in the aftermath.[24] Third, the main impact of violent incidents in polling seems to have been a short-term increase in favourable polling for the head of state. Hollande's raft of new measures on security in the wake of the Paris attacks was accompanied by a surge in his ratings of at least 7 points,[25] and in some polls (see Fig. 5.4) as much as 20 points. Similarly, after the Nice attack, there is a small increase (although this covers a two-month period during polling's recess during August). However, equally noticeable is the immediate reversion to the previous position within a maximum of two months afterwards.

Some dubious speculation over the size of attacks and their political effect aside, the main impact of violent events is indirect, in how their context frames the ensuing campaign and its issues. Given the political debate over the longevity and impact of the *état d'urgence*, the theme of security

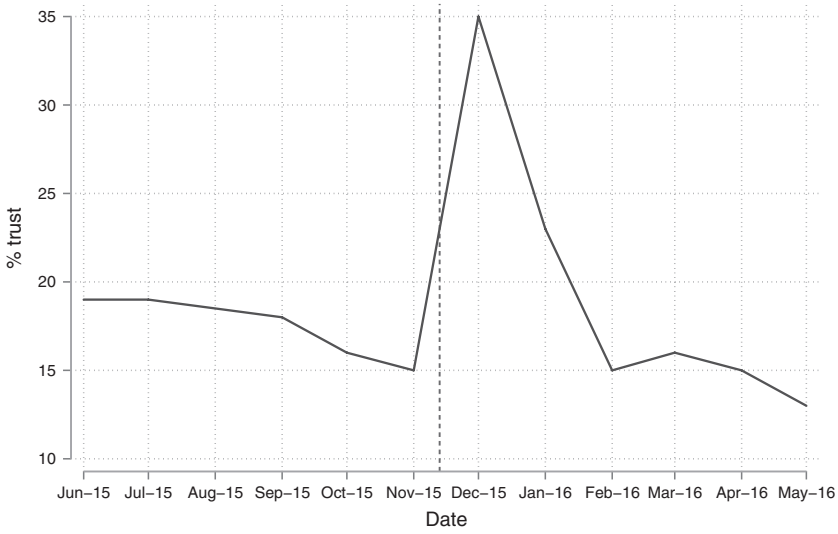


**Fig. 5.4** François Hollande popularity ratings around the time of the Paris attacks. Source: Kantar-TNS political popularity trends, http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites

and law-and-order inevitably emerged in candidates' programmes. Where their position was less clear—Emmanuel Macron, for example—this opened the candidate in question to attacks by their competitors. However, there is no evidence that the electorate was swayed towards any one candidate by their reaction to or political stance on dealing with terrorism. As such, terrorism was not a 'shock' in the 2017 presidential campaign but rather a contextual element of it, mostly because its political and electoral effects had been previously absorbed by parties and candidates. Terrorism as a salient political issue had emerged during the 2015 regional election campaign, immediately after the Paris attacks of November, revealing the depth of the cultural divide within the French left and Hollande's presidential majority, while both the moderate right and the FN would continue with their strong agenda of authority and national security. As a policy issue, terrorism later resurfaced during the Republican and socialist presidential primary campaigns where, as we noted in Chap. 3, candidates took very clear positions on fighting the terrorist threat and, more generally, on law-and-order, providing voters with the necessary cues as to the political stances that they would take in the presidential election.

## 6 The Debate of the *entre deux tours*

Perhaps the most striking shock to the electoral dynamics occurred five days before the second round of polling. On Wednesday evening, Macron confronted Le Pen in the traditional televised debate. First held in 1974, between Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand, and only absent in 2002 when Jacques Chirac refused to debate Jean-Marie Le Pen, this two-hour face-off has allowed the two candidates the opportunity to reinforce the key messages from their programmes, but also crucially to demonstrate their command and aptitude for foreign affairs, one of the key presidential domains. In the 1981 debate, the incumbent Giscard d'Estaing notoriously attempted to wrong-foot the challenger Mitterrand by asking him what the Franc-Deutschmark exchange rate was—an attempt to display an awareness of international issues which backfired spectacularly, given Mitterrand was able to provide this, and did so in berating the incumbent for, in his own words, trying to test him like a teacher. The debates have also, perhaps inevitably, been very confrontational, most strikingly in 1988 when Prime Minister Jacques Chirac faced François Mitterrand for the latter's third debate, and was reminded repeatedly of his (inferior) position through Mitterrand's use of *Monsieur le Premier Ministre*. In 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy accused Ségolène Royal of losing her temper over his reforms to disability benefits—an accusation which she was happy to endorse.

The 2017 debate was distinct in two ways. First, while Macron deliberately set out a clear set of policies with regard to unemployment, policing and education, for example, Marine Le Pen based the vast majority of her allocated time attacking Macron, both *ad hominem* and criticizing his policies but often based upon fallacious data or misrepresentation. These varied between misinterpretation of figures—for example, that the adoption of the euro had led to higher inflation—to outright falsehoods—that the euro had been adopted in 1993 (it was launched in 1999). One estimate ascribed 19 inaccurate statements to the FN candidate.[26] A number of these so-called *intox* dealt with Europe and international trade—key issues for Macron, where Le Pen wished to unnerve voters as to Europe's history on economic policy, and its likely future effect. It also allowed her to sidestep the issue of her own policy on Europe and the euro, exit from which was a minority position for the French electorate, causing confusion for the FN in how to moderate its position without appearing to do a complete U-turn. Indeed, when Le Pen did present her position on the

euro in the debate, it was as a partner currency used by central banks alongside a reinstated franc—a complicated, if not unworkable dual currency which further muddled many voters.[27]

An aggressive stance in debating Macron was an obvious strategy for a candidate campaigning for a party that had based much of its previous election campaigns driving home the '*bonnet blanc, blanc bonnet*' and 'UMPS' message, but it was singularly at odds with the message of *dédiabolisation* that the FN had tried to broadcast under Marine Le Pen. Undoubtedly, a former minister of the economy, banker and member of the elite French civil service presented an ideal target for criticisms of the establishment. However, the prioritization of negative messages left little time for the presentation of a constructive programme of power. Moreover, this omission suggested not just poor strategy, but poor planning as well. In the final sections of the debate, where the two candidates had the opportunity to play a '*carte blanche*' issue—for Macron, benefits for the disabled—Le Pen devoted her allotted time to attacking Macron's policy, before presenting, to the bewilderment of Christophe Jakubyszyn and Nathalie Saint-Cricq, the two journalists moderating the debate, what she described as a *philosophie générale*—a general worldview, which left very little to say in the closing statement.

Overall, the general consensus was that Le Pen had missed the opportunities provided by the debate to enhance her presidential stature, a perhaps unattainable goal given her party's structural deficit in credibility. As suggested by an Elabe poll after the debate, Macron was the uncontested winner of the confrontation: nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of the French would find him more convincing than his radical right opponent, including 66 and 58 per cent of Mélenchon and Fillon's supporters, respectively. Additionally, in the same poll, no less than 64 per cent said that Macron had a 'better project' for the country, showing that Le Pen was trapped in her role as protestor and vociferous critic of the political system rather than credible presidential alternative.[28]

As figures on polling in the next chapter will show, the opinion polls shifted in the last three days of the campaign more noticeably than they had for the rest of the campaign. For example, Ifop's rolling panel dropped 3 percentage points for Marine Le Pen from 3 May, the steepest consecutive decline of her polling figures since the beginning of the campaign. Unlike previous appearances broadly lauded by FN supporters, much of this latter group's reaction was hostile, criticizing Le Pen's aggressiveness and lack of clarity on policies.[29] Jean-Marie Le Pen accused both candi-

dates of debating like the head of political parties rather than future heads of state.[30] Ségolène Royal similarly referenced the FN candidate's 'emptiness and incompetence'.[31] On the centre–right, the usually guarded Alain Juppé asked how it was possible to imagine her as president after such a performance.[32]

In reality, Le Pen's approach to the debate was clearly not to try to convince sufficient voters to support her in order to overcome the large deficit in votes. As the second-round polls had made clear, there was no momentum in her favour after the first round. Her aim, instead, was twofold. First, she wanted to demobilize as many potential Macron supporters, particularly those on the left of the spectrum who were hesitating between a blank vote, abstention and a vote against her for Macron, by dampening positive debate of policies and instead demonstrating the negative aspects of political confrontation. As was discussed in Chap. 4, despite a strong opposition from the right-wingers of her party who had been advocating bringing the FN back to its right-wing roots since 2015, Le Pen strategically targeted Mélenchon's rather than Fillon's first-round voters during the run-off campaign, seeking to unite a very improbable 'populist' constituency against Macron, therefore conducting a misfit anti-establishment rather than policy-oriented second-round campaign.

Second, and linked with the above, Le Pen wished to place a marker for her party as the official opposition to a future President Macron, whilst both traditional parties of government were locked out of political competition. Already the largest party in the 2014 European elections, and de facto the largest party outside the presidential movement, *En Marche!*, becoming the principal alternative to Macron's movement in the June legislatives would have provided a greater level of legitimacy within the system than the FN had previously managed in its 40-plus year history. The announcement in her concession speech on 7 May that the party would change its name to reflect its broader role in French politics as an opposition movement reinforced the sense that Le Pen had used the debate as a basis for her party's future role rather than a realistic bid for the presidency.

The drop in Le Pen's support in the *entre-deux-tours* and eventual second-round result produced a demobilization of FN voters before the legislatives. As we discuss in more detail in Chap. 9, for a party widely expected to be challenging strongly in over 100 *circonscriptions*,[33] and with hopes of easily surpassing the threshold of 15 deputies for a parliamentary group, it managed to progress to the second round in only 110

constituencies, all but one of them duels rather than favoured *triangulaires*. In the event, only eight FN candidates were returned to the National Assembly. Overall, as well as Le Pen being unable to win the second round of the presidential election, the extent of her defeat certainly had repercussions for her party and its candidates in the legislative elections, and indeed may continue to do so in internal debates about the party's future programme and leadership.

## 7 Conclusion

There is little doubt that 'events', broadly construed, had a substantial impact on the elections, directly and indirectly, and to a much greater extent than in 2012. Indeed, reading the previous four chapters should already have alerted the reader to the role of effects outside the normal political dynamics of an election in this presidential race. Inevitably, the Penelopegate scandal appears to have had the greatest impact on the election result. Let us recall that most commentators one year prior to the election saw the LR party victory as virtually assured. The election of Fillon in the primary race may have been a shock, although one within normal political dynamics, and explicable by the values and policy preferences of the primary electorate (see Chap. 3). By itself, however, this polarization of the eventual LR candidate, relative to that of a Juppé candidacy, might not have been sufficient to ensure victory by Macron. Bayrou's backing of Macron, and Fillon's inability to campaign effectively on policies rather than personal integrity, was sufficient, however, to limit the LR candidate to his core support, losing him what had been an almost guaranteed run-off spot, and even putting him at risk of dropping behind Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Other events, specifically Hollande's withdrawal and Le Pen's poor second-round debate, evidently had an impact on the structure of competition, for the former, and vote share, for the latter. However, it is difficult to argue that these shifts were 'game-changers', at least for the presidential election outcome. For Le Pen, her poor performance had a longer-term effect on activist morale and voter momentum in the legislatives, compounding the stagnation of support in the last weeks of the campaign that resulted in her second-place qualification. From targeting a parliamentary group, to picking up only a handful of highly localized seats, the debate cemented the party's status as a movement unable to break the glass ceiling

to power, trapped in its role as primarily a protest force in French politics.

However, the remainder of events identified here held the status more of *faits divers* than of significant shocks in the electoral campaign. Whilst the internationalization of election coverage as a phenomenon stretched to France, as it had to other European countries, there is no evidence of any tangible impact upon the election. Likewise, the *état d'urgence* remained a constant across the campaign, with voter preferences influenced by the terror attacks set long before, and stable throughout. Other politically salient events, such as the closure of the 'jungle' refugee centre in Calais, had occurred outside the campaign period.

Overall, then, a presidential election which received more coverage internationally than perhaps any French election before was not marked by multiple watershed moments that this coverage elevated to front-page status. The trends in support and results should then be largely identifiable through a normal process of policy programme, candidate valence and voter preference structure evaluation. It is to those elements of the election which we turn after we have considered the status of opinion polling in the election in the next chapter.

## Notes

1. 'Macron campaign was target of cyber attacks by spy-linked group', http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-macron-cyber-idUSKBN17Q200.
2. 'La campagne de Macron visée pars des hackers russes', http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/2017/04/25/35003-20170425ARTFIG00068-la-campagne-de-macron-est-bien-visee-par-des-hackers-russes.php.
3. 'Pepe Le Pen: can the alt-right really "meme" Marine Le Pen to victory?', http://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/internet/2017/02/pepe-le-pen-can-alt-right-really-meme-marine-le-pen-victory.
4. 'The global wave of populism that turned 2016 upside down', https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/12/19/the-global-wave-of-populism-that-turned-2016-upside-down/?utm_term=.16d394f6cd34.
5. 'Présidentielle: Europe, Macron, employ … la "trumpisation" de Marine Le Pen sur TF1', http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/04/26/europe-macron-emploi-la-trumpisation-de-marine-le-pen-sur-tf1_5117479_4355770.html.

6. ‘Fillon, la théorie du complot’, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/03/01/fillon-la-theorie-du-complot_1552510.
7. ‘Marine Le en exulte et réclame un “Frexit”’, http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2016/06/24/marine-le-pen-exulte-et-reclame-un-frexit_4957154_823448.html.
8. ‘Plongée dans la France du “Frexit”’, http://www.lemonde.fr/m-actu-chroniques/article/2016/06/27/plongee-dans-la-france-du-frexit_4958615_4573473.html; ‘“L’UE croise les doigts pout que Macron, qui apparaît comme le seul proeuropéen, l’emporte”’, http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/04/07/l-ue-croise-les-doigts-pour-que-macron-qui-apparait-comme-le-seul-proeuropeen-l-emporte_5107916_4854003.html ; ‘Un Frexit ne ferait qu’écourter l’agonie de l’euro et de l’UE’, http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/2017/03/28/31003-20170328ARTFIG00261-la-bce-ne-pourra-pas-maintenir-continuellement-la-zone-euro-sous-perfusion.php.
9. ‘Union européenne: les Français de plus en plus eurosceptiques’, http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/06/08/union-europeenne-les-francais-de-plus-en-plus-eurosceptiques_4941770_3214.html.
10. ‘Sondage: un Français sur deux juge les gouvernants corrompus’, https://www.publicsenat.fr/lcp/politique/sondage-un-francais-deux-juge-gouvernants-corrompus-1530925.
11. ‘Fillon : “Qui imagine le général de Gaulle mis en examen?”’ http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2016/08/28/97001-20160828FILWWW00076-fillon-qui-imagine-le-general-de-gaulle-mis-en-examen.php.
12. ‘Mis en examen, le candidat Sarkozy a peu de risque d’être jugé avant 2017’, http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/08/24/mis-en-examen-le-candidat-sarkozy-a-peu-de-chances-d-etre-juge-avant-2017_4987454_4355770.html.
13. ‘Affaire Fillon: Bruno Le Maire dénonce le non respect “de la parole donnée” et démissionne de l’équipe de campagne’, http://lelab.europe1.fr/affaire-fillon-bruno-le-maire-denonce-le-non-respect-de-la-parole-donnee-et-quitte-lequipe-de-campagne-2991314.
14. ‘Santé: les propositions de Fillon font polémique’, https://www.lesechos.fr/25/11/2016/lesechos.fr/0211532561992_sante---les-propositions-de-fillon-font-polemique.htm.
15. ‘Assistants parlementaires: Marine Le Pen convoquée en vue d’une mise en examen’, http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/03/03/assistants-parlementaires-marine-le-pen-a-ete-a-nouveau-convoquee-par-des-juges_5089107_823448.html.
16. ‘Levée de l’immunité de Marine Le Pen dans l’affaire de la diffusion d’images violentes’, http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/03/02/le-parlement-europeen-vote-la-levee-de-l-immunite-de-marine-le-pen-

dans-l-affaire-de-la-diffusion-d-images-violentes-sur-twitter_5088118_1653578.html.
17. 'Les six affaires qui menacent Marine Le Pen et le Front national', http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/02/02/les-trois-affaires-qui-menacent-marine-le-pen-et-le-front-national_5073473_4355770.html.
18. 'Marine Le Pen choque en déclarant que « la France n'est pas responsable » de la rafle du Vél' d'Hiv', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/04/10/marine-le-pen-choque-en-declarant-que-la-france-n-est-pas-responsable-de-la-rafle-du-vel-d-hiv_5108622_4854003.html.
19. 'Délplacement de Macron à Las Vegas: perquisitions chez Havas et Business France', http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/06/20/deplacement-de-macron-a-las-vegas-perquisitions-chez-havas-et-business-france_5148116_1653578.html.
20. 'Loi n° 55-385 du 3 avril 1955 relative à l'état l'urgence', https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000695350.
21. 'Jean-Luc Mélenchon maintient sa campagne "pour ne pas céder à la panique"', http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/lfi/jean-luc-melenchon-maintient-sa-campagne-pour-ne-pas-ceder-a-la-panique_1901208.html.
22. 'La piste de trois militaires néonazis exclus du 17e RGP', http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2012/03/20/01016-20120320ART-FIG00335-la-piste-de-trois-militaires-neonazis-exclus-du-17e-rgp.php.
23. 'Toulouse: Marine Le Pen suggère à nouveau un référendum sur la peine de mort', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/breve/2012/03/21/toulouse-marine-le-pen-suggere-a-nouveau-un-referendum-sur-la-peine-de-mort_1673058_1471069.html.
24. 'Affaire Merah: un impact limité dans les sondages', http://www.liberation.fr/france/2012/03/27/affaire-merah-un-impact-limite-dans-les-sondages_806104.
25. 'Hollande gagne 7 points de popularité', http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2015/11/22/97001-20151122FILWWW00019-hollande-gagne-7-points-a-27.php.
26. 'Dix-neuf intox de Marine Le Pen dans son débat avec Emmanuel Macron', http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/05/03/des-intox-du-debat-entre-emmanuel-macron-et-marine-le-pen-verifiees_5121846_4355770.html.
27. 'Sortie de l'euro: naufrage en direct de Marine Le Pen', http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/elections/sortie-de-l-euro-le-naufrage-en-direct-de-marine-le-pen_1905031.html.

28. 'Débat présidentiel: Emmanuel Macron jugé le plus convaincant face à Marine Le Pen', http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/debat-presidentiel-emmanuel-macron-juge-le-plus-convaincant-face-a-marine-le-pen-1156571.html.
29. 'Débat de l'entre-deux-tours: "gueule de bois" chez certains partisans FN', http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/elections/debat-de-l-entre-deux-tours-gueule-de-bois-chez-certains-partisans-fn_1905103.html.
30. 'Jean-Marie Le Pen: "un débat de chefs de partis, pas de présidentiables"', http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/2017/05/04/35003-20170504ARTFIG00146-jean-marie-le-pen-un-debat-de-chefs-de-partis-pas-de-presidentiables.php.
31. 'Sérieux et efficacité d'Emmanuel Macron face au vide et à l'incompétence' https://twitter.com/RoyalSegolene/status/859851458635845632.
32. 'Qu'elle a été mauvaise! Brouillonne, agressive, sarcastique. Comment imaginer une telle personne Présidente de la République?', https://twitter.com/alainjuppe/status/859998223825600513.
33. 'Législatives: cent onze circonscriptions dans le viseur du Front national', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/05/09/legislatives-cent-onze-circonscriptions-dans-le-viseur-du-front-national_5124747_4854003.html.

## References

Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2013). *The 2012 French presidential elections. The inevitable alternation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Inglehart, R. F., & Norris, P. (2016, August). Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and Cultural backlash. Faculty Research Working Paper Series, Harvard Kennedy School. Retrieved from https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/getFile.aspx?Id=1401

Johnston, R. (2017). Campaign effects. In K. Arzheimer, J. Evans, & M. Lewis-Beck (Eds.), *Handbook of electoral behaviour* (pp. 709–732). London: Sage.

Larivière, D. (2000). La Cour de justice de la République et l'affaire du sang contaminé. *Pouvoirs, 92*, 91–102.

CHAPTER 6

# Forecasting and Polling

Electoral forecasting has become an increasingly common phenomenon across liberal democracies in the last decade. While forecasting has always been an informal feature of elections—from media punditry to a voter's own opinion as to the likely outcome—a more rigorous approach to predicting an election outcome based upon statistical modelling of econometric and polling data has moved over the last 20 years from an academic pursuit to a headline-grabbing activity. Whilst the United States and the UK have been the main generators of election forecasts, France has enjoyed some prominence in forecasters' analyses, particularly since 2002. The 2002 presidential election sparked particular interest in forecasting terms because of the largely unexpected success of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of voting—a surge which the opinion polls had seemingly failed to anticipate (Durand et al. 2004). But polls had similarly performed poorly in the preceding 1997 legislative election (Jérôme et al. 1999). Not only did these result in pollsters' soul-searching to identify why this had been the case, it also spurred a wider interest in building models to predict vote shares in France that used polls as only one variable, if at all.

Forecast models can be broken down into three main approaches—adjusted polling forecasts; 'structural', political economic forecasts; and synthetic models, which combine both polls and structural indicators (Lewis-Beck and Dassonneville 2015a). The first treat vote intention polls



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_6

as statistical estimates of support which can be combined to address problems of statistical error, and house effects—the statistical impact of each pollster's method of polling—and, using assumptions about trends in public opinion between polls and election day, provide an estimate of eventual vote share for each party or candidate (Jennings and Wlezien 2016). Structural models eschew vote intention and instead use a set of economic indicators, such as unemployment, GDP, perceived improvement in economic situation, plus polling data on governmental support, and, based upon the relationship between these and a party or candidate's vote share in previous elections, extrapolate the likely vote share for that competitor in the forthcoming election. Finally, synthetic models combine the two approaches, expecting that the inevitable error that each approach implies can be reduced by using both simultaneously (Lewis-Beck and Dassonneville 2015b).

The literature on French elections using the structural approach in particular is extensive, across presidential elections (Nadeau et al. 2010, 2012; Foucault and Nadeau 2012), legislatives (Auberger and Dubois 2005; Arzheimer and Evans 2010) as well as second-order elections (Jérôme and Jérôme-Speziari 2000; Auberger 2005), with some focus on how the semi-presidential executive affects economic models (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2004). Polling forecasts are less common, being used more recently to track candidate varying position through the campaign, but not used to provide a direct forecast of outcome. The synthetic approach, then, with the exception of Lewis-Beck and Dassonneville (2015b) is by definition also absent.

The 2017 elections posed a set of problems to electoral forecasters, particularly those looking to use structural economic approaches, and consequently formalized academic forecasts of the result were noticeable by their relative absence, as compared with previous elections (Jérôme et al. 1999; French Politics 2008, 2012). As a result, the body of work which developed from 2002 onwards has not continued to expand, and indeed the pre-election forecasts available prior to 2017 constitute a very mixed bag of approaches. In this chapter, we discuss why 2017 posed such problems to forecasters, review what the few forecasts which existed did predict, and consider the significant success of the opinion polls in anticipating not only the winners of the first and second rounds but also the precise vote shares that each candidate enjoyed.

## 1 2017: A Difficult Year for Structural Forecasting

Structural models forecasting the vote share for incumbent parties fared particularly badly in light of the 2017 roster of candidates, and the very specificity characterizing the election which we discussed in the first two chapters of the book is the root of forecasting's problems. The absence of the incumbent president, and in many ways of the incumbent party of government, given Hamon's position as *frondeur*, meant that any model using an incumbent penalty/gain variable—generally, the dependent variable in political economy models even in France, as we will discuss shortly—was impossible to run, at least in its standard version.

Similarly, opposition vote share models would find little to base their forecasts on. François Fillon as the Republicans candidate would be identifiable as the official opposition. However, in a race with three other candidates from different political positions performing as well as or better than Fillon, and each constituting an opposition of sorts, a model attempting to forecast their collective vote share would produce nothing insightful. Moreover, any model looking at all opposition candidates would be doomed, not least as the ten non-incumbent candidates' vote share summed to some 93 per cent of the vote.

Indeed, in the French context, with two-round run-off electoral systems, binary incumbent/opposition models are generally ill-suited to the task. Largely drawing upon two seminal papers from the United States in the 1970s (Mueller 1970; Kramer 1971), the vote-popularity (VP) function is premised upon the identification of some simple causal relationships between vote choice (or polling popularity, hence 'VP') and socio-economic indicators, usually measured at the national level, but also at the sub-national level—in the French case, often the *départements*. These relationships posit an influence upon the overall vote share for a party or an incumbent government from the state of the economy, whether absolute or relative, the country's involvement in conflict, the number of terms served by the incumbent and a range of other institutional controls (Bélanger and Trotter 2017). Using previous election results and measurements of these indicators at the appropriate time, the econometric model fits the relationship between these indicators and extrapolates to the current election. Measurement of variables such as unemployment, GDP and inflation, historically, is usually taken at a lagged point—six

months prior to the election—to allow for the effect of these to impact upon the electorate's perceptions.

The model has been applied across a vast range of countries (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2013), but as a usually binary model, it is discomfited by multi-party systems. The second round in the French system is of course better suited to this approach methodologically, and in the elections where the incumbent party, if not candidate, has faced the main opposition candidate, the incumbent model logic pertains. Again, however, 2017 presents a problem, in that neither incumbent nor opposition were represented in the second round. Furthermore, the 'anyone but Le Pen' strategy of the moderate parties saw incumbents and opposition grouped in supporting Macron, making his run-off support more heterogeneous politically and ideologically. As will be discussed in Chap. 8, the unwillingness of variable tranches of Fillon, Mélenchon and to a much lesser degree Hamon supporters to follow their candidates' line and vote for Macron—or, in Mélenchon's case, not vote for Le Pen—further cross-cuts the binary simplicity. This causes issues in an explanatory model of vote, as we will consider in the next two chapters, but these can be rectified through more complex modelling. However, the structural political economy approach relies upon the previous relationship between its predictors and the relevant vote variable to extrapolate to the current race.

A final possibility remains, namely to divide between the two political blocs of left and right, to look at their respective vote shares. For legislative election forecasts of seat shares, this method has been broadly appropriate, given that the key disruptor of the left/right duality, the FN, has not in the past won a significant share of National Assembly seats (Sauger and Grofman 2016). But Macron and LREM's stated centrist position, bridging left and right—a strategy which then combined voters of both blocs—would render any coding of the president and his party as 'left' or 'right' entirely arbitrary, and fallacious.

The FN candidate has been the subject of a subset of the French forecasting literature (Jérôme and Jérôme-Speziari 2003; Auberger 2008; Evans and Ivaldi 2013). However, these forecasts have generally used a set of variables relevant to radical right-wing support, such as unemployment, crime rates and immigration, rather than the more standard VP function variables. While this seems an appropriate choice for a 'protest' party or candidate, it is more problematic for a situation where Le Pen opposes another candidate in the second-round run-off—where such issues are less relevant, or even irrelevant, to the other candidate's performance. One

model with a long lead-in time did attempt to model FN seats in the legislative election (Evans and Ivaldi 2016), but was predicated upon competitive conditions similar to those that pertained in 2012, and consequently overestimated significantly the performance of a party beset by low turnout, presidential disappointment and a unique competitive array against a presidential party owning the democratic renewal agenda.

Moreover, in the case of the FN, the other finalist of 2017, the left–right bipolarity is doubly challenged in terms of its supply and demand. As regards party policy, the FN now occupies a specific competitive location which, in simple terms, combines left-leaning economic policies with its more traditional culturally right-wing ideology. At the demand level, previous FN research has identified a group of '*ninistes*' amongst FN voters, who see themselves as neither left nor right (Mayer 2017)—something we find in the 2017 election, as we discuss in Chaps. 7 and 8—thus making it more difficult to place the party and its voters on the left–right spectrum. Overall, a far more heroic set of assumptions than are normally brought to bear in political economy models would need to have been made to fit the 2017 case into this framework—a task upon which, to our knowledge, forecasters mostly did not embark.

The few attempts to use such approaches to forecast the presidential elections encountered significant issues precisely because the conditions governing these models were not met. Consequently, in one case, the predictors indicated that François Fillon, rather than Emmanuel Macron, would reach the second round.[1] At least one model did attempt to forecast Hamon's first-round vote share based upon incumbent popularity, and came within a percentage point of the socialist candidate's actual score.[2] However, one must be sceptical that the incumbent themselves would have performed quite as poorly as this model suggests, given that part of Hamon's failure was in running a radical left campaign against Mélenchon, and ignoring the centre–left space which featured no candidate between him and Macron. The perverse primary outcome discussed in Chap. 3, identifying a sub-optimal candidate in political spatial terms, presents the 'incumbent' failing worse than the true incumbent would have done in reality. Despite Hollande's parlous opinion poll ratings, occupying the centre–left ground spatially would almost certainly have ensured a score superior to that predicted by the model, and similarly would have done so for Manuel Valls. It is also worth noting that the popularity score from a CEVIPOF survey used in this model—4 per cent—is itself one of the low-

est recorded for Hollande. Compare this with, say, SOFRES favourability ratings which never dropped below 11 per cent.

As Jérôme and Jérôme-Speziari note, econometric forecast models rely upon three conditions to remain workable.[3] First, the drivers of electoral support need to remain the same as in the previous elections upon which the parameters of the model are based. Second, and by extension, these drivers must remain observable. Third, the model cannot be disrupted by any exogenous shock. For 2017, none of these three conditions obtained. Incumbent models fell on the absence of the incumbent in the race, and even the incumbent party was a poor fit, given Hamon's role as a political opponent 'from within' throughout most of the Hollande presidency. Similarly, left and right blocs were disrupted by the presence of Macron as a candidate bridging the moderate wings of both blocs, and drawing support from these. Indeed, the absence of Hollande and the presence of Macron constituted shocks to the modelling process, as well as the latter not abiding by the alternation logic inherent in most econometric models. As we discussed in the previous chapter, it is difficult to say with certainty that Hollande's withdrawal from the race constituted a major event in the election, but it is highly significant as a disruption to a VP function.

Beyond the academic realm of structural models, the socio-economic data they draw on forms part of a recent, broader quantitative approach to forecasting. In an era when 'Big Data'—the rigorous combination of multiple, varying data sources through data linkage and statistical algorithms—increasingly represents a step forward in data analysis both for private corporations and public sector organizations, it is perhaps inevitable that similar techniques have begun to be brought to bear on election forecasting. A relatively simple version of forecast and data aggregation has existed for a number of years in the PollyVote project (Graefe et al. 2014). By combining forecasts from a range of approaches, including expert opinion, opinion polls, betting markets and econometric models, the error associated with each can be averaged out to produce a more accurate forecast. PollyVote relies on a wealth of different forecasting data available in the United States, and more recently in Germany (Graefe 2017: 878). However, Big Data approaches combine available data such as social media messaging, web searches, economic data, census profiling and the like to provide an algorithmic estimation of likely vote.

Companies such as Filteris, Vigiglobe, Leonie Hill Capital and Enigma all provided forecasts of the first-round vote, and all turned out to be wrong, both in rank ordering and in vote share.[4] These models' success in

forecasting both the Trump victory and the Brexit referendum—and polls' apparent failure—had led to a heightened expectation of their efficacy. However, as with more traditional forecasting approaches, the difficulty of deriving precise estimates across a multi-candidate race, and particularly one so tightly bunched across the four candidates, proved beyond their capacity to estimate correctly, both for the presidentials and the legislatives.[5] Exactly why they did not work is more difficult to ascertain, as the method used to combine and adjust the data is not generally circulated. In terms of clarity and usability, two of the basic criteria for rating model quality (see later), these models fall down.

Whilst social media have proved useful in some aspects of forecasting, they have shown that, in addition to the problems of skewed profile of social media users relative to the electorate—which certainly strongly mattered in 2017 given Fillon's support relying heavily on older voters notably underrepresented on social media—reliance upon automated coding of language via sentiment analysis and keyword recognition, and the more generalized use of algorithmic information processing, can render estimations unstable. They are better used as a possible inflection to more established sources such as opinion polls (Ceron et al. 2017: 884–885). On a more prosaic level, a 'correct' estimation of the winner, if not the exact voter share, of a two-horse race such as an American election or a referendum is more probable than that of a four- or five-horse race.

## 2 Presidential Polling: Snatching Victory from the Jaws of Defeat

Despite their own problems, which we examine later, vote intention polls have the advantage that they do not require an understanding of the 'why' of vote choice. Voters' motivations are irrelevant to the outcome. Moreover, previous fit, in terms of specific parties and candidates, is less relevant—voters can simply be polled on the candidates or parties in the race or even, in the case of trial heat polls, candidates or parties that might be in the race. The need to adjust data to account for biases in sampling, and use of polling data in modelling that needs to account for so-called house effects do, nonetheless, often require a trend analysis of polls to understand idiosyncrasies relating to particular parties or their candidates. In that respect, the presence of Macron, a candidate standing in the unusual political space of the centre, and thereby being accessible to voters

of both centre–left and centre–right, and with no established party backing him, raised the possibility of polling being unable to pin down his support precisely.

A key issue underpinning many people's concerns about polling in France in 2017 was stability of vote intention. All polling forecasts must take into account turnout, usually by factoring in variable probabilities for different types of voters' actual vote likelihood, or simply using expressed probability of vote by the polling subjects themselves. However, in this election, a further complication was added by the relatively low certainty of Macron's supporters until quite late in the campaign, compared with those of the other leading candidates, and in particular Marine Le Pen. As alluded to in Chap. 3 and discussed more extensively below, a similar issue had notably arisen from the Republican primary polls during 2016, which all had failed to predict Fillon's victory, precisely, albeit not exclusively, because a substantial proportion of right-wing primary voters had left their decision to the final hours of the campaign.

As with turnout, the spectre of late deciders and switchers always hovers over any poll. However, the figures in Table 6.1 suggest that this was much more visible, and unsettling, for Macron's support than in normal elections. Uncertainty over the actual level of support turned out to be exaggerated, but in the period preceding the election when forecasts are most commonly issued, this will have discouraged many forecasters, as well as encouraging others to speculate about eventual outcomes, should

**Table 6.1** Certainty of vote choice for main candidates in the first round of presidential election (February and April 2017)

| *Candidate* | *7–12 February* | *11 April* |
|---|---|---|
| Jean-Luc Mélenchon | 53 | 60 |
| Benoît Hamon | 39 | 44 |
| Emmanuel Macron | 33 | 55 |
| François Fillon | 61 | 79 |
| Marine Le Pen | 74 | 79 |

% of candidate supporters indicating certainty of voting for this candidate

Source: CEVIPOF/Ipsos Sopra Stera Le Monde http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/02/16/emmanuel-macron-deuxieme-dans-les-sondages-mais-sur-des-bases-electorales-friables_5080863_4854003.html and http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/04/13/comment-l-incertitude-des-electeurs-pesera-sur-le-premier-tour-de-l-election-presidentielle-2017_5110892_4355770.html

Macron's vote have been affected by this, or indeed by the broader concerns over polling stability.[6]

More broadly, in the run-up to the first round of the presidential election, polling was under intense scrutiny. First, and relating to the internationalization of electoral coverage which we discussed in the previous chapter, polling in recent high-profile ballots, namely the 2015 UK General Election, the 2016 US election and the 2016 Brexit referendum, had apparently failed to anticipate the result correctly. In both the UK and US cases in 2016, the criticisms were exaggerated, no doubt because the forecast result appeared to be wrong. UK polls had shown the 'Remain' camp to be slightly ahead for most of the campaign (Hobolt 2016: 1262). US polls had forecast a Hillary Clinton victory, giving a three-point lead on average. In the UK case, the lead of Remain was only small, and margin of error would account for much of the difference. However, given it was a threshold result, at 50 per cent + 1 for the winner, the impact of this error was much the greater, changing the outcome entirely. For the US case, the national polls were actually very accurate—Hillary Clinton did indeed win the popular vote by an almost 3 million surplus, or around 2 percentage points. State polling, particularly in the Mid-West region, was less accurate, and did not pick up on the electoral college split which resulted in Donald Trump's victory (AAPOR 2017). Overall, a more apt comparator might have been the 2015 UK General Election, where polls did not predict the result accurately predicting party support concomitant with a hung parliament ended in giving the Conservative Party majority.[7]

Historically, the performance of polls in other countries would have been deemed irrelevant to polling in France. However, as we noted in the previous chapter, a level of international coverage of the elections, as well as the heightened outreach of candidates internationally, meant that the performance of the French polls was to be judged against that of the preceding elections in other countries, as well as in terms of French polling more narrowly.

### *2.1 Primary Polls*

In France itself, polling's track record prior to the campaign was less than auspicious, in its apparent failure to anticipate the election of François Fillon as the LR candidate or Benoît Hamon for the socialists. As Figs. 6.1 and 6.2 show, polls for both primaries had the eventual winners well behind.[8] For the *Belle Alliance Populaire*, Hamon only overtook

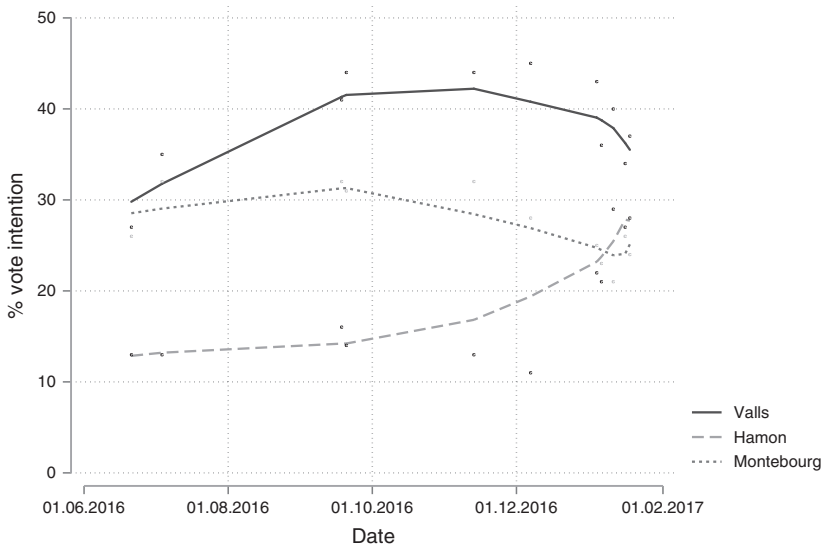


**Fig. 6.1** Vote intention polling for the *primaires citoyennes* (Left) primaries. Source: Authors' collation of vote intention polls, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sondages_sur_la_primaire_citoyenne_de_2017, polling institute archives

Montebourg in the last couple of weeks, despite eventually beating him by almost 20 per cent, and Valls still enjoyed on average a five-point lead over the *frondeur*. Nonetheless, the dynamics in the last days show a substantial upturn in Hamon's support. Similarly, on the right, the final polls in November 2016 had Fillon behind both Sarkozy and Juppé, but the upswing in support from the beginning of the month clearly indicated where the outcome was likely heading. Given polling was carried out at least two days before the primary race, an extrapolation on these trend lines brings both Hamon and Fillon closer to their eventual scores. But even this silent lag cannot account for the entirety of the gap. Other issues clearly afflicted the primary polls.

The first issue with polling the primaries was the fuzzy profile of the voting population. Both primary elections were open primaries, allowing any voter on the electoral register to vote, conditional upon the payment of one euro (for the *Belle Alliance Populaire*) or two euros (for the right and centre), and signing a statement of their holding 'values of the

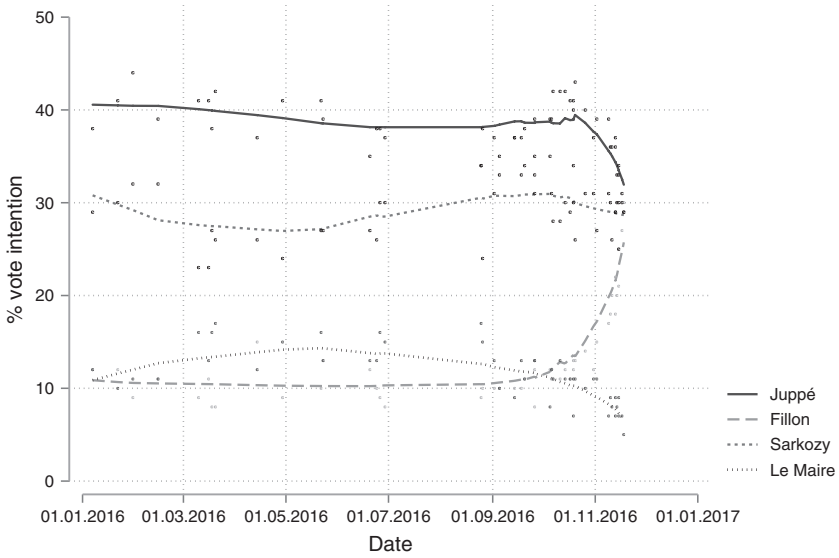


**Fig. 6.2** Vote intention polling fir the centre/right primaries. Source: Authors' collation of vote intention polls, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sondages_sur_la_primaire_ouverte_de_la_droite_et_du_centre_de_2016, polling institute archives

Republic and the left' or 'values of the Republic and the Right and Centre, and support alternation of power to support France', respectively. Pollsters generally used either self-proclaimed supporters of the left or right, depending on the primary, or those respondents saying they were certain of voting in the primary ballot. Disaggregating primary support suggests that the 'boundary' of the selectorate in primary elections may matter substantially to the outcome. In an analysis of a TNS-SOFRES BAP primary poll conducted in July 2016—at a time when both Hollande and Macron were considered as potential runners—we found that Macron had the highest level of support in the general electorate, reflecting his appeal to centre–right voters, but that his lead would vanish when the selectorate was narrowed down to PS voters. In contrast, there was evidence that the more the primary would resemble an internal party race, the better the odds that Hollande could win the nomination.[9]

The uncertainty regarding the profile of the voting population had two other effects. First, the sub-sample of the original sample was very much

reduced in size. For example, with a sample size for the Belle Alliance Populaire primary polls of 500—larger than many of the samples used by polling companies—the margin of error is ± 3.5 per cent for an estimate of 20 per cent vote, that is, a confidence interval from 23.5 per cent to 16.5 per cent. But this would only be true, were the sample a random sample of the true population of voters. Quota samples of voters for Internet panels are routinely adjusted by pollsters to try to approximate true vote intentions, but adjusting smaller sub-samples for a particular group introduces additional uncertainty.

Second, the eventual turnout was not restricted to supporters of the parties fielding candidates in the primaries. For the right and centre in November, only 63 per cent of those voting described themselves as supporters of this political bloc.[10] Around 14–15 per cent identified with the left, and a similar number with the FN. For *les primaires citoyennes* on the left, the party preference was remarkably similar—with around seven in ten voters identifying with the left, and between 11 and 15 per cent identifying with the right or centre, and similar for the FN.[11] Again, we should be cautious in imputing too much accuracy to these figures, although the larger samples of over 1000 Republican primary voters in the successive waves of the 2017 CEVIPOF-*Enquête Electorale Française* (ENEF) suggest that these proportions were very stable over time—the period considered in the survey being March to November 2016. Whilst not a factor affecting the final outcome,[12] the presence of a significant minority of non-aligned voters for each primary adds, however, further uncertainty to the capacity of the bloc-focused vote intention polls to reflect the outcome.

Finally, the primary election takes place in a much narrower political space than a general election. As Jaffré (2016) suggests, primary voters have a very distinct sociological and ideological profile, which clearly separates them from the rest of the electorate and also from the non-primary voters within their own camp.[13] Consequently, candidates tend to be in much greater proximity than each other, programmatically, and as a result, voters are much more easily able to change voting intention than they would be in a presidential election.[14] Supporters of Nicolas Sarkozy, for example, could shift on a relative whim to François Fillon, other things being equal. As a result, variation in polling estimates could be relatively more likely to occur.

### 2.2 *Presidential Polls*

Across the two rounds of voting in the presidentials, polling performed very well, although two types of doubt were cast on the two rounds. At a basic forecast level, both first and second rounds were beyond reproach. First-round polling predicted the order of the first two candidates, who would proceed to the run-off ballot. They also estimated the two runners-up in the correct order, and very close to their actual scores.

There are two key 'shocks' in the election that polling picked up. First, François Bayrou's announcement on 22 February that he would be endorsing Emmanuel Macron, rather than François Fillon, or indeed running as a Modem candidate himself, resulted in a substantial increase in support for the eventual president. As Fig. 6.3 shows, increase in support for Macron slightly predated this announcement, but it is clear that the

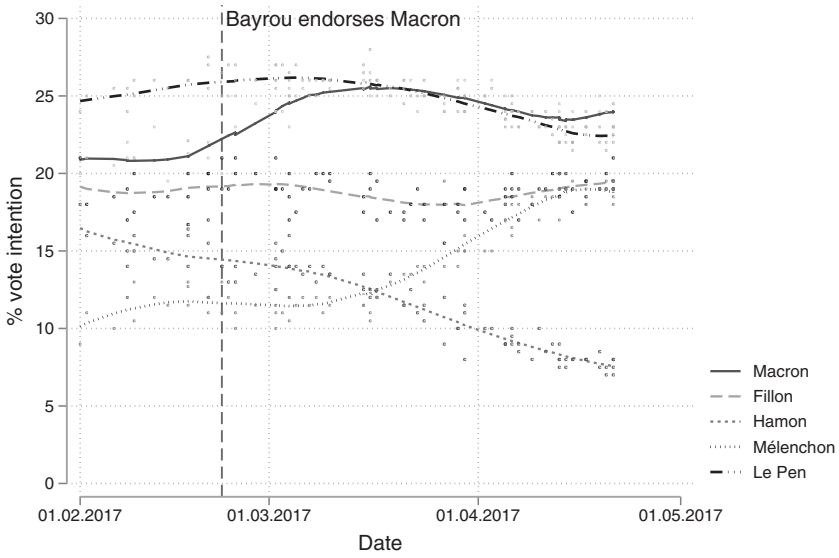


**Fig. 6.3** Vote intention polling for the presidential first round. Source: Authors' collation of vote intention polls, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_de_sondages_sur_l'élection_présidentielle_française_de_2017, polling institute archives, polling institute archives

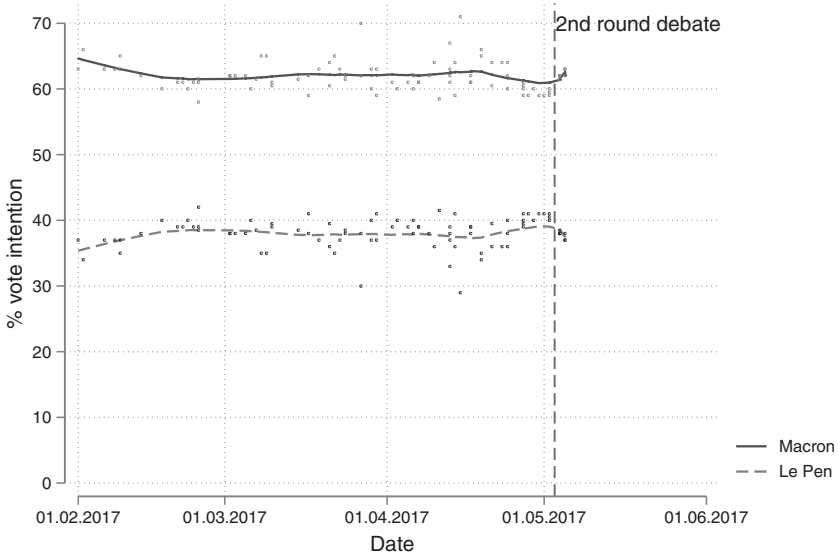


**Fig. 6.4** Vote intention polling for the presidential second round. Source: Authors' collation of vote intention polls, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_de_sondages_sur_l'élection_présidentielle_française_de_2017, polling institute archives

ascent to beyond 25 per cent was conditional upon the Modem leader's backing. Second, in the *entre deux tours* period, Marine Le Pen's poor performance in the televised debate on 3 May with Macron resulted, as we discussed in the previous chapter, in a late slump in the polls. Some criticized the polls for underestimating Macron's eventual winning margin. Or, put in a more sensationalist though mathematically identical way, the polls had overestimated Marine Le Pen's support (see Fig. 6.4).

Looking at the trend in polls directly before and after the debate, there is a clear inflection, with Macron's support rising more steeply. However, only one of these polls was fielded on 5 May—the rest were in the field either the day immediately after the debate or, in the case of the rolling polls, included respondents who had been polled before the debate. Unless we expect the trends in public opinion to stabilize immediately after the polls stop, or reaction to the debate to only occur within a 48-hour window, the trend post-debate should continue across the subsequent 48 hours to polling day itself. As a snapshot of the days previous to

the election, therefore, the score is likely accurate. Discussion with friends and neighbours, media discussion and voters' own reflection are likely responsible for the shift from 5 May to 7 May.

More broadly, criticism of these polls being inaccurate, however, seems unfounded. As pollsters and academic forecasts alike go to great lengths to emphasize, polls are snapshots of public opinion at a point in time. They can be used to generate forecasts, but they are not forecasts in and of themselves. As polling day approaches, there is an expectation that voter preferences will become manifest and stabilize, and the polls should approach the final result. However, this requires the rider 'other things being equal'. In a situation where, in the late campaign, a shock occurs that might influence public opinion, late swing may be beyond the reach of polls the fieldwork for which has taken place days earlier.

One final concern expressed before the election result was possible herding among the polling companies. As a statistical sample, one would expect a certain amount of variation in polling estimates as a natural outcome of sampling error. Where the amount of observed error in the polls is less than the predicting sampling error for surveys of a given size, suspicion inevitably arises that pollsters are adjusting methods in the light of other pollsters' results. Inevitably, the occasional sample will regularly, if not frequently, produce an outlier result by chance. The inevitable tendency, however, is to consider this might be due to a flawed methodology, and try to correct it, rather than accept it as a random statistical outlier. As polls converge, pollsters could potentially be tempted to try to 'correct' even small variations. Should such corrections occur when polls are close to the margin of error, over time pollsters will start to converge excessively. For some analysts, polling among French polling companies did look overly consistent not to be the result of some herd-like behaviour.[15] Given their strong performance, particularly in the first round, however, such concerns soon dissipated after the election.

A final step to assessing the accuracy of polls is to look at the difference from the final result across time. A number of measures of polling accuracy are available with varying applicability to multi-party races (Mosteller et al. 1949; Martin et al. 2005; Jennings and Wlezien 2016) but we choose to use the B measure (Arzheimer and Evans 2014) for comparability with our analysis of the 2012 elections (Evans and Ivaldi 2013). The B measure provides a single index (with Bw being a version weighted by candidate score) of polling accuracy for each poll based upon the actual result, with

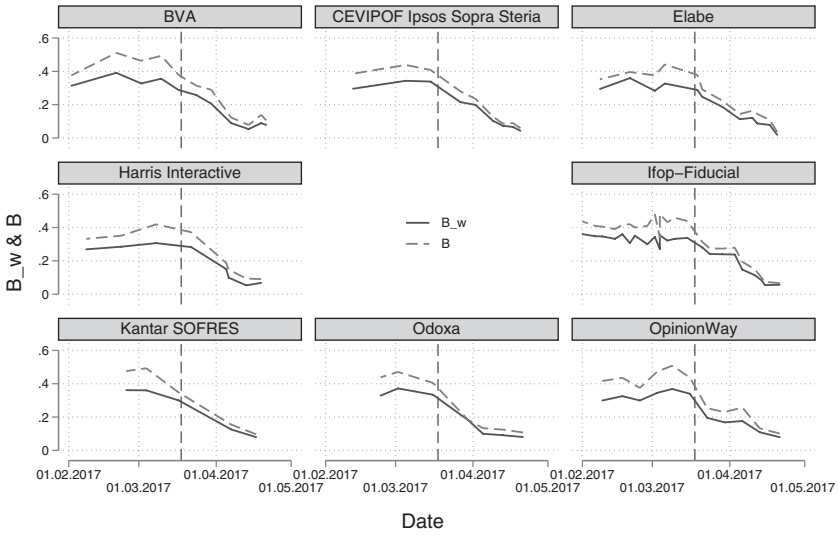


**Fig. 6.5** Trends in polling accuracy for first-round presidential election polls. Note: Vertical line indicates 18 March 2017 (publication of official list of candidates). Source: As Fig. 6.3

higher scores indicating greater inaccuracy. Whilst in theory the index can be constructed using all candidates' scores separately, we plot the accuracy by polling institute of the first-round presidential election polls, using an index constructed from the five main candidates and combining all other candidates in an 'other' miscellaneous category.

Figure 6.5 presents the across-time B and Bw scores for the eight pollsters for whom we have sufficient polling data points. First, it is noticeable that the broad trends across the pollsters are very similar. We would expect inaccuracy to reduce as the election draws closer, but both the start and end index scores are similar across the eight pollsters. There is a slight rise in inaccuracy in the polls in early March, but the patterns in the polling scores are mostly notable for the absence of changes or inflections related to critical junctures. The reference line, 18 March, indicates the publication of the final roster of candidates where, at the equivalent date in 2012, pollsters either saw a marked increase or a marked decrease in polling inaccuracy (Evans and Ivaldi 2013: 141–142). In 2017, as Fig. 6.5 shows, this is not the case. For all pollsters, inaccuracy continues to decline, in many

cases more steeply. In polling terms then, if we discount issues of possible herding (which could result in conformity as illustrated here) the accuracy measures simply confirm the relative success of the polls in the first round of the presidentials.

## 3 From Unpredictable to Highly Predictable: The Legislative Election Polls

Throughout this book, we emphasize the disruption in the French political landscape both causing and caused by Emmanuel Macron's victory. In forecast terms, this extends to the legislative elections as well as the presidential elections. A forecast model based upon time series data since 1981 on unemployment and incumbency variables at the departmental level, which had been run relatively successfully on both 2007 and 2012 (Arzheimer and Evans 2010; Evans and Ivaldi 2013), finds it difficult to cope with the centrist candidacy of Macron and LRM, given the absence of a significant centrist party with structurally defined predictors prior to 2017. Again, as we have noted for the presidential race, any bloc forecast for left or right cannot reasonably be replicated. In this regard, the interruption of the time series of bloc voting, even when extended to include a third FN bloc, plays havoc with the backlog of forecasting models.

One implication of this which has been looked at has been the apparent bypassing of the assumed institutional imperatives of the Fifth Republic—bipolar competition, alternation between left and right, marginalization and exclusion of the extremes. In the context of political forecasting, where stable context is required as a *ceteris paribus* condition for standard variables to be used to model the likely outcome, this proved a significant obstacle to any forecast endeavour. However, in the legislative elections which followed, the expected institutional effects remained very solid.

The distinction between mid-term and confirmatory elections has always pertained to legislatives, both in France and abroad (Shugart 1995; Dupoirier and Sauger 2010) but the realignment of the electoral calendar since 2002 to ensure that the legislative election followed the presidential, and the de facto continuation of that ordering given the lack of early dissolutions, has reinforced the sense of legislative elections coat-tailing on the presidential result and returning the Head of State a strong majority, even if the strength of that majority has varied.

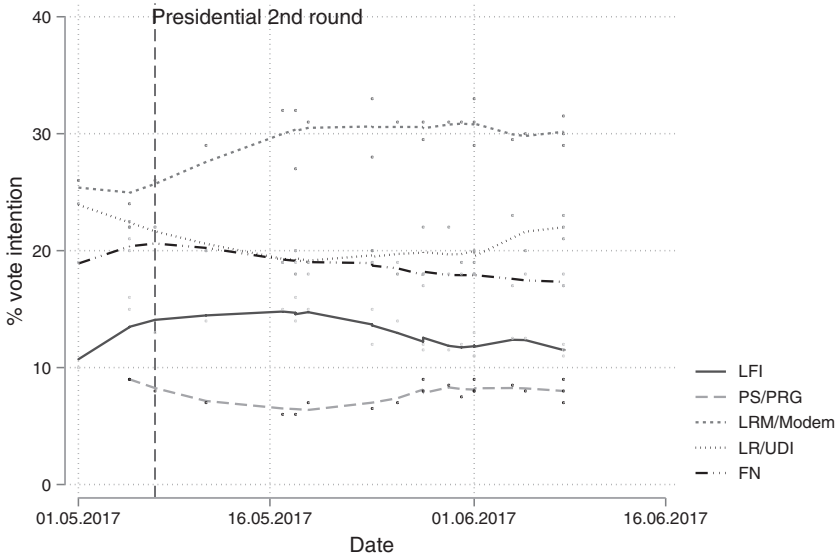


**Fig. 6.6** Vote intention polling for the legislative first round. Source: Authors' collation of vote intention polls, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_de_sondages_sur_les_élections_législatives_françaises_de_2017, polling institute archives

2017 was no exception. From the first polls of vote intentions held after the presidential election, the LRM-Modem coalition led as the first placed label in the first round of the elections, with a slight lengthening of its lead in the latter stages of the legislative campaign.

We will discuss the elections themselves in greater detail in Chap. 9, but here it suffices to look at the accuracy of the polls in reflecting the eventual outcome. As Fig. 6.6 shows, the consolidation of LRM's lead after the election of Macron shows a steady trend upwards. Across the other main parties, the left forecasts are relatively accurate, but both LR/UDI and the FN are overestimated. As we will consider in Chap. 9, this doubtless reflects for the former a successful 'incursion' of LRM into a moderate right electorate that had remained relatively loyal during the presidentials, but who had succumbed to a party in government with senior LR figures such as Edouard Philippe and Bruno Le Maire. For the FN, the trend downwards from near parity with LRM prior to the second round simply reflects, as with LFI, a steady erosion of optimism and

support for parties neither of whose candidates had performed to expectations.

In the lead-up to the presidential election, a key concern over Macron's suitability was less his 'fit' to the presidential role, and more over his capacity to mobilize a majority, either through his own party or through a coalition of supportive parties.[16] For many commentators, the inclusion of a party other than LRM, or indeed a majority formed by LR, would have immediately constituted a form of cohabitation[17]—something which the new electoral calendar had precisely been designed to avoid. Matthew Shugart and Robert Elgie have countered that cohabitation *stricto sensu* would have meant a prime minister from a party directly opposed to Macron, and no presidential party representation in the government—a highly unlikely event.[18] In particular, honeymoon elections—what we have referred to here as confirmatory elections—in semi-presidential systems almost inevitably return a supportive majority (Evans and Ivaldi 2017).

In that respect, the voting intention polls exactly followed the institutionalist path, demonstrating the expected willingness of an electorate, who had in the majority supported Macron's election as president, to return an 'enabling' majority. As Shugart demonstrates more completely, this honeymoon effect is visible in the relationship between legislative election performance of the presidential party and the presidential approval rating, itself a 'honeymoon' before political reality dawns on the electorate. In 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP won 39.5 per cent of the vote in June, when his approval rating was 63 per cent (TNS-SOFRES). In 2012, François Hollande's PS won only 29.4 per cent of the vote, given an approval rating of 55 per cent. At 57 per cent in the same rating, we would therefore expect Macron's LRM to return around the first-round vote share the party was polling in the week before the election[19]—which turned out to be the case.

Of course, the second-round results determine the seat share, and, as we will discuss in Chap. 9, the constellation of competition by *circonscription* is key in how party coordination and vote transfers determine the eventual winner. Unlike the United States, local polling at the level of *circonscription* is very unusual in France, and generally only occurs in constituencies with high-profile duels, for example, Marine Le Pen against Jean-Luc Mélenchon in Hénin-Beaumont in 2012 (11e *circonscription* in the Pas-de-Calais) or the FN Gilbert Collard against LRM's Marie Sara in

the 2e *circonscription* of Gard in 2017. In polling and forecasting terms, then, large assumptions about the distribution of votes in the second round and their aggregate conversion to seats have to be made—what has been described as *une délicate alchimie* for pollsters.[20]

The effect of turnout through the 12.5 per cent rule for second-round participation, and party fragmentation and cooperation by *circonscription* cause issues in any election. The virtual elimination of any straight left–right duel through LRM's competitive presence increased the uncertainty in 2017 by an order of magnitude. Even the events detailed in the previous chapter could potentially influence seat shares in either direction. Consequently, seat projections varied widely, with some predicting 450-plus seats for LRM-Modem,[21] others more modest around the 400 seat mark,[22] and others still closer to the eventual result, with forecasts around 350 seats.[23] In this respect, limiting oneself to ex-post-explanatory analysis of the outcome seems a safer option, and one we choose in Chap. 9.

## 4 Conclusion

Somewhat perversely, the election where the polls were remarkably accurate turned out to be the election where forecasting of the outcome was virtually impossible. In his guide to assessing the quality of a forecast (1985: 60ff), Lewis-Beck identifies six criteria—accuracy, lead time, usability, clarity, parsimony and specification. Accuracy is clearly *primus inter pares*—without this, any forecast fails. In this respect, polling aggregations worked very well. However, they fell down on lead time. Only in the final weeks of the election did the positioning of the lead candidates become clear. Polling proponents would quite rightly protest that the polls were not inaccurate, as they were simply reflecting the state of public opinion at the time. This is a useful reminder that polls *per se* are not forecasts, even if we are tempted to treat them as such.

As far as we can ascertain, all other approaches failed on the accuracy criterion. Big Data approaches failed largely on clarity, usability and parsimony, relying upon proprietary algorithms amassing vast quantities of variables. But in the longer term, structural models from previous elections have also fallen down on usability. Simply, the equations which performed with varying degrees of success on previous presidential elections were apparently inapplicable to the 2017 race. Whilst the more marginal models used to forecast Le Pen vote could potentially have been brought

to bear in this election (even if they were not), the government/incumbent models were not applicable.

In that sense, polling approaches in the long run appear a more flexible forecasting tool, particular for multi-party systems like France. In the United States, even a 'left-field' candidate such as Donald Trump can be fitted easily into an incumbent/opposition model, given his nomination by the Republican Party against the 'incumbent' Democrat Hillary Clinton. Of course, success of polling approaches still relies upon the quality of the data, and the capacity of researchers to adjust these in the light of an understanding of polling's likely biases. The quality of the data is also crucial given the undoubted role that polls can have in voters' electoral decisions. As information about the state of competition, voters in particular who have not yet made up their mind may be influenced on whether or how to vote by what the polls report. In a tight race like the 2017 presidential first round, such influences can be important, and consequently the expectation that polls should indeed reflect the state of public opinion at a given time is a reasonable one. Even where data quality is high, the media's use of polling data, and especially the temptation to portray small, margin-of-error fluctuations as substantial changes in a candidate's success, does not reflect the status of electoral competition accurately, and needs to be resisted. In that regard, structural models with longer lead times and predictors set in stone months before the election have offered greater transparency and rigour, and their taking a back seat in 2017 has left a worrying hole in the French electoral forecasting time series.

However, it would seem hasty to write off structural models in the French case on the basis of 2017 alone. As we will discuss in the very close of this book in a more general sense, much depends on whether the centrist dynamic in place after Macron and LRM's victory remains a stable realignment of the French political system, or whether precisely those elements which we have associated with the Fifth Republic—bipolar, two-bloc competition—reassert themselves in the longer run. If so, the structural political economic models which have served French forecasting so well to date will retain their usability. A similar concern applies to the focus of our next two chapters, namely the applicability of traditional models of vote choice in an explanatory sense. To what extent do the standard models of policy array and social–psychological determinants of voting behaviour fit the 2017 presidential race?

## Notes

1. 'Electionscope: retour sur un modèle de prédiction économétrique qui a échoué sur les résultats du 1er tour',http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/electionscope-retour-modele-prediction-econometrique-qui-echoue-resultats-1er-tour-3031269.html/page/0/1.
2. 'L'appel du vide', https://theblueReview.org/lappel-du-vide/.
3. Ibid.
4. 'Filteris, Enigma… Face aux instituts de sondage, la défaite des prévisions "alternatives"', http://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2017/04/24/big-data-buzz-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-la-defaite-des-previsions-alternatives_5116570_4408996.html.
5. '"Predict the Parliament": pas de majorité absolue pour le parti du président', http://www.lepoint.fr/legislatives/predict-the-parliament-rem-une-vague-plutot-qu-un-raz-de-maree-09-06-2017-2134120_3408.php.
6. See, for example, 'How Marine Le Pen could win', http://www.politico.eu/article/how-marine-le-pen-could-win/ ; 'What a Le Pen win would look like', https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/23/opinion/what-a-marine-le-pen-win-would-look-like.html.
7. Report of the inquiry into the 2015 British general election opinion polls, http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3789/.
8. Vote intention polling figures are taken from online collations of election polling (Wikipedia, Financial Times, *Le Monde*) confirmed by polling institutes' own data sources. Graphs report the polling scores for the leading candidates. All graphs are locally weighted smoothed loess regression curves. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 use 0.8 and 0.6 bandwidth; Figs. 6.3 and 6.4 use 0.4. Care should be taken with Fig. 6.1 on the left primaries which has only a small number of data points.
9. Evans, J. and G. Ivaldi (2016) Hollande's calculation behind the French socialist presidential primary, 500signatures.net, 7 July (http://500signatures.net/index.php?id=56).
10. 'Comprendre le vote', http://elabe.fr/comprendre-le-vote/.
11. 'Comprendrelevote/Lesprimariescitoyennes',http://elabe.fr/comprendre-vote-primaires-citoyennes/.
12. See Foucault, M. (2016) 'Les "infiltrés" peuvent-ils menacer le résultat de la primaire?' Note #27 / vague 8 / November (https://www.enef.fr/app/download/14753736525/LA_NOTE%2327_vague8.pdf?t=1503972396).
13. See Jaffré, J. (2016) 'Le corps électoral déformé de la primaire de la droite', CEVIPOF-ENEF, Note #11 / vague 2 / February https://www.enef.fr/app/download/13328632125/LA_NOTE_%2311_vague2.pdf?t=1458746867).

14. 'Les résultats de la primaire soulignent (encore) les limites des sondages', http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/11/21/les-resultats-de-la-primaire-soulignent-encore-les-limites-des-sondages_5035269_4355770.html.
15. See 'Are French pollsters cheating? The jury is still out', http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/04/daily-chart-13; 'Yep, looks like herding in French election polls', https://twitter.com/natesilver538/status/852552041738141696.
16. 'Législatives: casse-tête en vue pour former une majorité à l'Assemblée', http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/elections/legislatives-casse-tete-en-vue-pour-former-une-majorite-a-l-assemblee_1902712.html.
17. 'Après la victoire de Macron, les ténors des Républicains visent la cohabitation', http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/2017/05/07/35003-20170507ARTFIG00228-apres-la-victoire-de-macron-les-tenors-des-republicains-visent-la-cohabitation.php ; '"Aux législatives, trois scénarios sont concevables et sont tous trois inédits"', http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/05/30/une-chambre-bleu-macron_5135759_3232.html.
18. 'France: what to expect for the assembly?', https://fruitsandvotes.wordpress.com/2017/04/23/france-what-to-expect-for-the-assembly/; 'France—Macron and cohabitation: don't worry about it', http://presidential-power.com/?p=6360.
19. TNS-Kantar political popularity trends, http://www.tns-sofres.com/cotes-de-popularites.
20. 'Sondage : la délicate alchimie des projections de sièges', http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/06/02/sondage-la-delicate-alchimie-des-projections-de-sieges_5137662_5076653.html.
21. 'Sondages législatives 2017: Ce que disent les enquêtes avant le 2e tour', http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/06/16/sondages-legislatives-2017-ce-que-disent-les-enquetes-avant-le_a_22353372/.
22. 'Législatives : des réserves de voix à gauche et à droite pour En marche!', http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/06/02/legislatives-des-reserves-de-voix-a-gauche-et-a-droite-pour-en-marche_5137801_5076653.html.
23. 'Législatives: les projections donnent à Emmanuel Macron une majorité absolue', http://www.lejdd.fr/politique/legislatives-les-projections-donnent-a-emmanuel-macron-un-majorite-absolue-3352814.

## References

AAPOR. (2017). An evaluation of 2016 election polls in the US. Report of the ad hoc committee on 2016 election polling, American Association for Public Opinion Research. Retrieved from https://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/Reports/An-Evaluation-of-2016-Election-Polls-in-the-U-S.aspx

Arzheimer, K., & Evans, J. (2010). Bread and butter à la française: Multiparty forecasts of the French legislative vote (1981–2007). *International Journal of Forecasting, 26*(1), 19–31.

Arzheimer, K., & Evans, J. (2014). A new multinomial accuracy measure for polling bias. *Political Analysis, 22*, 31–44.

Auberger, A. (2005). Forecasts of the 2004 French European election. *Swiss Political Science Review, 11*(3), 61–78.

Auberger, A. (2008). The National Front vote and turnout in the French presidential elections. *French Politics, 6*, 94–100.

Auberger, A., & Dubois, E. (2005). The influence of local and national economic conditions on French Legislative elections. *Public Choice, 125*, 363–383.

Bélanger, E., & Trotter, D. (2017). Econometric approaches to forecasting. In K. Arzheimer, J. Evans, & M. Lewis-Beck (Eds.), *Handbook of electoral behaviour* (pp. 813–834). London: Sage.

Ceron, A., Curini, L., & Iacus, S. (2017). Social media and elections: A meta-analysis of online-based electoral forecasts. In K. Arzheimer, J. Evans, & M. Lewis-Beck (Eds.), *Handbook of electoral behaviour* (pp. 883–903). London: Sage.

Dupoirier, E., & Sauger, N. (2010). Four rounds in a row: The impact of presidential election outcomes on legislative elections in France. *French Politics, 81*(1), 21–41.

Durand, C., Blais, A., & Larochelle, M. (2004). The polls in the 2002 French presidential election: An autopsy. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 68*(4), 602–622.

Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2013). Forecasting the FN presidential vote in the 2012 elections. *French Politics, 10*(1), 44–67.

Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2016). A seat-level nowcast of the Front National in the 2017 legislatives. *French Politics, 14*(4), 493–504.

Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2017). An atypical 'honeymoon' election? Contextual and strategic opportunities in the 2017 French legislative elections. *French Politics.* 15, 322–339.

Foucault, M., & Nadeau, R. (2012). Forecasting the 2012 French presidential election. *PS: Political Science and Politics, 45*(2), 218–222.

French Politics. (2008). Symposium on forecasting the 2007 elections. *French Politics, 6*, 2.

French Politics. (2012). Symposium on forecasting the 2012 elections. *French Politics, 10*, 1.

Graefe, A. (2017). Political markets. In K. Arzheimer, J. Evans, & M. Lewis-Beck (Eds.), *Handbook of electoral behaviour* (pp. 861–882). London: Sage.

Graefe, A., Armstrong, J., Jones, R., et al. (2014). Accuracy of combined forecasts for the 2012 Presidential Election: The PollyVote. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 47*, 427–431.

Hobolt, S. (2016). The Brexit vote: A divided nation, a divided continent. *Journal of European Public Policy, 23*(9), 1259–1277.

Jennings, W., & Wlezien, C. (2016). The timeline of elections: A comparative perspective. *American Journal of Political Science, 60*(1), 219–233.

Jérôme, B., & Jérôme-Speziari, V. (2000). The 1998 French regional elections: Why so much political instability? *Electoral Studies, 19*(2), 219–236.

Jérôme, B., & Jérôme-Speziari, V. (2003). A Le Pen vote function for the 2002 Presidential election: A way to reduce uncertainty. *French Politics, 1*(2), 247–251.

Jérôme, B., Jérôme, V., & Lewis-Beck, M. (1999). Polls fail in France: Forecasts of the 1997 legislative election. *International Journal of Forecasting, 15*, 163–174.

Kramer, G. (1971). Short-term fluctuations in US voting behavior, 1896–1964. *American Political Science Review, 65*(1), 131–143.

Lewis-Beck, M. (1985). Election forecasts in 1984: How accurate were they? *PS: Political Science & Politics, 18*(1), 53–62.

Lewis-Beck, M., & Dassonneville, R. (2015a). Forecasting elections in Europe: Synthetic models. *Research & Politics, 2*(1), 2053168014565128.

Lewis-Beck, M., & Dassonneville, R. (2015b). Comparative election forecasting: Further insights from synthetic models. *Electoral Studies, 39*, 275–283.

Lewis-Beck, M., & Nadeau, R. (2004). Dual governance and economic voting: France and the United States. In M. Lewis-Beck (Ed.), *The French voter. Before and after the 2002 elections* (pp. 136–154). Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave.

Lewis-Beck, M. S., & Stegmaier, M. (2013). The VP-function revisited: A survey of the literature on vote and popularity functions after over 40 years. *Public Choice, 157*(3–4), 367–385.

Martin, E., Traugott, M., & Kennedy, C. (2005). A review and proposal for a new measure of poll accuracy. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 69*(3), 342–369.

Mosteller, F., Hyman, H., McCarthy, P., Marks, E., & Truman, D. (1949). *The pre-election polls of 1948: Report to the committee on analysis of pre-election polls and forecasts.* New York: Social Science Research Council.

Mueller, J. (1970). Presidential popularity from Truman to Johnson. *American Political Science Review, 64*(1), 18–34.

Nadeau, R., Lewis-Beck, M., & Bélanger, E. (2010). Electoral forecasting in France: A multi-equation solution. *International Journal of Forecasting, 26*, 11–18.

Nadeau, R., Lewis-Beck, M., & Bélanger, E. (2012). Proxy models for election forecasting: The 2012 French Test. *French Politics, 10*, 1–10.

Sauger, N., & Grofman, B. (2016). Partisan bias and redistricting in France. *Electoral Studies, 44*, 388–396.

Shugart, M. S. (1995). The electoral cycle and institutional sources of divided presidential government. *American Political Science Review, 89*(2), 327–343.

CHAPTER 7

# Parties and Voters in the Policy Space: The Presidential First Round

In 2017, French political parties and voters operated in a restructured competitive space. The unexpected outcomes of the presidential primary races for the two mainstream parties had set the stage for the election, showing the rise of new alternatives within parties, fuelled by general anti-establishment feelings and voter aspiration to political renewal. The win by more ideologically extreme candidates in the presidential nominations had also confirmed the fragmentation and polarization of France's largest governing parties, opening a wider opportunity space for Macron's centrist alternative while simultaneously providing further legitimacy to the PS and LR's radical competitors, LFI and the FN, on the fringes of the party system. Furthermore, significant 'shocks' examined in Chap. 5 had a large impact on the campaign, most evidently the revelation of Fillon's scandal, and the tenability of a presidential candidacy while under formal judicial investigation, which overshadowed the campaign.

This significant reshuffling of party competition ostensibly reduced the significance of the classic model of left–right competition and weakened parties operating primarily around the left–right cleavage. The rise of non-traditional political alternatives such as Macron and Le Pen magnified the impression of the decline of 'old' politics while showing the increased salience in French politics of the wide array of economic, cultural and political issues associated with the EU and globalization, opposing views of an open and internationally integrated society with claims of national



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_7

sovereignty and protection. Finally, the competitive space that emerged from the 2017 campaign showed the magnitude of voter disenfranchisement and distrust of cartelized governing parties, which was conducive to political change and renewal in French politics, thus fuelling support for non-governing parties with an anti-establishment appeal. Reflecting the public's distrust of politics, issues of political renovation and institutional reform dominated the presidential agenda.

This chapter explores the dimensionality of ideological space in French politics in the context of the 2017 presidential election, and how parties and voters operated in the more complex presidential space that resulted from the diversification in the supply of candidates and issues. We look in particular at the broad ideological dimensions that structured parties and voters' policy views across the range of economic, cultural and international issues that achieved salience in the election, and how policy debates interacted with candidate valence, political narratives of 'political change' and anti-establishment appeals across both mainstream and periphery.

## 1 The Ideological Space of the 2017 Elections

This first section maps the policy space of the 2017 presidential election, locating both voters and parties on the most salient economic, cultural and political policy dimensions. The literature on party competition suggests that political parties make decisions regarding the positions they take on issue dimensions and that they can also manipulate the salience of those issue dimensions in the pursuit of electoral gains (Meguid 2005: 349). Accounting for the specific context produced by the 2017 elections, we look at candidate valence attributes, as regards in particular their capacity to embody political change and reform.

### *1.1 Candidate Valence and Rhetoric of Change*

Alongside policy and ideological proximity, candidate personality traits and valence attributes are key to any presidential election in France (Nadeau et al. 2012). Voters may allocate instrumental attributes such as credibility, competence and statesmanship to candidates, as well as more affective personal empathy. In the French context, valence attributes include also the candidates' ability to embody political change. Beginning with Mitterrand's claim to '*changer la vie*' in 1981, the rhetoric of change has been central to presidential campaigns, which to some extent can be

regarded as inherent in the electoral dynamics of 'hyper-alternance' produced by the closure and atrophy of the polity. The significance of political narratives of change was illustrated more recently by Sarkozy's concept of '*rupture*' and Royal's '*Pour que ça change fort*' claim in 2007, or Hollande's slogan '*le changement, c'est maintenant*' in 2012. Additionally, presidential candidates often engage in symbolic campaign acts to achieve policy differentiation and secure appeal to wider sections of voters in their respective camps. This was true, for instance, of Sarkozy's manipulation of immigration and national identity issues to win former FN voters in 2007; similarly, in 2012, Hollande pledged that he would wage a 'war on finance' as a means of drawing support from radical left voters.

Amidst economic gloom, social pessimism and voter disenchantment with traditional governing parties, the candidates' capacity to embody change as a credible alternative to 'old' politics achieved greater salience in the 2017 elections. Common to all the major presidential candidates, narratives of change were particularly prevalent in Macron's concept of 'revolution' that he had laid down in his book in November 2016, and which reflected his more general liberal–progressive agenda of economic, cultural and political transformation of French society. Terms such as 'change', 'renewal' and 'transformation' dominated the political communication of the *En Marche!* candidate. For François Fillon, narratives of changes were on the other hand associated with claims of 'freedom' embedded primarily in the candidate's liberal market agenda of deregulation, flexibility and, overall, of freeing the French from their 'bureaucratic chains'. Finally, Le Pen referred to a typical populist anti-establishment framework, whereby she claimed to represent the interests of the people against the political 'caste' and 'oligarchy', equating political change with shaking the old system and giving power back to the people.

Whilst mostly a campaigning tool, for candidates such as Macron, Hamon and Mélenchon, the rhetoric of 'change' was nonetheless embedded in a more robust policy agenda of institutional reform and renovation of French politics. A move towards a 'Sixth Republic', meaning a radical reform of the current political system, was a top priority of both Hamon and Mélenchon's 2017 campaigns. Institutional reform was key, for instance, to Mélenchon's programme, which called for the establishment of a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution and put an end to 'presidential monarchy'. New civic rights would include lowering the voting age to 16, proportional representation and the right for citizens to recall elected representatives. Similarly, Hamon endorsed a wide range of

institutional changes, including popular initiative referenda, a single seven-year presidential term, official recognition of the blank vote, and the right for citizens to push legislation through parliament. Together with building a new political movement cross-cutting the left and right, institutional reform was a pillar of Macron's concept of political renovation, which in particular insisted on 'moralizing' French politics while simultaneously keeping with the overall structure of the Fifth Republic. Like other candidates of the left, Macron advocated proportional representation, albeit limited to a small 'dose' for parliamentary seats, as well as anti-corruption policies such as a new rule of not holding an elective mandate more than three times, and a clean criminal record for all running in elections.

As polling data suggest, the 2017 array of presidential candidates showed diverging valence attributes as regards credibility, competence and the extent to which they were seen by voters as 'true' incarnations of political change and renovation. The distribution of voter views of both attributes of valence in the 2017 roster of candidates is illustrated in Fig. 7.1, which has presidential competence on the horizontal axis and embodiment of change as the vertical dimension. As demonstrated in the graph, there was a significant polarization on the 'change' dimension, with the three candidates from outside traditional party alternatives—that is, Macron, Le Pen and Mélenchon—taking the lead on their perceived capacity to represent change at about +8 points, as opposed to −12 points in Hamon and Fillon. Simultaneously, the competitive allocation by voters of candidate presidential credibility and stature indicated that Fillon and Macron had the highest scores of presidential competence—+11 and +7 points, respectively—which contrasted with −2 points for the two radical candidates, Mélenchon and Le Pen, with Hamon trailing at −14 points. Additional items suggested that presidential credibility was primarily framed by voters in terms of economic competence, with Macron and Fillon receiving the highest scores on their perceived ability to 'manage the economic crisis'. Overall, then, as the data suggest, Macron occupied a 'winning' location combining competence with the ability to effect political change.

### *1.2 Campaign Issues and the Policy Space*

Whilst overshadowed by the Fillon scandal, the 2017 campaign illustrated diverging sets of issues and policies amongst the main candidates, showing both continuity and change from 2012. As had been the case five years

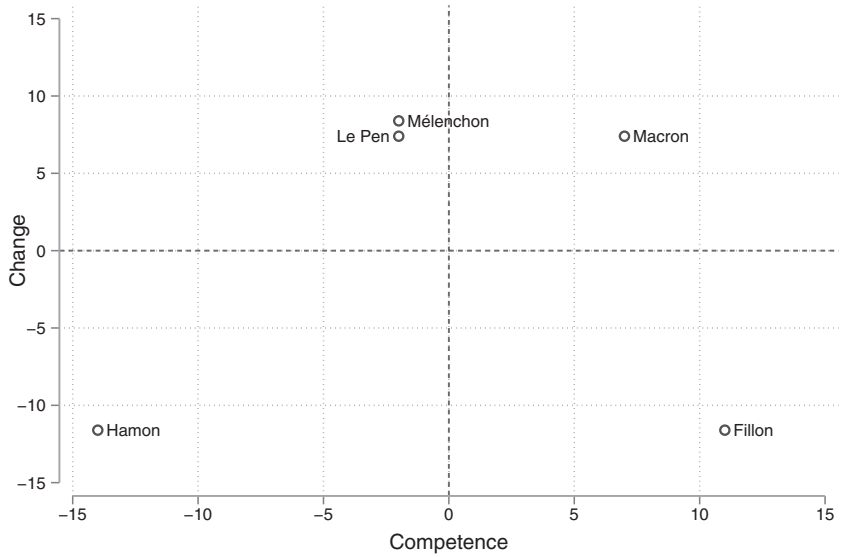


**Fig. 7.1** Candidate competence and capacity to embody change in the first round of the 2017 presidential election. Note: Horizontal axis = per cent saying candidate is capable of governing the country; vertical axis = per cent saying candidate embodies change. Candidate location is relative and expressed as a deviation from the mean of all scores. Source: OpinionWay *Sondage jour du vote Premier tour de l'élection présidentielle 2017*, 23 April 2017 (http://opinionlab.opinionway.com/dokumenty/OpinionWay-SondageJourduVote-Tour1Presidentielle201723avril2017.pdf)

earlier, socio-economic issues dominated the 2017 presidential agenda (see Table 7.1). Reflecting the failure by President Hollande to deliver on his central 2012 campaign promise to 'invert the trend' of unemployment, in 2017, unemployment and social welfare were the top two issues for voters, at 47 per cent and 43 per cent respectively, followed by purchasing power at 38 per cent. Whilst an important issue in 2012, public debt and deficits lost salience in 2017, however, from 46 per cent down to 25 per cent, and was no longer among the top priorities of French voters. Finally, national security issues of terrorism and law-and-order were another important set of issues, together with immigration at about 35 per cent, reflecting the widespread immigration and terrorism fears that had arisen from the EU refugee crisis and wave of Islamic attacks since 2015.

**Table 7.1** Top voting issues in the first round of the 2017 presidential election

| *All voters* | *Mélenchon* | *Hamon* | *Macron* | *Fillon* | *Le Pen* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| – Jobs (47)<br>– Social protection (43)<br>– Purchasing power (38) | – Social protection (62)<br>– Social inequalities (61)<br>– Purchasing power (51) | – Social protection (61)<br>– Social inequalities (61)<br>– Environment (49) | – Jobs (53)<br>– Social protection (44)<br>– Education and training (42) | – Debt and deficits (56)<br>– Fight against terrorism (52)<br>– Jobs (53) | – Immigration (82)<br>– Fight against terrorism (67)<br>– Security (60) |

As percentage of important issues at times of voting, multiple responses allowed (not summing to 100 per cent); percentages are in brackets

Source: OpinionWay *Sondage jour du vote Premier tour de l'élection présidentielle 2017*, 23 April 2017 (http://opinionlab.opinion-way.com/dokumenty/OpinionWay-SondageJourduVote-Tour1Presidentielle201723avril2017.pdf)

Looking at the distribution of salient issues across the main candidates shows that top voting concerns differed significantly, however. Left-wing voters clearly put more priority on socio-economic issues of social protection, reducing social inequalities and tackling unemployment, while simultaneously de-emphasizing cultural and national security concerns and, in the case of Hamon, greater importance to the environment. Reflecting Macron's cross-cutting programmatic appeal, concerns expressed by *En Marche!* voters covered a wider range of issues across the economic and cultural dimensions, notably showing higher-than-average importance on education and training, Macron's key campaign issues. On the right, Fillon's voters exhibited significant support for fiscal orthodoxy, rating debt and deficits as their most important issue, which clearly set them apart from all the other electorates. Finally, as regards Le Pen's voters, cultural issues were as ever predominant, with immigration topping their agenda at 82 per cent. Given these differing priorities among voters, to what extent did the campaign priorities of each of the candidates conform to their supporters' concerns?

### *1.2.1 Economic Issues*

Divergences in voter issue agendas and positions were reflected in the socio-economic positions taken by the main parties in the 2017 presidential race. Candidates and parties spread across the whole economic left–right dimension, from Fillon at its market liberal pole to Mélenchon at its redistributive pole.

As early as 2016, Fillon had entered the presidential race on an unambiguous market liberal platform, embracing deregulation, liberalization and fiscal consolidation, which clearly placed him furthest to the right of the 2017 economic spectrum. Whilst toning down some of its more extreme proposals concerning welfare retrenchment in the early stages of the campaign, Fillon's project, entitled '*Une volonté pour la France*', featured pledges to cut down state spending drastically to save 100 billion euros over the next five years, to reduce state bureaucracy by cutting 500,000 public sector jobs, while lowering corporate and income taxes, increasing VAT and dropping the wealth tax (ISF). Additionally, Fillon would call for more flexibility and regulatory simplification in the labour market, advocating a ceiling for all social benefits, and scrapping the 35-hour working week.

A predominant liberal orientation was found in Macron's package of social liberal economic policies. Macron's platform entitled '*La France*

*doit être une chance pour tous*' claimed to expand welfare provisions and social protection, granting in particular individual entrepreneurs access to unemployment benefits, while seeking to ease the financial burden of the middle class by promising local council tax exemption for 80 per cent of French households. Education and vocational training were top priorities of Macron's transformative agenda, as part of his generous 50 billion euros public investment plan over five years. This stimulus package was typically counterbalanced with measures of labour market flexibility, fiscal orthodoxy, tax cuts and a reduction of 60 billion euros in public spending and 120,000 public jobs in central state and local authorities. Macron's announcement of a new labour law and his pledge to simplify France's pension schemes were clearly the most controversial and polarizing issues, provoking harsh criticism amongst other parties of the left.

In contrast, social protection policies were paramount for the two other candidates of the left. In the wake of the PS primary, Hamon had continued on a leftist trajectory, claiming to fight financial powers and castigating the 'many candidates of the party of money' in the election.[1] His programme '*Faire battre le coeur de la France*' advocated his campaign flagship proposal of a universal basic income of 750 euros a month to all citizens, as well as an increase in the minimum wage and small pensions, a broader system for family allowances and a more generous healthcare system. Hamon pledged that he would improve public and health services locally, increasing the size of the public sector by hiring more teachers and medical staff, while pursuing state intervention in the economy—including temporary nationalizations. His agenda of redistribution was articulated with higher taxes on banks and large corporations, including a social contribution on robots whereby the candidate would challenge the 'myth' of economic growth and productivity in an age of automation.[2] Most symbolically, Hamon promised that he would repeal the 2016 labour law that had become emblematic of the economic divide within the French left.

Taking the PS further to the left on the economy, Hamon would find himself challenged by the more radical anti-austerity policies in Mélenchon's platform '*L'avenir en commun*'. The latter pledged primarily to reduce socio-economic inequalities in France, opposing fiscal orthodoxy while embracing wealth redistribution by higher taxes on capital, assets and financial transactions, state intervention and public services, the prohibition of 'market-based redundancies', promising to 'eradicate poverty and unemployment', raising the minimum and public sector wages, reducing the retirement age to 60 and proposing a public investment pro-

gramme of 100 billion euros. Like Hamon, Mélenchon pledged to improve public services in France, hiring more teachers and medical staff, and also calling for nationalizations in the banking sector to fight market speculation. Inevitably, he also called for the repealing of El Khomri's labour law.

Finally, consistent with the more leftist orientation taken by the FN since 2012 (Ivaldi 2015), Le Pen ran on a mixed economic platform of social redistribution, fiscal justice and market liberal measures for small entrepreneurs. The 2017 platform presented 144 proposals to '*Remettre la France en ordre*' which showed little departure from the general Keynesian orientation in Le Pen's previous presidential bid of 2012, which had embraced state regulation, government spending and redistribution. Le Pen's economic policies shared some similarities with the left, most notably as regarding lowering the retirement age to 60, bolstering public services, increasing social spending minima, small pensions and wages and repealing the 2016 labour law. Additionally, Le Pen would target her more traditional petty bourgeoisie clientele by promising tax cuts and less bureaucracy for small businesses, as well as tax breaks on donations and inheritance.

### *1.2.2 Cultural Issues*

A clear left–right divide was visible in candidate and party positions along the cultural dimension of competition, showing a significant amount of polarization within the mainstream as well as across the radical sectors of the French party system. The 2017 presidential agenda was marked by an increase in salience of issues of national security, Islam and immigration, arising from the development of the EU refugee crisis and the wave of Islamic attacks since 2015. Whilst most candidates agreed on the need to spend more on national security and defence, they diverged clearly on issues of immigration and identity.

Unsurprisingly, anti-immigration themes were pillars of Le Pen's presidential campaign, which also emphasized Islam and terrorism, often linking the terrorist threat with what was deemed the growing identitarian closure (*communautarisme*) of French Muslims, threatening France's identity and social fabric. Le Pen's immigration policy package included the wide range of nativist policies traditionally outlined by the FN, putting 'national preference' and a drastic reduction in immigration at the heart of her campaign. To combat terrorism, Le Pen professed that she would close all 'extremist' mosques, rearm security forces and show 'zero toler-

ance', calling for anyone associated with the Jihadist movement to be stripped of their French citizenship and deported.

Fillon's cultural agenda clearly mimicked a large number of FN anti-immigration themes, reflecting both contextual incentives and the more structural trend towards accommodating FN policies in the French right since the mid-1980s, and particularly in Sarkozy's 2007 campaign (Godin 2013). The Republican nomination of 2016 had already demonstrated a clear shift to the cultural right among candidates and primary voters, mostly as a result of the progressive radicalization of the UMP under Sarkozy, and of the increasing electoral pressure exerted by the FN since 2012. This provided the framework within which the mainstream right would frame immigration and national security issues in the presidentials. Fillon embraced a strong right-wing cultural agenda, offering a 12 billion euros package for security forces, a reduction in legal immigration to 'a strict minimum', establishing immigration quotas and limiting access for foreigners to social welfare, while advocating a 'tough on crime' stance and 'zero impunity', co-opting FN proposals regarding individuals in the Jihadist movement. Since the 2016 primary, Fillon's policies had also been closely associated with the socially conservative agenda of the Catholic right, with the candidate opposing 'full' adoption rights for gay couples and promoting traditional family and Christian values, which included personal views against abortion.

In contrast, parties and candidates of the left would exhibit more universalistic views of immigration and identity, clearly placing themselves in opposition to the national-authoritarian agenda of the right and the far right. Reflecting his move to the left during the primary, Hamon embraced cultural liberalism and a clear universalist profile in the 2017 campaign, calling for France to accept more refugees and granting them the right to work, refusing immigration quotas, preserving family reunion rights and emergency healthcare for migrants, while advocating voting rights for non-European foreigners in local elections, a highly sensitive issue and a socialist chestnut since Mitterrand in 1981. Along with more generous immigration policies, Hamon pushed forward a strong libertarian agenda of advocating minority and women's rights, fighting discrimination and promoting direct democracy across all sectors of French society and its polity.

Culturally liberal views were found, albeit with some attenuation and more balanced views, in Mélenchon and Macron's presidential bids. Macron's platform outlined positive attitudes towards immigration, Islam

and asylum seekers, yet endorsed a managerial approach towards economic migrants and a firm stance concerning rejected asylum seekers who, according to him, should be immediately expelled. Like Hamon, Macron endorsed minority rights, opposing the FN on Islam and pledging that women's rights would be a national priority under his presidency. Further to the left, there were indications that Mélenchon was toning down the traditional universalistic message of the left and de-emphasizing immigration issues, thus acknowledging growing immigration fears among lower and middle class voters that formed the basis for LFI's electoral support. The 2017 platform indicated a number of changes in the candidate's traditionally pro-immigration policies, for instance, opposing the EU status of 'posted worker' and eradicating previous claims to 'regularize all undocumented migrants'. A libertarian orientation was preserved, however, with policies to legalize cannabis and to repeal Sarkozy's security laws.

Finally, a significant reconfiguration of policy space occurred to the left and centre of the party system, as a consequence of the 'Greening' of Hamon and Mélenchon's platforms, less so in Macron's which proposed mostly a range of status quo policies on the environment, building primarily on the legacy of the preceding government. In 2017, environmental issues were largely co-opted by parties outside the ecology movement, most evidently Hamon and Mélenchon who included more robust environmental policy claims in their presidential platforms, reflecting the political and organizational marginalization of EELV and the redistribution of its various factions, issues and policies across the other candidates (see Chap. 4). The stronger focus on green politics in Hamon's presidential bid had, for instance, allowed him to incorporate whatever was left of EELV immediately after he had won the PS nomination, with Yannick Jadot joining the socialist campaign. Hamon's platform notably set a 100 per cent renewable energy goal for 2050, with the phasing out of diesel fuel by 2025, and overall making sustainability a 'condition of social progress'.

The Greening of left-wing politics was perhaps most discernible in Mélenchon's move towards an 'ecological transition', away from the more 'productivist' and growth-oriented economics that he had endorsed in 2012, partly as a result of his partnership with the traditionally less environmentally-friendly Communists. In 2017, Mélenchon had his hands free to take LFI one step further on the ecology issue, pushing for the principle of ecological sustainability to be enshrined in the French consti-

tution, setting a 'green rule', which pledged to phase out nuclear power and to achieve 100 per cent of renewable energy by 2050, while advocating a wide range of green policies in favour of local and organic productions, including new taxes to favour local production over imports.

### *1.2.3 European Integration, Globalization*

Whilst European issues had only arisen relatively infrequently in the presidential election in 2012, and with very limited impact, economic and cultural issues intersected more closely with European integration in 2017, with the continuing economic crisis and increasingly salient migration management issues after 2015 bringing the EU back to the forefront of the presidential agenda. Reflecting the EU's impact upon domestic processes, policies and institutions, along with the variety of cultural and economic issues associated with globalization, successive EU crises produced a new context for party competition, augmenting the politicization of European integration (Hutter and Kerscher 2014, Meijers and Rauh 2016), whereby mainstream actors in particular would no longer be able to downplay an electorally costly issue of European integration.

The 2017 elections took place against a backdrop of growing public scepticism about Europe, associated with anger and frustrations with the EU's management of the crisis. As suggested by polls, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of the French would disapprove of how Brussels was dealing with European economic issues—compared with only 28 per cent in Germany—while another 65 per cent were critical of the EU's handling of the refugee crisis, in line here with most other West European electorates.[3] Another international poll conducted a few months before the election revealed the extent of French disillusionment with globalization, as French people showed some of the most negative sentiments towards economic openness and only 37 per cent saw 'globalisation as a force for good'.[4]

Candidate and party attitudes towards European integration in the 2017 campaign reflected the variety of cultural and economic voter concerns, showing nevertheless significant variation amongst presidential frontrunners and the persistence of a typical inverted U-shape distribution of partisan positions, whereby Euroscepticism is predominantly found at the extremes of the party system, while moderate parties of the centre are traditionally more strongly in favour of the EU (Hooghe et al. 2002).

Macron's 2017 campaign exemplified centrist support for the EU, claiming to 'rebuild the European dream'[5] and advocating greater fiscal, environmental and social co-operation across Europe. Endorsing fiscal

consolidation, Macron advocated the creation of a finance minister and budget for the Eurozone, exposing also his vision of a 'multi-speed' Europe. The EM! candidate committed to preserving the Schengen area and European principles of free movement, calling, however, for the strengthening of the EU's external borders. Finally, Macron advocated higher European anti-dumping taxes, better EU control over foreign takeovers and corporate tax harmonization.

Macron's Europeanist campaign would contrast sharply with the more critical views of the EU expressed by the other major candidates, most notably the two radical alternatives embodied by the FN and LFI in the first round. On the far right, Le Pen's campaign exhibited continuity with the FN traditional contestation of European integration since the mid-1990s. Successive EU crises had provided a propitious context for the FN's anti-EU mobilization in the 2014 and 2015 elections, which was transported into Le Pen's 2017 platform. The latter advocated returning to national sovereignty across a wide range of policy areas, most notably by leaving the Eurozone and the Schengen area. In line with the FN's wider nationalist framework, Le Pen pushed forward an agenda of economic and cultural protectionism, calling for new import taxes and national preference to French companies for public procurements, while simultaneously opposing all free trade agreements, pledging a drastic reduction in immigration as well as in the number of asylum seekers, and advocating national priority to the French for access to social welfare.

To the left of the spectrum, the 2017 campaign saw the intensification of Euroscepticism in Mélenchon's LFI, which was embedded in the more general move by the movement towards left-wing populism in French politics. In the wake of the Brexit referendum of June 2016, Mélenchon had adopted a harder Eurosceptic stance promising to take France out of the European treaties.[6] The 2017 platform attested to LFI's radicalization on European issues, demonstrating anti-globalization stances and strong opposition to free trade agreements such as TAFTA and CETA, calling for 'equitable protectionism' to relocate production and jobs in France, while intensifying also Eurosceptic policies by pledging that France should renegotiate EU treaties. A notable departure from the universalist tradition of socialism in France, Mélenchon adopted a patriotic tone during the campaign, advocating the defence of national interests and opposing the EU status of posted workers.

As discussed earlier, the rise in salience of European issues had a significant impact on mainstream parties, increasing factionalism, most notably

in the PS where European issues had intersected with internal conflicts over distributional and cultural policies. In line with his domestic agenda of redistribution and social protection, Hamon adopted soft criticism of EU austerity policies in the 2017 campaign, urging a moratorium on the stability pact and advocating a mutualization of national debts. In the course of the campaign, Hamon suggested a new treaty on the 'democratization' of Eurozone governance that would increase democratic control of the single currency, which was criticized for undermining the legitimacy of the European parliament. Finally, Hamon called for social cohesion and a pan-European minimum wage, a policy which had long been on top of the French socialists' agenda of a more 'social' Europe, while simultaneously advocating protectionism and pledging to pull out of international trade agreements such as CETA.

In contrast, European economic issues had proved much less divisive in the mainstream right, as most Republican primary runners had endorsed EU fiscal orthodoxy. In the general election campaign, Fillon's posture on European integration showed ambivalence, however, reflecting his political background as a former supporter of the 'No' vote and *protégé* of Eurosceptic Gaullist leader Philippe Séguin in the 1992 Maastricht referendum. Fillon outlined a plan for further economic integration and a tighter Eurozone, calling for an economic government of the Eurozone composed of its heads of government, and a European Treasury with mutualized national debts, carefully avoiding the sensitive issue of EU free trade agreements. Amidst increasing electoral pressure by the FN on the right flank of LR, Fillon's presidential bid also included the renegotiation of the Schengen agreement on borderless travel and of the EU status of posted worker, a pledge to limit the powers of the European Commission to just 'a few fundamental areas', while reaffirming his strong opposition to Turkey's membership of the EU. Finally, Fillon reiterated his criticism of the culturally 'liberal' orientation of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), suggesting that France could leave the ECHR.[7]

## 2 Voters

As we have seen in the previous section, the campaign policies put forward by the candidates broadly cover the key issues identified by the voters in polling. Differential emphasis on economic and cultural issues follows a relatively standard pattern of left–right priorities, with much stronger emphasis placed upon cultural aspects by the radical right, in particular,

and socio-economic rectification taking front seat in the left programmes. However, the context of the election, and eventually the victory of two 'untraditional' candidates, in party system terms, suggests that the attitudinal arrays of voters may be less clear across the different candidates. Similarly, the shift in emphasis on the part of Marine Le Pen towards a more leftist economic agenda, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon towards a less internationalist, more francocentric rhetoric than in 2012 may partly shift the traditional boundaries between the culturally exclusionist appeal of the radical right and the more economically inclusive supply by the radical left. Moreover, in 2017 the accentuation by Mélenchon of his populist and Eurosceptic profile may also increase the possibility of vote transfers between these two candidates more, where in the past such radical-left-to-radical-right shifts have been largely an ecological construct of generational change in political affiliation, rather than individual vote transfers (Lewis-Beck et al. 2012; Gougou 2015).

### *2.1 Modelling the 2017 Vote*

In this section, then, we look at the attitudinal arrays of the voters by the key dimensions of the political campaign. It is beyond the scope of the analysis to offer a causal analysis of the hierarchy of vote motivations. However, we can nonetheless ascertain the differences between each candidate's supporters, and the relative importance of these in compartmentalizing their voters. We follow Lewis-Beck et al.'s (2012) lead in constructing a social-psychological model of vote—first round in this section, and the second round in the subsequent chapter—to identify the key contrasts across the main candidates. The model incorporates the standard demographic explanatory variables which are to be found in the vast majority of explanatory models used for elections in established democratic regimes (Evans 2003; Arzheimer et al. 2017)—gender, age, level of education, religion and religiosity. We add patrimony which has long been identified as a factor in French voting behaviour, playing a key role in the victory of the right in the 1978 legislative elections, despite the apparent majority support for the left (Capdevielle et al. 1981). Lewis-Beck et al. (2012) emphasize the role of patrimony (i.e. estate, or assets other than income), with higher assets, perhaps unsurprisingly, associated with the moderate right. This relationship continued in 2012 (Bélanger et al. 2014).[8]

Our models also include a series of attitudinal predictors, as well as a 'root' political affiliation variable. Key variables of party identification or political ideology, dating from the seminal research into American voting behaviour by Campbell et al. (1960), are assumed to provide a stable baseline voting proclivity, the product of socialization in the voters' early years, and based upon active social milieus (Percheron and Jennings 1981; Percheron 1982). Whilst party identification has been the focus in the United States, there has been debate over the relative applicability of partisan allegiance and ideological affiliation in France (Fleury and Lewis-Beck 1993; Converse and Pierce 1993). In 2017, partisanship, as with many other longitudinal indicators, falls out of the equation because of the presence of a presidential candidate with no formal party support, and even with its formation into a nominal party in the lead-up to the legislative elections, has no bearing upon partisanship in the generally accepted definition of the term. By default, basic ideological orientation, as indicated by left–right self-placement, takes its place as the root variable in our analysis.

It is important to assess the significance of traditional left–right ideological affiliations in the specific context provided by Macron's successful centrist bid in 2017. Lewis-Beck and colleagues found evidence of a growing specificity to a centrist electorate in 2007, specifically for support for François Bayrou (2012: 166–167). His relative success, with over 18 per cent of the first-round vote, underlined the possibility of a candidate not aligned explicitly with either the left or right, or indeed the radical right, performing credibly within the Fifth Republic's binary political-institutional context. In 2007, Bayrou had been able to exploit a significant tranche of more liberal right support left vacant by the UMP candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, hardening his rhetoric on social issues in a (successful) attempt to attract voters from the FN. Bayrou's support was found amongst the more educated, secular and predominantly male voters (Lewis-Beck et al. 2012: 31). In 2017, we would expect to see Macron's supporters continue the traits of Bayrou in 2017, nonetheless tempered by the balancing centre–left supporters regarding Macron as a *vote utile*.

In the context of an election where a range of issues only weakly related, or essentially independent, from the dominant ideological abscissa of political space featured prominently in candidates' campaign programmes, and in broader political discourse, it is of course also important to include sufficient indicators to pick up their possible effects on voting choice in the presidential elections. To that end, we include a set of 12 attitudinal indicators which mirror the principal policy positions set out by the presi-

dential candidates, to examine the extent to which these added to, or indeed replaced, traditional ideological affiliation (as indicated by left–right self-placement) in voters' choices.

Normally, a dozen attitudinal indicators would be a very heavy burden for a multivariate model, for reasons of collinearity and number of observations. On the first, basic diagnostics of collinearity revealed no excessive dependence between attitudinal variables. Inevitably, some of the predictors which we detail below were correlated with each other, but in no case was that relationship worryingly high. If we were building a strict causal model of voting, and a parsimonious depiction of ideological space, we might wish to combine some such attitudes into factor scales or the like. But, in this context, we simply wish to see which of the possible variables were the

**Table 7.2** Summary of attitudinal predictors in voting models

| *Dimension* | *Variable name* | *Item* | *Measurement* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Left–right ideological position | *lr* | Left–right self-placement | 11-point scale, low values = left |
| Less state intervention | *econ1* | Benefit of reducing state intervention in the economy | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Reduce economic inequalities | *econ2* | The state should intervene to reduce inequality | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Welfare Chauvinism | *wc* | when should immigrants receive benefits | 5-point scale, low values = earlier |
| Opposition to the EU | *eu* | France should leave the European Union | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Positive view of Islam | *islam* | Islam is compatible with our democracy | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Cultural liberalism | *ssm* | Same-sex marriage equality is good | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Equality of way of life | *libert* | Everyone should have an equal right to their own preferences | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Globalization as opportunity | *mondial1* | Globalization presents economic opportunities | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Anti-establishment | *antie* | Politicians care what I think | 7-point scale, low values = agree |
| Populism | *pop* | People rather than politicians should take the important decisions | 5-point scale, low values = disagree |
| Support for strong leadership | *auth* | People need discipline and a strong leader | 7-point scale, low values = disagree |

strongest predictors of presidential vote. In terms of number of observations, the SCoRE survey data, collected between the presidential and legislative elections, has a sufficiently large sample size ($n$ = 19,454 in total, with 11,093 in our analytical sample) to resolve this potential issue admirably.

Which attitudinal variables, then, do we pick? Table 7.2 details the 12 indicators, in their coding and the broader value dimension to which they relate. Alongside left–right ideological affiliation, a first set of indicators taps into traditional economic issues, relating to attitudes towards state intervention in the economy and voter preferences for redistribution to reduce social inequalities. On the cultural dimension, we look at welfare chauvinism—that is, giving preference to nationals for social benefits—and views of Islam as compatible with democracy, as well as two classic items of cultural liberalism relating to approval of same-sex marriage and equality of way of life. Given the salience of European integration and globalization issues in the 2017 elections, we include two items of opposition to the EU and the perception of globalization as an opportunity for economic growth, which we expect should have a strong differentiating effect amongst voters in the context of 2017. Finally, our models include a set of political indicators which look at anti-establishment sentiments—that is, the idea that politicians do not really care about people like us—as well as a single item of populism which subsumes both its anti-elite and people-centrist features, enquiring whether people rather than politicians should take the important decisions. To these, we add one last item which concerns support for strong leadership, which we assume to be relevant not only to traditionally more authoritarian voters of the right, but also to supporters of Macron's conception of a Jupiterian presidency placing a strong emphasis on the charismatic leader.

In terms of socio-demographic controls, age is included as an interval-level variable. Gender is coded 1 for female. Education is coded in four categories, from no formal qualifications (the reference) to higher education. *Patrimoine* is a simple count variable, from 0 to 4 items. Religion is coded into three categories—secular (the reference), Catholic and 'other' religion. Religiosity is also coded into three categories, including more than weekly church attendance (the reference), monthly, and less frequently or never. Former or current occupational class is coded using the standard CSP coding, into independent, managers and professionals (the reference category, given their assumed high proclivity to vote Macron, other things being equal), technicians and supervisors, routine non-manual, blue-collar workers, and inactive.

### *2.2 Patterns of Voting in the 2017 Presidential Elections*

For their historical analysis of French presidential elections until 2007, Lewis-Beck et al.'s specification (2012) using a binary logistic regression model of vote probability for a bloc or an individual candidate compared with any other candidate, has the merit of simplicity—parameters indicate the distinctiveness of a specific candidate in their voters' profile—and replicability—the variables included are the standard demographic, ideological and broader attitudinal predictors of vote which have been applied consistently, not just to the French case but to most, if not all, elections in established democracies. We choose a slightly different strategy to model vote choice as efficiently as possible, using a multinomial logistic regression which provides a single constrained model of vote choice across all candidates. Despite a large sample size, there are insufficient cases for the minor candidates to allow modelling of these, and substantively we are only interested in the main candidates—Macron, Le Pen, Fillon, Mélenchon and Hamon—so we collapse these into a miscellaneous 'other' category.

The main issue with a multinomial logit model is the profusion of coefficients it reports as relative contrasts with the dependent variable's reference category—in this case, Macron voters.[9] Consequently, we report the full model in the appendix (Table A4) and make reference to it for the purposes of overall model fit, and for the demographics effects. In the case of demographics, there are inevitably issues of collinearity, where the full set of attitudinal predictors, which will derive causally from voters' social profiles, pick up those social indicators' explanatory variance in the model. Consequently, when we report demographic effects, these are only those that retain independent explanatory power alongside the attitudinal variables. However, we use it indirectly for the main analysis by using the reported z values—the standardized Wald coefficients—to identify the main attitudinal differentiators for each of the presidential candidates, relative to Macron's support. In the table, we list the cluster of strongest effects for each candidate contrast. Given the relative absence of collinearity amongst the attitudinal indicators, this grouping should provide a simple guide to the voter profiles linked to these candidates. Macron's own supporters are used as the reference category, so the indicators should be seen as differentiating from the winning candidate's own support (Table 7.3).

**Table 7.3** Demographic and attitudinal differentiators of presidential candidate support (in contrast to Emmanuel Macron's support)

| | *Le Pen* | *Fillon* | *Mélenchon* | *Hamon* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demographics | – Younger<br>– Lower university education<br>– Lower patrimony<br>– Lower 'other' religion<br>– Higher non-practising<br>– Fewer professionals/managers; more independent and blue-collar/employees | – Older<br>– More female<br>– Higher university education<br>– More Catholic<br>– Higher medium religiosity<br>– Higher independent occupations | – Younger<br>– Higher intermediary education<br>– Lower patrimony<br>– Less Catholic<br>– Higher secular and medium religiosity<br>– Fewer professionals and managers/independent; more blue-collar/employees | – Younger<br>– More female<br>– Lower patrimony<br>– Higher secular and medium religiosity |
| Left–right (rank of predictor) | – More right wing (2) | – More right wing (1) | – More left wing (1) | – More left wing (1) |
| Attitudes | – More anti-EU<br>– More anti-establishment<br>– More anti-globalization<br>– More anti-Islam | – Less supportive of same-sex marriage<br>– Less supportive of reducing inequality<br>– More anti-establishment<br>– More supportive of state withdrawal | – More anti-EU<br>– More anti-globalization<br>– Less supportive of a strong leader<br>– More anti-establishment<br>– More supportive of reducing inequality | – Less supportive of a strong leader<br>– More anti-globalization<br>– Less welfare chauvinist |

Source: SCoRE survey

Reflecting their culturally liberal agenda, both Mélenchon and Hamon attract younger and lower practising or secular voters with lower economic assets. In Mélenchon's case, this is complemented by greater relative support than Macron amongst middling education attainment. In terms of occupation, there are more blue-collar and routine employees but fewer self-employed, independent workers and professionals and managers among the LFI candidate's supporters—unsurprisingly, perhaps, given these latter's more rightist positioning. For the PS candidate, however, the absence of any independent class or education effect is noteworthy, suggesting Hamon was competing, unsuccessfully, within similar social strata. Politically, their electorates show a much lower degree of authoritarianism, being much less likely than Macron's supporters to endorse citizen discipline and strong leadership, which is also in line with the emphasis that both candidates placed on participatory democracy during the campaign. Greater opposition to the EU and globalization, and support for redistribution of wealth to reduce inequalities is what distinguish most Mélenchon's supporters from Macron's voters, which is consistent with Mélenchon's supply of radical anti-austerity policies, and his opposition to Macron's social–liberal agenda. The distinguishing elements for Hamon's electorate are less numerous, with only cultural liberalism and a more universalistic profile being visible amongst Hamon's voters who notably show more positive attitudes towards immigrants—measured here by their significantly lower level of welfare chauvinism.

Fillon's voters featuring the typical social conservative support for the mainstream right, that is, older female and more Catholic (though infrequently practising) voters, also showing higher yield ratios amongst small entrepreneurs and the self-employed which traditionally make up the petty bourgeois electorate of the right. Fillon's voters have significantly more culturally conservative views and economically liberal positions, as is demonstrated by their lower level of support for same-sex marriage as well as for reducing social inequalities. Interestingly, we find that Fillon's voters have significantly stronger anti-establishment feelings (though not to the same extent as the radical candidates), which may reflect Fillon's aggressive attitude towards the media and the political establishment amidst the Penelopegate scandal, accusing journalists of fomenting a plot against his candidacy and repositioning himself as political outsider against Macron and Le Pen.

The differentials shown in our model suggest that Macron's support is predominantly found in the 'cultural' sector of the French bourgeoisie,

amongst voters with higher education, liberal values, and greater economic assets, which, as illustrated by Macron's score in Paris, for instance, generally cluster in large gentrified metropolitan areas.[10] As our model suggests, voters who turned to Macron in the first round show mixed economic and cultural attitudes, closer to the right on the economy and to the left on cultural issues, which reflect the centrist position of their candidate across various dimensions of competition. In contrast with the other electorates, Macron's supporters wholeheartedly embrace globalization and an open society, while simultaneously showing a lower degree of distrust of politics.

As we will discuss in the next chapter, the sociological make-up of Macron's constituency is a negative image of Le Pen's. In the first round, Le Pen's vote is overrepresented amongst younger low educated voters with few economic assets, across the pertinent occupational categories, with the strongest presence (superior to Mélenchon's) amongst working class and routine employee voters. In contrast to Mélenchon, but in line with Fillon's, there is also strong support from the independent workers. The socially hybrid electorate of the FN is still visible in 2017. Ideologically, opposition to the EU is the strongest predictor of voting for Le Pen in 2017, which corroborates previous research (Mayer 2013). But it is also worth noting that the Islam variable, whilst significant, is not the strongest predictor. Part of this is due to the left–right positioning picking up much of the variance, as well as other inter-item correlations.[11] Also, the Islam question regards a particularly aspect of the social religion *vis-à-vis* political institutions—perhaps not where we would expect the greatest differentiation. However, we should also acknowledge that, in 2017, the specifically ethnocentric element to Le Pen's support is not as strong in differentiating from other electorates as it has been previously.

It is clear from the model that left–right is an extremely strong predictor, and consulting the table in the appendix confirms the positioning of the electorates, with a couple of interesting inflections to what we might expect. First, Fillon's electorate is on average more right wing than Le Pen's. As Fig. 7.2 demonstrates, this is because of a greater proportion of Le Pen's voters placing themselves in the centre—the classic position of the '*ninistes*'—that is FN voters who see themselves as neither left nor right and who tend to place themselves at the centre of the scale (Mayer 2017: 69). Secondly, there is very little difference in the left-wing posi-

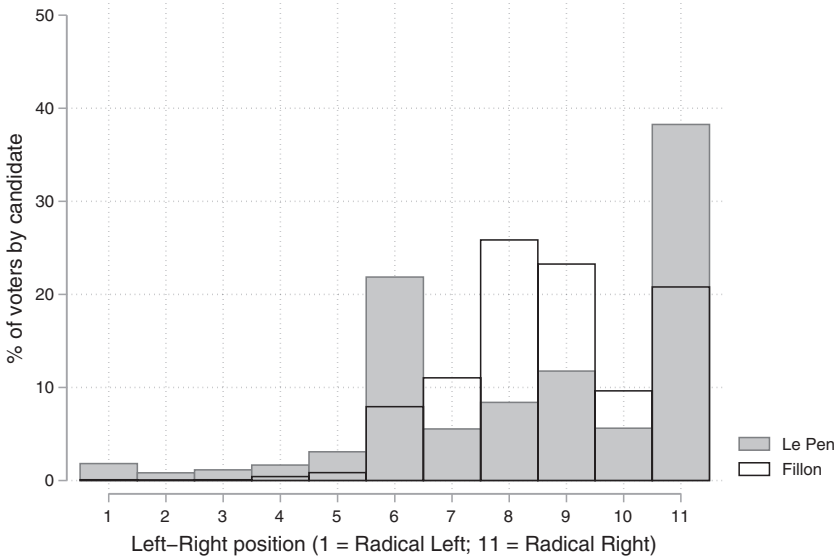


**Fig. 7.2** Distribution of left–right positions for Fillon and Le Pen voters. Note: 11-point scale (1—radical left; 11—radical right). Source: SCoRE survey

tions of Mélenchon and Hamon voters. Together with the attitudinal proximity to Macron, this confirms the lack of independent political space that Hamon was able to mobilize.

The next strongest predictor across any of the contrasts is attitude to the EU, which essentially splits the French electorate across its mainstream and radical sectors. Whilst Macron's voters show the highest level of support for European integration, the model finds little differences with Fillon and Hamon's voters. Strong anti-EU feelings are found on the other hand amongst Le Pen but also, to a lesser extent, Mélenchon's voters, which largely mirror the candidates' Eurosceptic themes and policies during the 2017 campaign. Linked with the EU, economic globalization is another divisive issue, which pits the more liberal voters—that is, Macron's, followed by Fillon's—against all other electorates. Negative views of economic globalization as a threat rather than an opportunity are dominant amongst Hamon and Mélenchon's voters, which again is consistent with the positions taken by those candidates during the campaign. Reflecting the FN's supply of economic protectionism, opposition

to globalization is also found to be significantly stronger amongst Le Pen's voters, making those more similar to the left on that particular dimension.

One final point can be made. The electorate with the least differentiation from Macron's is that of Hamon. There are differences, of course, which we have noted above, notably a hard left position. Fillon's electorate is slightly more differentiated on key attitudes, but very much so on left–right positioning. However, in terms of attitudinal differentiators, the size of the effects, even for the main issues which we have identified, is much smaller than for the other candidates. This emphasizes that, in many ways, Hamon was fighting for a similar type of voter on a number of dimensions as Macron, even if the proximity would have been greater had Manuel Valls, or indeed François Hollande, been the candidate. For the reasons we have explored throughout this book so far, that competition proved to be one of the many elements that proved deleterious to the socialist candidate's chances.

Lastly, as a focus of the presidential campaign, particularly in the second round, it is worth confirming, in a fashion that can be compared with the model of the second-round vote in the next chapter, that the explanatory power of European integration is indeed weaker than that of left–right ideology.

The Akaike Information Criterion is a parsimony indicator for multivariate models, indicating how well a model fits given the explanatory variables it uses. The smaller the score, the better the fit. As Table 7.4 clearly shows, the fully specified model is inevitably the best fitting. However, the model excluding the EU indicator but retaining the left–right variable is a much better fit than the equivalent including only the EU variable but excluding left–right. For the first round, then, traditional ideological placement remained the strongest predictor of vote choice.

**Table 7.4** AIC fit scores for different specifications of the full first-round voting model

| *Model* | *AIC* |
|---|---|
| Full model | 23,940 |
| Full model w/o left–right self-placement | 27,530 |
| Full model w/o EU sentiment | 25,423 |

Note: AIC = Akaike Information Criterion

## 3 Conclusion

In their study of French presidential elections, Lewis-Beck et al. conclude that over the 20-year period they analyse, the full model of voting that incorporates socio-demographic and ideological predictors continues to account very well for French voting behaviour—as well as the model accounts for US voting, where it originated, to the order of around three-quarters of variance explained (2012: 174). Our findings suggest that this social-psychological model of vote continues to account for presidential voting and factors driving voters' choices in the 2017 elections. Whilst the effect of the social structure seems to be less clear, partly as a consequence of declining social cleavages and partly because candidates such as Le Pen and Macron occupy competitive locations that cross-cut traditional sociological and ideological boundaries, the educational divide seems to have played an important role in the 2017 elections, on the other hand, both direct, and indirectly by notably polarizing voters' positions' on non-traditional 'vertical' issues such as international integration and the EU.

The 2017 election demonstrates a clearly definable electorate that may be mobilized by a centrist candidate unaligned with either of the main parties of government, if their candidates do not represent sufficient ideological connection to this voter group. As previously discussed, even with the presence of Hamon, Macron enjoyed a clear space from the centre–left to centre–right that would have been singularly narrower had the PS or LR nominated more moderate candidates—Manuel Valls and Alain Juppé, respectively. This contrasts, for instance, with the competitive opportunities offered to Bayrou in 2007. Ten years earlier, Bayrou's space had extended to a hard-right position by Sarkozy, similar to the Macron-Fillon gap in 2017, but on the left, Ségolène Royal's position was much closer to the centre than Benoît Hamon's equivalent position, holding more firmly the centre–left of French politics.

Finally, our findings suggest that, despite a significant reshaping of party competition and the emergence of a powerful centrist candidate, the long-term ideological determinants of French voting continued to strongly influence presidential electoral politics in 2017. Left–right ideological identification, which traditionally structures the French ideological space, still played a crucial role in shaping presidential choices in the 2017 elections. As the next chapter will argue, the continuity in left–right presidential politics is contingent on the double-ballot voting system in French

presidential races, however, and the array of candidates which emerges from the first round. Traditionally, French presidential run-offs feature two major candidates from the left and the right, thus reinforcing bipolar presidential competition and left–right affiliations. In 2017, the atypical run-off pitting Macron against Le Pen, that is two candidates operating outside traditional party channels and ideologies, had the potential to disrupt the bipolar divide, thus depriving voters from traditional ideological cues and incentives. The next chapter will examine to which extent such a reshaping of presidential voting occurred in the 2017 run-off.

## Notes

1. 'Benoît Hamon en meeting à Paris: "Le parti de l'argent a trop de candidats"', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/03/19/benoit-hamon-en-meeting-a-paris-le-parti-de-l-argent-a-trop-de-candidats_5097183_4854003.html.
2. 'Ecole, revenu universel, 32 heures … Ce qu'il faut retenir de Benoît Hamon dans "L'émission politique"', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2016/12/09/ecole-revenu-universel-32-heures-ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-de-benoit-hamon-dans-l-emission-politique_5046001_4854003.html.
3. 'EU back in favor, but Brussels' handling of economy and refugees still questioned', http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/15/eu-back-in-favor-but-brussels-handling-of-economy-and-refugees-still-questioned/.
4. 'International survey: Globalisation is still seen as a force for good in the world', https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/11/17/international-survey/.
5. 'Macron outlines plans for multi-speed Europe', https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/macron-outlines-plans-for-multi-speed-europe/.
6. See 'L'Union Européenne, on la change ou on la quitte! L'heure du Plan B sonne en 2017!', http://melenchon.fr/2016/06/24/lunion-europeenne-on-change-on-quitte-lheure-plan-b-sonne-2017/.
7. 'Mon projet pour la France', https://www.fillon2017.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PROJET_FRANÇOIS_FILLON_2017.pdf.
8. We limit ourselves to demographic and attitudinal variables, and do not include economic or personality variables due to limitations on the variables contained in the SCoRE survey.
9. Suffice to say that reporting a series of binomial logit models is no less overwhelming in terms of parameter estimates.
10. 'Présidentielle 2017: à Paris, 90% des votes pour Emmanuel Macron', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/05/07/presidentielle-2017-90-des-suffrages-pour-emmanuel-macron-a-paris_5123937_4854003.html.

11. It should be noted, however, that a model run without the other attitudinal indicators still does not see the Islam variable reach as strong an effect as the other key predictors.

## References

Arzheimer, K., Evans, J., & Lewis-Beck, M. (2017). Introduction. In K. Arzheimer, J. Evans, & M. Lewis-Beck (Eds.), *Handbook of Electoral Behaviour* (Vol. 1–2, pp. 1–7). London: Sage.

Bélanger, E., Nadeau, R., Turgeon, M., Lewis-Beck, M., & Foucault, M. (2014). Patrimony and French presidential vote choice: Evidence from the 2012 election. *French Politics, 12*(1), 59–68.

Campbell, A., et al. (1960). *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.

Capdevielle, J., Dupoirier, E., Grunberg, G., Schweisguth, E., & Ysmal, C. (1981). *France de gauche, vote à droite?* Paris: Presses de la FNSP.

Converse, P. E., & Pierce, R. (1993). Comment on Fleury and Lewis-Beck: Anchoring the French voter: Ideology versus party. *Journal of Politics, 55*(4), 1110–1117.

Evans, J. (2003). *Voters and voting: An introduction*. London: Sage.

Fleury, C. J., & Lewis-Beck, M. S. (1993). Anchoring the French voter: Ideology versus party. *The Journal of Politics, 55*(4), 1100–1109.

Godin, E. (2013). The porosity between the mainstream right and extreme right in France: *les droites décomplexées* under Nicolas Sarkozy and Marine Le Pen's leadership. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 21*(1), 53–67.

Hooghe, L., Marks, G., & Wilson, C. J. (2002). Does left/right structure party positions on European integration? *Comparative Political Studies, 35*(8), 965–989.

Hutter, S., & Kerscher, A. (2014). Politicizing Europe in hard times: Conflicts over Europe in France in a long-term perspective, 1974–2012. *Journal of European Integration, 36*(3), 267–282.

Ivaldi, G. (2015). Towards the median economic crisis voter? The new leftist economic agenda of the Front National in France. *French Politics, 13*(4), 346–369.

Mayer, N. (2017). Les électeurs du Front national (2012–2015). In F. Gougou & V. Tiberj (Eds.), *La déconnexion électorale* (pp. 69–76). Paris: Fondation Jean-Jaurès.

Meguid, B. (2005). Competition between unequals: The role of mainstream party strategy in niche party success. *American Political Science Review, 99*(3), 347–359.

Meijers, M., & Rauh, C. (2016). Has Eurosceptic mobilization become more contagious? Comparing the 2009 and 2014 EP Election campaigns in The Netherlands and France. *Politics and Governance, 4*(1), 83–103.

Nadeau, R., Didier, T., & Lewis-Beck, M. S. (2012). Leader images and election forecasting: French presidential elections. *French Politics, 10*(1), 11–21.

Percheron, A. (1982). Religious acculturation and political socialisation in France. *West European Politics, 5*(2), 8–31.

Percheron, A., & Kent Jennings, M. (1981). Political continuities in French families: A new perspective on an old controversy. *Comparative Politics, 13*(4), 421–436.

CHAPTER 8

# Challenges to the Blocked Polity: The Macron/Le Pen Presidential Run-Off

The 2017 presidential second-round run-off pitting centrist European Union (EU) enthusiast and pro-globalization candidate Emmanuel Macron against far right leader Marine Le Pen constituted a unique competitive array for French elections, magnifying the weakening of traditional party alternatives and pointing to the decreased significance of the traditional model of left–right competition. Notwithstanding Mélenchon's exceptional showing at 19.6 per cent of the vote, Macron's *En Marche!* and Le Pen's *Front National* represented the strongest challenges to France's 'blocked' polity in the 2017 elections, operating outside established party alternatives and producing dramatic changes to the traditionally moderate bipolar competitive structure.

Whilst showing clear divergences in their ideology, strategy and party system location, as well as in the timescales of their political momentum, Macron and Le Pen's progression to the second round can be regarded as a by-product of the political closure and atrophy of the French political system. The two candidates were the Janus-faced manifestation of a single voter aspiration to effect political change and elite renewal, as voter disenfranchisement and distrust of cartelized governing parties had continued to grow during Hollande's presidency.

Exploring the role of Le Pen and Macron in the presidential elections, this chapter looks at the key supply and demand-side parameters of the unprecedented competitive structure that emerged from the outcome of the first round. In the first half, we examine the ideological bases of the Le Pen



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_8

versus Macron opposition, their respective strategies and organizational strengths for challenging the traditional bipolar polity. The focus is on how policy agendas were embedded in the array of economic, cultural and political issues associated with the EU and globalization, pitting Macron's vision of an open and internationally integrated society against Le Pen's claims on national sovereignty, protectionism and closure of France's national borders to external threats. Finally, whilst both candidates participated in the 2017 process of political renovation, there were significant differences between Le Pen's 'de-demonizing' populist radical right appeal and the attempt by Macron to build a novel progressive force that could cross-cut existing left–right boundaries. These aspects were crucial to the reconfiguration that occurred between the two rounds of the presidential race and also allowed the revitalization of the nearly defunct *front républicain*.

In the second half, we turn to the demand side of the new political equation of the 2017 presidential race, looking at the demographic and attitudinal bases of support for the two candidates. Given the evidence of a broader ideological basis to this, opposing the open, liberal, pro-European values of Macron to the closed, reactionary, anti-European values of Le Pen, we employ the same predictors as in the previous chapter, and look to see whether Europe as a proxy for these contrasting perspectives takes a stronger role in the *ballottage* choice than it did in the first-round equation. Finally, we look if this same set of predictors can help in understanding the non-traditional behaviour of a substantial minority of the main losing candidates in the first round, namely Fillon and Mélenchon, in their choice of destination for their second-round vote.

## 1 The Supply Parameters of the 2017 Run-Off

With candidates from outside traditional party alternatives, the 2017 run-off provided a ground-breaking structure to competition, showing the increasing relevance of a new dimension of competition around globalization, immigration and European integration. Amid social pessimism and voter distrust of the more established parties of government (Ivaldi et al. 2017), both Macron and Le Pen were seen as the embodiment of political renewal—despite Le Pen's already long electoral career—and the promise of change in French politics. To varying degrees, both candidates had mobilized on anti-establishment discourse and criticism of the political 'class' during the campaign, clearly positioning themselves outside the traditional left–right party structure. They would exhibit deeply antagonistic

**Table 8.1** Summary of Macron and Le Pen's ideology, strategy, organizational strength and party system location in 2017

| | *Macron* | *Le Pen* |
|---|---|---|
| Ideological Conflict<br>– Globalization<br>– Immigration<br>– European integration<br>– Left–right economic<br>– Left–right cultural | Free trade<br>Cosmopolitan universalism<br>Pro-European integration<br>Social liberalism<br>Cultural liberalism | Economic nationalism<br>Nativism<br>Euroscepticism<br>Mixed domestic agenda<br>Right-wing authoritarianism |
| Strategy | Soft anti-establishment<br>Inclusive: centre–left and right unification<br>One foot in, one foot out | Anti-establishment populism<br>Exclusive: neither left, nor right<br>Fringe party opposition |
| Party system location | Centrism | Extreme right |
| Organization | Personalized<br>Grassroots Internet mobilization | Personalized<br>Centralized hierarchical |

policies, strategies and locations in the French party system, however. These differences are summarized in Table 8.1. We examine each aspect in turn in the first section of the chapter.

## *1.1 Ideological Conflicts*

This first section looks at the extent to which Macron and Le Pen may be regarded as representing the two sides of a single ideological conflict opposing views of an 'open' and internationally integrated society to claims of returning to the nation-state, involving economic protectionism, nativism and Euroscepticism, and how this opposition aligned with the more traditional left–right structure of competition in the 2017 elections.

### *1.1.1 'Open' Versus 'Closed' Society*

The 2017 French presidential run-off corroborates theoretical arguments made in the recent literature that a transformation of the traditional political space may have occurred as a result of globalization and of the increasing economic, cultural and political competition which has put the national political community under strain (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2008;

Hooghe and Marks 2017). In the French context, this new line of division has been conceptualized as an opposition between an 'open' and 'closed' society (Perrineau 2001, 2012). Economic globalization, immigration and European integration are three facets of a more general process of 'denationalization' which opposes socio-cultural groups that represent the 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization. Whilst the former support international integration, the latter favour protectionist measures and the maintenance of national boundaries. This new 'integration versus demarcation' conflict provides electoral potential, with new competitive opportunities for political parties, producing strategic repositioning as parties seek to adjust to the new structure of competition.

Radical right actors across Europe have been particularly successful in appealing to the interests and concerns of losers of globalization, formulating a policy mix of economic and cultural protectionism combined with Eurosceptic positions (Zaslove 2008; Harteveld 2016; Kriesi and Hutter 2017). In the 2017 election, the French FN exemplified the typical demarcation agenda, mixing economic, cultural and political protectionist policies, with nationalistic claims to be able to reverse globalization. Since 2011, this line of division has been politicized by Marine Le Pen as a wider moral framework whereby the FN would pit itself as the 'true patriotic' force against to the so-called globalists (*mondialistes*), that is traditional party elites, the EU and all international financial powers.

Economically protectionist policies featured predominantly in the FN's presidential platform. As explained by Le Pen: 'we have designated our adversary: corrupt, financial globalism, of which the European Union, finance and most of a domesticated political class are zealous servants.'[1] In 2017, the FN opposed free trade agreements such as TAFTA and CETA and outlined a package of protectionist policies including a new 3 per cent imports tax, a tax on company job relocation, a financial penalty for companies hiring foreign workers, as well as the pledge to direct public procurement towards French companies.

The closing of France's economic borders was associated with cultural protectionism, featuring the party's traditional nativist themes and policies, in line with the dominant 'authoritarian populist' mood in the French public in the lead-up to the 2017 presidential race.[2] The FN continued to advocate national priority to the French over foreigners for social benefits, housing and jobs, emphasizing both the economic and cultural threats of immigration. The EU refugee crisis and wave of Islamic terrorist attacks in 2015 had already produced a favourable opportunity structure for FN

xenophobic and Eurosceptic politics, whereby Marine Le Pen had reactivated typical FN narratives of 'invasion' and 'submersion' by migrants, while linking Islamic terrorism with the influx of refugees and blaming the EU for its mismanagement of the crisis. In 2017, Le Pen opposed family reunion rights for migrants and advocated a drastic reduction in asylum. In the last days of the presidential campaign, she intensified her anti-immigration message and went as far as proposing an 'immediate moratorium on all legal immigration'.[3]

As we noted in the previous chapter, Le Pen's 2017 campaign relied heavily on the politicization of Islam, amalgamating so-called communitarist claims by French Muslims with the growth of religious fundamentalism and, ultimately, with the terrorist threat. Central to the campaign was the new 'civic' repertoire of secularism and Republican values, which she had brought to FN identity politics after her accession in 2011, whereby Muslims are instrumentalized as a threat to liberal democratic values and to France's most cherished principle of laicity (*laïcité*).

Finally, Marine Le Pen's 2017 presidential platform mobilized on a range of Eurosceptic themes and policies, showing continuity with the traditional supply of FN Euroscepticism since 2002. In 2017, the FN contestation of European integration was galvanized by the outcome of the Brexit referendum of June 2016. As Szczerbiak and Taggart (2016) suggest, the British referendum results helped legitimize the FN's existing opposition to the EU, making it a more 'viable project'. Marine Le Pen's campaign was launched in February 2017 around the pledge that the FN would free France from the 'tyranny' of 'globalisation', 'Islamic fundamentalism' and 'the European Union', advocating a return to national sovereignty which would most notably imply leaving the euro and Schengen.

At the opposite pole of the crystallizing 'transnational' cleavage, new political parties of the cosmopolitan left and social–liberal centre have increasingly taken up an agenda of international integration, embracing cultural liberalism, economic openness and European integration (Kriesi and Hutter 2017). In 2017, Macron's presidential bid represented such an attempt to redefine the political preferences of the mainstream left in France, balancing support for market integration, cultural diversity and a clear Europeanist stance, with the preservation of the French model of generous welfare.

Macron's programme exemplified the connection between cultural liberalism and support for European integration. As Kriesi and Hutter (2017)

suggest, European integration is located close to cultural liberalism, and, as such, it is embedded in the cultural axis and closely associated with its cosmopolitan pole. As we saw in the previous chapter, Macron entered the race with a sense of reviving the European dream. Central to his pro-EU bid was the necessity of reinvigorating the Franco-German relationship and traditional motor at the heart of any progress in European integration, by restoring the credibility of France in the eyes of Germany. Most notably, Macron advocated the creation of a finance minister and budget for the Eurozone to stabilize and develop it further, committing to the EU's 3 per cent deficit target and strongly criticizing Brexit as a 'crime' against Europe, promising a hard bargain after his election. Laying down the foundations for a more 'protective' Europe, Macron called for a policy of solidarity relaunch, advocating also changes in the stability mechanism to permit greater European investments. Additionally, he outlined his plan for a 'multi-speed' Europe which, in his view, was already a reality as was demonstrated by existing strengthened cooperation deals, opt-in policies and the Eurozone itself.

Whilst enthusiastically Europeanist, Macron's campaign reflected the need to adopt more nuanced European views and more balanced policies for a 'protective Europe' that would send a positive signal to Eurosceptic voters who were increasingly turning to the FN and, to a lesser extent, to Mélenchon's LFI. 'I'm a pro-European,' Macron said just before the second round; 'During this election, I have constantly defended the idea of Europe and European policies because I believe it's extremely important for French people and for the place of our country in globalisation. But at the same time we have to face the situation, to listen to our people, and to listen to the fact that they are extremely angry today, impatient, and the dysfunction of the EU is no longer sustainable.'[4]

Despite his commitment to secure the border-free Schengen zone and remain aligned with the EU's control over migration, Macron insisted, for instance, on the need to strengthen the EU's external borders and pushed for additional resources for the Frontex agency. He also pledged to reinforce European counterterrorism alongside French security forces and intelligence, announcing that he would recruit 10,000 additional police officers in France and put cybersecurity at the top of his presidential agenda.

On European economic issues, Macron openly criticized social dumping calling for higher European anti-dumping taxes as well as creating an EU mechanism to control foreign takeovers and harmonizing corporate

taxes among Eurozone member states. Most notably, Macron pledged that he would renegotiate the EU directive on ex-pat workers, a hot button issue in French politics, by limiting to one year the period in which people could work on contracts outside their home country. In the area of free trade, Macron lent explicit support to the EU–Canada deal, CETA, during the campaign while de-emphasizing the comparable yet far more controversial EU-USA, TAFTA, agreement which was rejected by all other candidates. Ahead of the election, a majority (63 per cent) of the French were expressing doubts that their government would protect their national interests in negotiating the Treaty, while another 69 per cent deemed the European Commission incapable of defending France's interests.[5]

Differences with Le Pen's national–protectionist platform were also visible in the areas of immigration and national identity. In sharp contrast with Le Pen's anti-immigration and nativist rhetoric, Macron endorsed more culturally liberal views and a more positive attitude towards immigration: 'The French people shouldn't be worried about immigration,' Macron argued during the campaign. 'From an economic, cultural and social point of view, immigration is an opportunity.'[6] Macron's policies included in particular the pledge to make France more attractive to highly skilled immigrants by promoting 'talent' visas, and to help immigrants better integrate in French society by financing French language programmes. On the highly sensitive and politicized issue of asylum, Macron opposed Le Pen's claim of putting an end to the influx of refugees, pledging that he would speed up the processing time for asylum requests, taking it down to six months. His platform also pledged, however, that rejected asylum seekers would be expelled without delay.

Similarly, diverging views between the two candidates were found as regards their conception of secularism and the presence of Muslims in France. As Macron declared in the lead-up to the presidential election: 'no religion should be a problem in France today. If the state should be neutral, which is at the heart of secularism, we have a duty to let everybody practise their religion with dignity.'[7] In July 2016, Macron had opposed a proposal by Prime Minister Manuel Valls to ban Muslim veils in French universities, a position which he reiterated during the 2017 campaign. This contrasted sharply with Le Pen's aggressive campaign on Islam, whereby the FN candidate vowed to ban Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols from all public places in France.[8]

Finally, the more culturally liberal positioning of Macron led him to endorse Hollande's 2013 law on same sex marriage (*mariage pour tous*), while advocating medically assisted procreation (MAP) for single women and female couples, and pledging that he would make women's rights a national priority of his presidency.

### *1.1.2 Economic Issues*

Both candidates ran on mixed economic platforms, which reflected diverging economic strategies and competitive opportunities contingent on their respective party system location. A degree of heterogeneity in Le Pen's economic programme attested to the need for the party to broaden its electoral appeal beyond its consolidated left-leaning working class voter base, most particularly to try and reach out to right-wing voters in Fillon's electorate. Whilst not entirely devoid of inconsistencies and contradictions, mixed economic policies in Macron's agenda exemplified, on the other hand, a social–liberal package consistent with the candidate's attempt to cross-cut existing ideological boundaries and build a 'true' centrist force in French politics.

As had already been the case in 2012, the FN's economic manifesto consisted of a heterogeneous package of leftist social policies and market liberal economics, which were embedded in the party's protectionist, anti-globalization and Eurosceptic framework. Notably, the first of Le Pen's 144 proposals in her 2017 presidential platform pledged: 'we will regain freedom and be masters of our future by giving back their monetary, legislative, territorial and economic sovereignty to the French people,' thus making a Eurozone exit a necessary pre-requisite to the FN's political economy.

In 2017, Le Pen's economics attested to the continuation of the left-wing domestic agenda of redistribution, state intervention and fiscal justice that the party had formulated five years earlier. In 2012, the FN had confronted important policy incentives emerging from the social and economic ramifications of the financial crisis, and it had shifted its platform further to the economic left to adjust to growing voter demands for redistribution and economic regulation. The FN under Marine Le Pen had adopted a Keynesian economic agenda, embracing state regulation, income redistribution, government spending and public services expansion. As Ivaldi (2015) suggests, this shift had occurred in the post-crisis period as the FN moved to converge towards the preferences of the French

median economic voter, notably intensifying its appeal to crisis-ridden voters in the lower social strata.

To a large extent, the 2017 presidential platform reiterated the dominant Keynesian orientation of the 2012 manifesto, opposing austerity and breaking free from the EU's budget deficit rules. Le Pen pushed forward a vast array of left-leaning economic policies. Additionally, Le Pen promised to make public services and hospitals available to all across France, opposing privatization of public companies under what was deemed a Brussels' *diktat*, and pledging that she would keep SNCF and *La Poste* in the public sector.

Whilst successful in increasing the FN's appeal to working class and lower salariat voters since 2012, leftist economic policies had, however, alienated the more traditional petty-bourgeois support for the party, notably showing lower yield ratios among small entrepreneurs and the self-employed, as well as among older voters with greater economic assets, all located to the right of the party spectrum and all deeply sceptical of the FN's plan to shed the euro. The 2017 economic plan demonstrated the party's efforts to address the needs of those voters in the domestic market, outlining tax cuts and less bureaucracy for the small businesses as well as reforming their specific social welfare scheme (RSI), while promising substantial tax breaks on donations and inheritance to the wealthier pensioners. Together with another set of right-wing economic policies such as fighting social benefit fraud and cutting down staff in regional and local administrations, the proliferation of pro-small business proposals in the 2017 platform increased FN economic policy inconsistency, blurring Le Pen's positions while attesting to the FN's lack of governmental credibility.

Turning to Macron, his package of economic policies exemplified a typical social–liberal agenda, albeit with a predominantly liberal tone which placed him to the right of Le Pen on the economy. Macron's platform showed little divergence from Hollande's social–democratic policies which he had inspired during his time as economic adviser and economy minister. As explained by his chief economic adviser, Jean Pisani-Ferry, Macron's policy mix engaged with a reformist agenda of 'transformation', combining fiscal orthodoxy and job market deregulation with public investment and claims to extend welfare provisions.[9]

Macron's social policies included tax cuts for all in employment through a reduction in social contributions paid by employees, while promising a

net 100 euros monthly increase for minimum wage earners (SMIC), tax exemption for overtime hours and granting the self-employed access to unemployment benefits. Reiterating his campaign flagship policy, his 2017 platform vowed that no less than 80 per cent of French households would benefit from local council tax exemption, with central government compensating the shortfall incurred in municipal budgets. Finally, Macron pledged that he would simplify France's retirement system by merging all 37 existing schemes into a single, common system for public and private sector employees.

Despite claiming to formulate a modern reformist and progressive agenda, a liberal orientation was clearly perceptible in Macron's presidential platform, which emphasized his commitment to budgetary discipline. Against this backdrop of fiscal rectitude, Macron pledged that he would make France more attractive to businesses and investors, proposing to reduce the corporate tax rate from 33 down to 25 per cent, thus aligning with the EU average, while simultaneously capping taxes on capital and changing France's wealth tax (ISF) base by excluding financial assets. Additionally, Macron reiterated the pledge to reduce bureaucracy and regulations for small businesses, and proposed that simplification measures should be made a top priority immediately after his election.

Finally, Macron's liberal approach was most visible in the area of job market deregulation and labour relations. Whilst announcing that he would preserve the socialist legacy of the 35-hour legal work week, the candidate pledged that negotiation should nonetheless be left to individual companies, thus bypassing national trade unions and business federations. Most controversial was Macron's proposal to build upon the widely criticized 2016 Labour Law to accelerate reforms in what he deemed was a rigid job market, to relax existing legal processes and give more flexibility to companies to hire and fire employees, promising that his government would move forward rapidly in that area through the use of *ordonnances*, allowing relatively little parliamentary oversight and the muzzling of the opposition.

### *1.2 Strategy: Exclusive Populism Versus Inclusive Centrism*

Ideological divergences were embedded in different campaign strategies by the two candidates. As discussed earlier, both Macron and Le Pen presented narratives of political change and renovation during the 2017 campaign, primarily as a means of distancing themselves from the 'political

system' and 'old' governing parties that were rejected by so many voters. However, there were profound differences between the two candidates, reflecting diverging party profiles and party system locations.

Le Pen operated primarily on anti-establishment populism throughout the 2017 campaign, which has been typical of FN mobilization strategies since the mid-1980s, whereby the FN pits itself as the 'true' representative of the people against a corrupt political 'caste'. As the recent literature on the FN suggests, exclusive populism continues to be central to Marine Le Pen's leadership which shows no significant departure from the previous period of populist mobilization by her father (Ivaldi 2016). Le Pen's run-off campaign perpetuated her populist profile, attesting also to her status as low valence candidate. In her speech on 1 May 2017, Le Pen attacked, for instance, Macron as the candidate of the 'oligarchy', depicting him as the 'face of international finance' and 'adversary of the people.[10]

In sharp contrast, and despite his cultivating his image as a political outsider, Macron's strategy was one of transformative and progressive centrism, embedded in mainstream liberalism, and seeking to unify the centre–left and the centre–right in French politics, thus keeping one foot in, one foot out of the system, as did, for instance, François Bayrou during the 2007 campaign. Whilst certainly relying on some elements of the populist critique of party politics, such as criticizing the 'old parties' and castigating 'political correctness',[11] Macron's dramaturgy of presidential politics nevertheless lacked the core anti-elitist and anti-pluralist features that define populist mobilization. Moreover, Macron's presidential platform put financial and ethical probity at the top of his political agenda, developing key legislation on the 'moralization' of French politics, which differed significantly from Le Pen's populist project.

## 2 The Demand Side of the 2017 Political Equation

In modelling the bases of support for the two second-round candidates, we face a different set of challenges to the models presented in the first chapter. The two rounds of French presidential elections, and indeed run-off systems more broadly, have been characterized as 'expressive first round, instrumental second round' in terms of voter motivations (Elgie 1996). In the first round, there is the opportunity to support one's favoured candidate, and in the second, one chooses the preferred

candidate. Of course, such a characterization is simplistic, in that one's first-round vote may also need to be instrumental in situations where one's favoured candidate has no hope of reaching the second round, and disliked candidates are likely to do so (Cox 1997: 128). The closeness of the race between leading candidates may also affect how a voter chooses. Moreover, in the French case, the presidentialization of the two-bloc system to which we have referred repeatedly encourages precisely an instrumental mentality to ensure the 'correct' set of candidates for the second round. Nonetheless, the amalgamation of distinct electorates, who have been motivated more, if not exclusively, by expressive, value-based concerns in the first round renders the ideological make-up of the two *ballottage* candidates' support potentially less polarized.

### *2.1 The Context of the Second-Round Vote*

In 2017, this premise applies more strongly than in previous presidential races, but asymmetrically. For Marine Le Pen, the presence of the *front républicain*, though diminished from that which ensured Jacques Chirac's landslide victory against her father in 2002, meant that predominantly only voters with a value-set aligned closely with the FN candidate would be likely to support her—a hypothesis supported by our findings in the previous chapter. With an unprecedented run-off pitting Le Pen against an overtly enthusiastic Europeanist candidate, one would expect in particular a higher level of polarization around issues of European integration and economic globalization. In addition to her own voters from the first round, this would apply to a proportion of Fillon and Dupont-Aignan voters, and potentially Eurosceptic and protectionist protest voters who had supported Mélenchon in the first round—but not strongly aligned Mélenchon voters, whose ideological proximity with Le Pen would be next to non-existent. In Le Pen's vote, we would expect the expressive component to remain relatively similar to that of her first-round vote.

For Macron, on the other hand, the instrumental component should increase quite significantly, with voters from across the spectrum, or at least the left and moderate right sections, converging upon Macron as the 'non-Le Pen' vote, as much as for reasons of expressive support. The key question for the second-round vote is whether the ideological dimensions motivating the expressive vote of the first round remain as potent in their explanatory power, or whether those dimensions which cross-cut the more traditional economic and cultural dimensions become more conspicuous

in differentiating between the Macron and Le Pen vote. Overall, does the second-round electoral divide reflect the 'open versus closed' society dimension manifest in the two candidates' programmes and in the presentation of their second-round campaign and debate face-off?

To this end, we model the second-round vote as a simple choice between Macron and Le Pen using a binary logit model. Unlike the multinomial counterpart which we used in the previous chapter, the binary logit provides a simple set of coefficients characterizing the profile of one candidate in contrast to the other (in this case, Macron's vote in contrast to Le Pen's vote used as the reference category). We present the full model, including demographic controls, to understand the attitudinal differentiation between the two candidates. We use the same attitudinal predictors as in the first-round model, but look to see if there is indeed greater differentiation on the open/closed society predictors than on the more traditional ideological dimensions.

Looking simply at the contrast between Macron and Le Pen ignores two potentially significant elements to understanding the electoral dynamics of the second round. First, as we noted above, significant speculation in media coverage preceding the second round covered the potential move of Mélenchon voters to Le Pen. This was, perhaps fallaciously, boosted by Mélenchon's refusal to endorse a vote for Macron, preferring simply to report the Internet vote by his party supporters on this, and instruct his voters to make their own decision. Before we look at the Macron/Le Pen contrast, then, we look at the vote transfers between the first and second round.

Second, this election was notable for the low turnout and the exceptionally high proportion of spoiled and blank ballots cast in the second round, at over 4 million votes cast, representing 11.5 per cent of voters, by far the highest proportion since 1958. It is a reasonable starting assumption that these voters felt unable to vote either for Macron or Le Pen due to a lack of ideological proximity to either. Looking at the polling data of vote transfers above, together with the SCoRE survey, we will identify the principal sources of these voters, which we will then include in a secondary model (multinomial this time) to understand how they differed from Macron and Le Pen voters. Rather than include them as a single *blanc/nul* category, we will separate them into distinct groups according to their first-round vote, given that the group would otherwise be highly heterogeneous, combining voters of left and right. For the sake of simplicity, we will only isolate groups with sufficiently large numbers to

constitute a significant large electoral pool, as well as allowing robust modelling of their profiles in a statistical test.

### 2.2 *Vote Transfers Between the First and Second Rounds*

Before looking at the profiles of the two second-round candidates' voters, where did these supporters come from in terms of their first-round vote? Some post-election analyses of vote transfers between the two rounds of the 2017 presidential suggest that, to some degree, first-round voters acted independently of voting instructions from political leaders.

Table 8.2, based upon the post-election poll carried out by Ipsos,[12] reports the origins of support for the two second-round candidates as well as blank and spoiled votes. It excludes first-round votes for Macron and Le Pen, given the lack of analytical interest in an essentially stable vote, and the very minor candidates. The supporters for Hamon and Dupont-Aignan show interesting variation. Unsurprisingly, Hamon voters almost universally reject Marine Le Pen, with almost three-quarters voting for Macron, the highest level of *front républicain* discipline. However, a minority choose to abstain or 'waste' their vote. Reflecting the political unease created by the DLF–FN alliance amongst Gaullist troops, the DLF candidate sees a much more even spread of votes across the two candidates, *blancs et nuls* and abstention. However, even with the large-scale SCoRE data, the numbers of voters are too small to provide a useful analysis.

For Mélenchon and Fillon, however, two distinct dynamics are visible for candidates with significant tranches of votes. Only half of their voters opt for Macron, but while one in five of Fillon's voters move to Le Pen—

**Table 8.2** First- to second-round vote transfers from the main losing first-round presidential candidates

| | *Macron (2)* | *Le Pen (2)* | *Blank/spoiled (2)* | *Abstained (2)* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fillon (1) | 48 | 20 | 15 | 17 | 100 |
| Mélenchon (1) | 52 | 7 | 17 | 24 | 100 |
| Hamon (1) | 71 | 2 | 10 | 17 | 100 |
| Dupont-Aignan (1) | 27 | 30 | 20 | 23 | 100 |

Note: Percentage of (1) first-round vote transferring to (2) second-round vote (or abstention)

Source: CEVIPOF/Ipsos Sopra Stera Le Monde (http://www.ipsos.fr/decrypter-societe/2017-05-07-2nd-tour-presidentielle-2017-sociologie-electorats-et-profil-abstentionnistes)

providing another indication of the increasing ideological porosity between the FN and LR since 2012—fewer than one in 10 do so from Mélenchon. The spectre of the radical left vote moving directly to the radical right is relatively minor in terms of voter share, which suggests that Le Pen largely failed to rally a defined 'populist constituency', attesting to profoundly diverging values and policy preferences amongst LFI and FN voters. Nonetheless, given the size of Mélenchon's electorate, it is still worth examining the extent to which there was any ideological proximity between those of his voters who did decamp to the radical right. More broadly, some three times the proportion, however, are unable to vote for either candidate, with a similar proportion of Fillon voters unable to do the same.

Looking at the proportion of voters in our dataset, the percentage of voters choosing Macron and Le Pen are quite close. The proportion of *blancs et nuls* for Fillon is much lower—around half—but may represent a social desirability bias, as well as recall issues due to the survey being carried out over a month later (van der Eijk and Niemöller 1979). Nonetheless, we can still model the individual profiles of these two candidates' supporters who chose not to vote Macron or Le Pen. First, however, we consider the contrast between the entirety of supporters for the two candidates.

### *2.3 Demographic and Attitudinal Bases to the Second-Round Vote*

As noted above, the explanatory variables used in the models are identical to those used in Chap. 7, but we will review the set-up in the following sections for the sake of clarity. We include a set of standard demographic variables. To recall—age is included as an interval-level variable. Gender is coded 1 for female. Education is coded in four categories, from no formal qualifications (the reference) to higher education. Patrimony is a count variable, from 0 to 4 items. Religion is coded into three categories—secular (the reference), Catholic and 'other' religion. Religiosity is coded into three categories—more than weekly church attendance (the reference), monthly, and less frequently or never. Class is coded using the CSP coding, into independent, managers and professionals (the reference), technicians and supervisors, routine non-manual, blue-collar workers, and inactive.

**Table 8.3** Binary logit model of second-round presidential vote (2017)

| *Variable* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 0.025 | 0.003 | 5.25 | <0.001 |
| Female | 0.022 | 0.077 | 0.29 | 0.774 |
| No quals | – | – | – | – |
| CAP-BEP | 0.051 | 0.132 | 0.29 | 0.698 |
| Bac | 0.233 | 0.135 | 1.72 | 0.086 |
| University | 0.594 | 0.140 | 4.24 | <0.001 |
| Patrimony | 0.066 | 0.038 | 1.74 | 0.081 |
| No religion | – | – | – | – |
| Catholic | −0.240 | 0.080 | −3.01 | 0.003 |
| Other | 0.673 | 0.181 | 3.71 | <0.001 |
| Once/week | – | – | – | – |
| Once/month | −0.611 | 0.327 | −1.87 | 0.062 |
| Less often | −0.579 | 0.306 | −1.90 | 0.058 |
| Prof/manag | – | – | – | – |
| Independent | −0.221 | 0.221 | −1.00 | 0.317 |
| Technician | −0.459 | 0.147 | −3.12 | 0.002 |
| Employee | −0.740 | 0.129 | −5.72 | <0.001 |
| Blue-collar | −1.220 | 0.190 | −6.42 | <0.001 |
| Inactive | −0.426 | 0.129 | −3.29 | 0.001 |
| Lr | −0.341 | 0.016 | −21.07 | <0.001 |
| econ1 | −0.070 | 0.021 | −3.29 | 0.001 |
| econ2 | 0.060 | 0.026 | 2.30 | 0.022 |
| Wc | −0.352 | 0.045 | −7.81 | <0.001 |
| Eu | −0.612 | 0.020 | −31.14 | <0.001 |
| Islam | 0.191 | 0.020 | 9.65 | <0.001 |
| Ssm | 0.035 | 0.020 | 1.78 | 0.075 |
| mondial1 | 0.233 | 0.026 | 9.15 | <0.001 |
| Antie | −0.311 | 0.026 | −12.05 | <0.001 |
| Libert | 0.084 | 0.026 | 3.26 | 0.001 |
| Auth | 0.019 | 0.023 | 0.81 | 0.417 |
| Pop | −0.245 | 0.037 | −6.60 | <0.001 |
| Constant | | | | |
| *N* | | | 9596 | |
| Pseudo-$R^2$ | | | 0.55 | |

Note: Reference category in dependent variable is vote for Le Pen; religiosity variables—church attendance 'once/week', 'once/month', 'less often'. Source: ScoRE survey

Those attitudinal predictors also remain the same as the model in Chap. 7 (see Summary Table 7.2). We include these explanatory variables in a simple binary logit model, reported in Table 8.3, with a vote in the second round for Macron coded 1 in the dependent variable.

Given the ideological disparities highlighted in the first half of this chapter, we would expect there to be strong attitudinal divisions between the two candidates' electorates. This is indeed the case, with highly significant contrasts ($p < 0.001$) between candidates on almost every attitudinal item. As we have noted before, this may in part be due to the sample size, and consequently we should try to differentiate between the relevance of effects on these items. However, other indicators suggest that the differentiation between the model is present, and well mapped by the model. First, the pseudo-$R^2$ indicator is high, showing that the model picks up over half of the variation in vote choice. If we compare this with the models run by Lewis-Beck et al. (2012), the model is equivalent to that of the Sarkozy-Royal run-off model in 2007 (210, Table A.24)—an election which was characterized by very strong left–right bloc differentiation of vote—and far stronger than the same model in 2002, with a less traditional run-off between Le Pen *père* and Chirac (200, Table A.17). Indeed, in this latter model, the same amount of explanatory power is only reached using candidate thermometer measures, which by definition are causally very proximate to, and potentially endogenous with, vote intention. For an election characterized as being outside the norm, the standard explanatory model of vote performs remarkably well, at least in terms of overall fit.

Before we turn to the attitudinal detail within that fit, it is worth noting that, despite the presence of a potentially overbearing set of attitudes that could wash out sociological effects entirely, a number of effects nonetheless remain significant. First, older voters are more likely to vote for Macron than younger voters. Second, the most educated group of voters, with some form of higher education qualification, are also more likely to vote for the eventual winner than those with low or no education. Independently of this, for all occupational strata except the self-employed and independents, they are more likely to vote for Le Pen than managers and professionals are, but particularly among blue-collar and routine non-manual workers. Given the contrast of independent workers in the first-round vote, the absence of an effect in this model is noteworthy, with former Fillon supporters meriting further investigation.

Catholics on average are more likely to vote Le Pen than secular voters, but 'other' religions—which include Judaism and Islam—are inevitably much less likely to do so. Religiosity fails to reach significance at the 95 per cent level, however, despite negative coefficients suggesting that the most religious are most likely to vote Macron. The occupational and education effects corroborate the traditional divide and long-established dominance of the radical right candidate among lower social strata (Mayer 2013; Gougou 2015), with the religion effect potentially reflecting that found in comparative research on radical right voting (Arzheimer and Carter 2009).[13] Moreover, they fit the narrative of the 'establishment' electorate turning to Macron as part of a *front républicain*. The coalition of older and more religious voters among Macron's supporters suggests in particular the presence of right-wing social conservatives who are famously less supportive of Le Pen's adventurous plan to shed the euro.

What of the attitudinal differentiators? As we have noted, almost none of the attitudes fails to reject the null hypothesis. However, through the relative strength of the effects, best indicated through the column of z values, to allow for the different measurement scales, two variables in par-

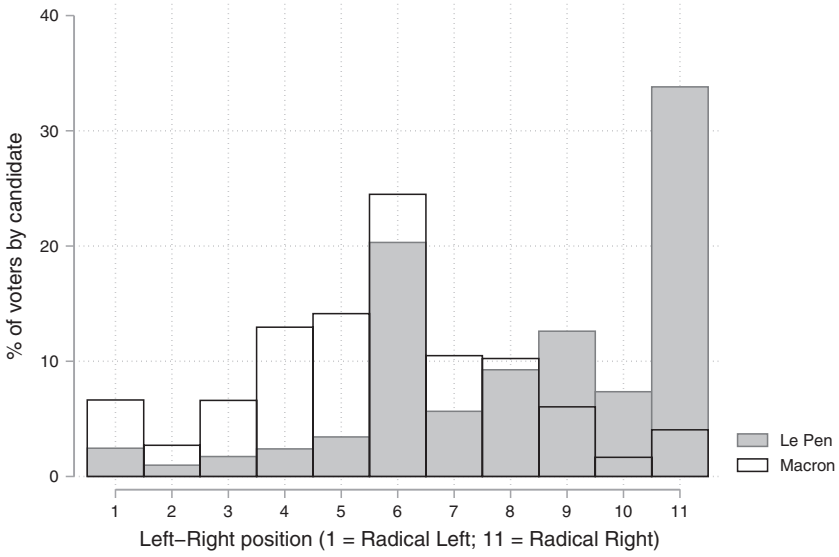


**Fig. 8.1** Distribution of left–right position for Le Pen and Macron voters. Note: 11-point scale (1—radical left; 11—radical right). Source: SCoRE survey

ticular stand out—left–right ideological placement, but most notably attitude to the EU. As we might expect, voters placing themselves further to the left of the political spectrum are more likely to vote for Macron than those on the right and radical right. In any vote model in France, ideology should always matter, assuming that there is ideological difference between the two candidates. But the EU effect is stronger. We might expect that ideology's effect would be tempered by Macron's candidacy occupying a more centrist, rather than left-wing position. Indeed, his voters are normally distributed across the left–right spectrum (Fig. 8.1). For Le Pen, as in the first round, the 'niniste' centre position has around a fifth of Le Pen's support in the second round, with a heavy preponderance on the (radical) right.

Whatever the nuances of left–right positioning, the bloc effect is apparent, and the large proportion of right voters willing to vote Le Pen in the second round is another indication of the porousness of the former *cordon*

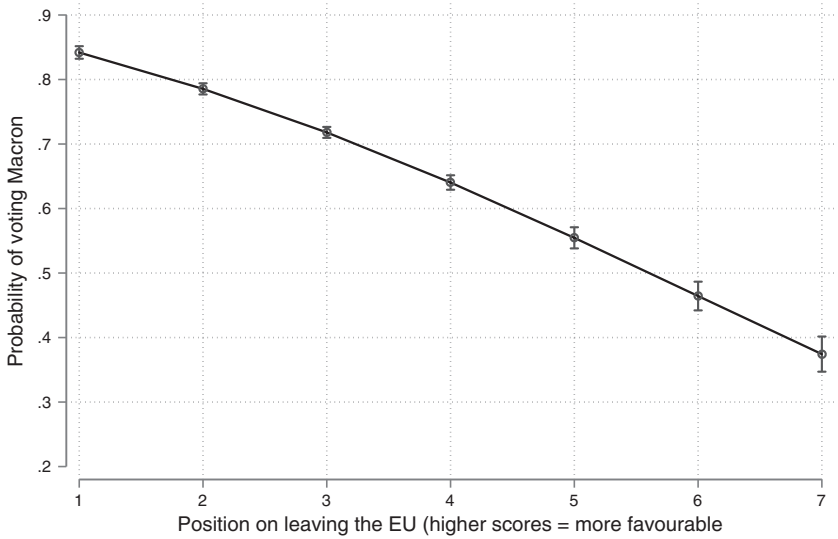


**Fig. 8.2** Fitted probability of Macron vote by position on EU dimension. Note: Probabilities derived from binary logit model, holding other variables at their mean or proportions. 95 per cent confidence intervals reported. Source: SCoRE survey

*sanitaire*, even when the opposing second-round candidate is himself centrist rather than on the left.

Looking back to the attitudinal indicators, the strength of the EU effect is striking. Fig. 8.2 presents the fitted probability of the positions on the EU dimension.

Given the bias to the Macron vote, the two end-points of the dimension are notable in the 50-point differential in vote likelihood. The strong division noted between the two candidates on Europe is mirrored in the attitudes of their voters. Moreover, despite controlling for many other facets of ideology, the EU effect remains dominant. Whilst in the past Europe has been an issue characterized as overlapping with other attitude dimensions, or being seen through the 'lens' of domestic political concerns, here is a strong indication that Europe mattered independently of these. The independent effect of the globalization measure suggests that, despite substantial covariance in the two items,[14] Europe and globalization are not synonymous in voters' minds—and both divide the two electorates. The notion of an 'open' versus 'closed' dimension to competition in the 2017 presidential elections receives very strong support at the international level, then.

The importance of the EU effect here is paramount. Recall that in the previous chapter, we looked at the respective model fit statistics (AIC) for three specifications of the multinomial logit model, finding that left–right self-placement was the more powerful attitudinal predictor of left–right and EU position. Table 8.4 reports the AIC scores for identical specification tests on the second-round vote, alongside the scores for the first round, for clarity.

The AIC scores are much larger for Round 1, as the model specification is more complex. We are interested instead in the relative size of the scores

**Table 8.4** AIC fit scores for different specifications of the full first- and second-round voting models

| *Model* | *AIC* | |
|---|---|---|
| | First round | Second round |
| Full model | 23,940 | 5,152 |
| Full model w/o left–right self-placement | 27,530 | 5,651 |
| Full model w/o EU sentiment | 25,423 | 6,320 |

Note: AIC = Akaike Information Criterion

by model specification. In the case of Round 2, the EU variable is more powerful than the left–right—more variation in second-round vote choice is explained by the EU dimension than by traditional political ideology, which was more important in Round 1.

Whilst the EU dimension is much stronger than the other dimensions, the z values suggest that there are four other dimensions worth looking at—the anti-establishment, welfare chauvinism, anti-globalization and attitude to Islam. Whilst secondary to EU and left–right in their explanatory power, all four separate between Le Pen and Macron. With regard to the anti-establishment dimension, it is worth noting that Macron's electorate are not hugely supportive of politicians, with a mean position of 3.5, reflecting a more general distrust of politics in the French electorate, which we highlighted in Chap. 2. However, our findings for the second round confirm that they are the most supportive of any of the presidential candidates, whereas the model corroborates that both anti-elite (and people-centred claims, through the populism question) are significant factors of the FN vote, reflecting the general populist orientation in Le Pen's campaign in the run-off. On welfare chauvinism and Islam, as we saw in Chap. 7, the position of Macron voters is more supportive, particularly on the Islam question, which again contrasts sharply with strong anti-Islam sentiments among Le Pen voters. Finally, in line with the EU question, but retaining an independent effect, those favouring globalization as an opportunity are more likely to vote Macron.

Finally, it is worth noting that traditional economic concerns over state intervention and inequality influenced the outcome very little—weaker than the cultural liberalism and libertarianism items, even though Macron's second-round electorate will have accommodated a range of views on these items among his voters. A small part of this is due to the inclusion of the left–right ideological indicator,[15] but it is also the case that economic factors simply mattered much less in vote choice between Le Pen and Macron, ceding to broader issues of openness, tolerance and universalism.

### *2.4* The Macron and Le Pen Vote Transfers Compared with *les blancs/nuls*

There is one further aspect of the second-round vote which is worth considering from the demand side, namely the very high proportion of blank and spoiled ballots cast, and the rise in abstention to 25.4 per cent, close

to the record low turnout in the previous 'atypical' French presidential race of 1969, which featured two candidates of the right, Alain Poher and Georges Pompidou. At around 11.5 per cent of the total second-round electorate, the proportion of blank and spoiled votes substantially exceeded the usual levels, which may reflect the 'verticalization' of party competition in the run-off that we have outlined above, specifically alienating voters with traditional policy preferences distributed along the left–right economic cleavage, for instance. However, the difference between those who spoiled their ballot or left it blank and those who simply did not turn out is not apparent.

As we have noted, the Fillon and Mélenchon first-round 'camps' provide sufficient sample size ($n$ = 2250 and 2809 in total, and 1800 and 1900 in analytical samples) in our data to examine the rationale for choosing to spoil or blank their ballot, rather than vote for one of the two second-round candidates. We use the same explanatory variables to contrast the Mélenchon and Fillon sub-samples, with a three-category dependent variable, coded for those who voted Le Pen, those who voted Macron and those who spoilt their ballot or cast a blank ballot (the reference category).[16] This would necessitate two separate multinomial logit models, which are reported in their entirety in the appendix for those wishing to look at the independent contrasts. In Fig. 8.3, however, we provide a summary of the differences simply by plotting the mean position of the three voting groups on the dimensions included in the model, to see if we can identify patterns in the different vote-choice groups. Because the dimensions are measured on different length scales, we use standardized coefficients to map these. Negative values are closer to lower values in the original unstandardized scales.

Whilst not dwelling on the multinomial models (Tables A5 and A6), it is nonetheless worth noting that both the Fillon and Mélenchon models account for almost an identical proportion of variance explained in the dependent variable—c. 20 per cent. This is evidently not as powerful as the main vote model, in explanatory terms, but this characterization is more exploratory in nature. In terms of demographics, very little emerges. It is notable that older first-round Fillon and Mélenchon voters are relatively more likely to spoil or blank their ballots than vote Le Pen than younger voters, which is consistent with our previous finding regarding the age structure of the two run-off electorates. Two other demographics effects are visible: among Mélenchon voters, women are more likely than men to vote for Macron or to vote for Le Pen rather than spoil or blank their ballot. It is difficult to identify an underlying reason for this. Second,

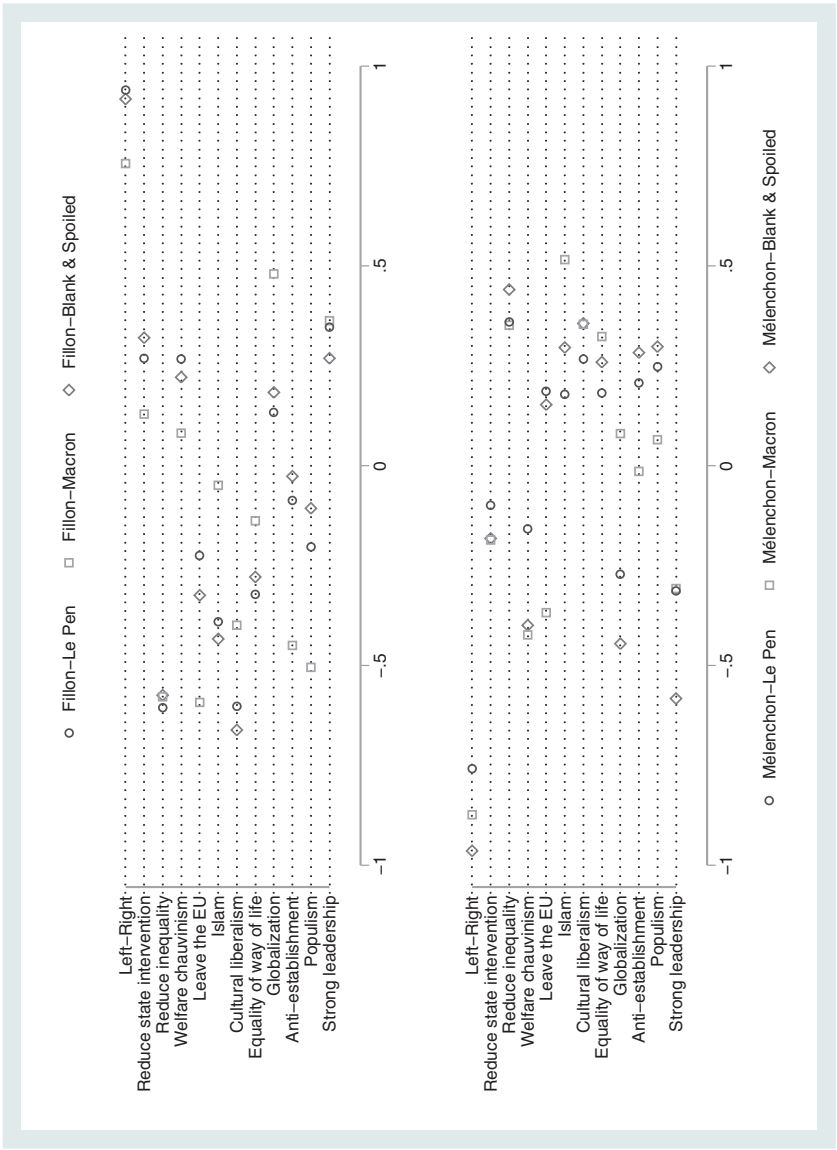


**Fig. 8.3** Mean positions of second-round vote choices for Fillon and Mélenchon first-round voters on attitudinal items. Note: all positions calculated on standardized attitudes, negative values corresponding to lower values of unstandardized variables. Source: SCoRE survey

among the 'other' religious category in both first-round voting groups, they are more likely than Catholic or secular voters to vote for Macron, rather than spoil or blank their ballot. Beyond these effects, the fully specified models offer no other demographic effects.

As Fig. 8.3 shows, notwithstanding the direction of their vote in the run-off, both Fillon and Mélenchon's voters are firmly anchored to the right and left sides of the political spectrum, respectively. Looking first at the Fillon set, the voters who chose to move to Macron are noticeably distant from the other two groups ideologically on almost all the dimensions. They are a little more to the left, more pro-EU and globalization enthusiasts, less anti-establishment and populist, and more optimistic about Islam's compatibility with democracy. They are also less vociferous on reducing state intervention, and less welfare chauvinist. Only on inequality reduction and strong leadership are the differences indistinct. Conversely, for Fillon voters who moved to Le Pen, there is a much greater ideological proximity with their blank and spoiled ballot counterparts across all items.

The 'direction of travel' of Fillon supporters is therefore ideologically predictable, in terms of where they would not vote, but distinguishing between spoilt/blank ballots and Le Pen votes is not. This suggests that other elements of differentiation may be found elsewhere, perhaps in the low credibility profile of Le Pen which might have deterred otherwise ideologically proximate voters to choose the FN candidate, making the 'blank and spoiled' their best available option. Within the available data, there is also some evidence that party identification with LR or UDI reduces the likelihood of voting Le Pen, and increases the likelihood of blanking or spoiling one's ballot, but this also falls short of a full explanation, and unfortunately the data provide no other variables which seem able to explain the distinction.

For Mélenchon's first-round voters, Macron transfers are also more identifiable through their greater support of the EU and globalization, less anti-establishment and more positive views of Islam. Also in contrast with Fillon supporters, those most to the left are also most likely to cast a blank or spoilt ballot. The Le Pen transfers are more ideologically distinct from the blank and spoiled ballots than in the Fillon model, showing no clear pattern, however. Comparing across the Fillon and Mélenchon scores, it is clear that, of course, there are two very different ideological sources of votes, not just in the left–right dimension. On inequality and all of the cultural and social liberalism questions, the two groups cluster in different blocs. Other dimensions clearly mattered more to these voters,

including antipathy to Le Pen. The inequality differential stands out quite considerably—even though the intra-group differences are negligible, they stand at opposition ends of the spectrum. This confirms that, for these voters at least, the economic dimension can have played little role in second-round vote choice.

## 3 Conclusion

Our analysis of the supply and demand sides of the 2017 presidential second-round run-off has confirmed the unprecedented competitive structure produced by the Macron-Le Pen duel. Beyond the implicit rebuke to the old PS and LR politics, the election highlighted a more latent line of political division around economic globalization, immigration and European integration, which has been at play in the electoral politics of France since the mid-1990s, and of which Macron and Le Pen represented the two opposite poles.

Perhaps the key dynamic across the two rounds of the election is the relative importance of traditional ideology in the first and second rounds. For the first, the shock success of two outsider candidates, and the defeat of the mainstream parties, did not in and of itself herald the disappearance of the traditional divide in political competition. Indeed, the differentiation between candidates of the left and right, and radical/moderate delineations therein, still mattered fundamentally in voter choice. Even a centrist candidate such as Macron attracted voters from moderate space, albeit on both flanks—and, in the first round of the presidential, much more successfully from the left. Spatially, French political competition remained stable, resembling previous presidential races in France, most notably the 2007 election where François Bayrou won 18.6 per cent of the vote on a centrist bid similar to that of Macron in 2017.

Such a delineation could have remained dominant in the second round too, and the eventual vote share could be interpreted spatially, with voters to the left of Macron and to a cut-point equidistant from himself to Le Pen moving to support him in the second round, and the remainder, past the cut-point on the right, moving to Le Pen. However, the voter transfers already suggested this was simplistic as an explanation, and the model fit indices provided empirical evidence that here, whilst voters' decisions were influenced spatially, the better predictor of support was the EU dimension—and its associated values of openness and liberalism—rather than the traditional left–right opposition.

The literature on European integration and the national party system corroborates the increased salience of Europe as an issue, which interacts with other lines of division (De Vries 2010), blurring traditional ideological boundaries in French politics (Sauger et al. 2007). As Belot et al. (2013) suggest, the politicization of European issues had augmented in the 2012 elections, playing a more divisive role in the campaign. In 2012, the authors argue, European integration was aligned with the left–right dimension, around issues of social protection and national sovereignty. In 2017, however, the 'vertical' structure of competition in the presidential run-off was conducive to Europe separating further from the traditional left–right basis of opposition, thus finding its own way into France's presidential politics.

## Notes

1. Marine Le Pen, Speech in Lyon, 5 February 2017, http://www.frontnational.com/videos/assises-presidentielles-de-lyon-discours-de-marine-le-pen/.
2. 'Trump, Brexit, Front National, AfD: branches of the same tree', https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/11/16/trump-brexit-front-national-afd-branches-same-tree/.
3. 'Au Zénith de Paris, Marine Le Pen veut un "moratoire immédiat sur toute l'immigration légale"', http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/04/17/au-zenith-de-paris-marine-le-pen-veut-un-moratoire-immediat-sur-toute-l-immigration-legale_5112668_4854003.html.
4. http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-39765575/emmanuel-macron-says-eu-must-reform-or-face-frexit.
5. 'Tafta: 63% des Français ne font pas confiance au gouvernement', http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-eco/2016/05/06/97002-20160506FILWWW00138-tafta-63-des-francais-ne-font-pas-confiance-au-gouvernement.php.
6. 'Que dit vraiment Macron sur l'immigration?', http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/presidentielle-2017/20170426.OBS8601/marine-le-pen-ventriloque-que-dit-vraiment-macron-sur-l-immigration.html.
7. 'Emmanuel Macron: "No religion is a problem in France"', http://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-muslim-islam-no-religion-problem-in-france/.
8. 'La laïcité à géométrie variable de Marine Le Pen', http://www.la-croix.com/Religion/France/La-laicite-geometrie-variable-Marine-Le-Pen-2017-02-13-1200824424.

9. 'Qui est derrière le programme de Macron?', https://www.lesechos.fr/02/03/2017/lesechos.fr/0211841981384_qui-est-derriere-le-programme-de-macron--.htm.
10. 'A l'occasion du 1er mai, charge de Le Pen contre Macron et la "finance"', http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/le-pen-demande-a-macron-de-dire-qui-il-nommera-premier-ministre-01-05-2017-2123960_20.php.
11. 'Macron répond aux critiques et veut "convaincre"'. http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/04/25/emmanuel-macron-s-en-prend-au-diktat-de-la-bien-pensance_5117450_4854003.html.
12. http://www.ipsos.fr/decrypter-societe/2017-05-07-2nd-tour-presidentielle-2017-sociologie-electorats-et-profil-abstentionnistes. An alternative poll provides similar findings on vote transfers—http://opinionlab.opinion-way.com/dokumenty/OpinionWay-SondageJourduVote-Tour2Presidentielle20177Mai2017.pdf.
13. We should exercise some caution here—the direct effect is from Conservative/Christian Democrat party affiliation in Arzheimer and Carter's work, which we do not control for here. Also, they focus on religiosity, which in the French case may covary substantially with Catholic belonging, given the large proportion of non-Catholics in the secular group.
14. The pairwise correlation is –0.45. If the EU item is excluded, the strength of the globalization predictor does increase. However, it is a strong predictor even when the EU item is included in the specification.
15. It is nonetheless worth noting that the pairwise correlations of econ1 and econ2 with the left–right dimension are only 0.18 and –0.24, respectively.
16. We do not include those first-round Fillon and Mélenchon voters who abstained in the second round, first because, in models including this dependent category, there is very little of interest in the contrast with voters who cast a spoilt and blank ballot; and consequently, the inclusion reduces the clarity of the explanatory graphics. Given we do not use the model coefficients to calculate relative probabilities or similar coefficients, the bias in excluding a relatively small number of self-confessed abstainers is of little concern.

## References

Arzheimer, K., & Carter, E. (2009). Christian religiosity and voting for West European radical right parties. *West European Politics, 32*(5), 985–1011.

Belot, C., Cautrès, B., & Strudel, S. (2013). L'Europe comme enjeu clivant: ses effets perturbateurs sur l'offre électorale et les orientations de vote lors de l'élection présidentielle de 2012. *Revue française de science politique, 63*(6), 1081–1112.

Cox, G. W. (1997). *Making votes count: Strategic coordination in the World's electoral systems*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

De Vries, C. (2010). EU issue voting: Asset or liability? How European integration affects parties' electoral fortunes. *European Union Politics, 11*(1), 89–117.

Elgie, R. (1996). The institutional logics of presidential elections. In R. Elgie (Ed.), *Electing the French president: The 1995 presidential election* (pp. 51–72). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gougou, F. (2015). Les ouvriers et le vote Front National. Les logiques d'un réalignement electoral. In S. Crépon, et al. (dir.), Les faux-semblants du Front national. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Ivaldi, G. (2015). Towards the median economic crisis voter? The new leftist economic agenda of the Front National in France. *French Politics, 13*(4), 346–369.

Ivaldi, G. (2016). A new course for the French radical-right? The Front National and 'de-demonization'. In T. Akkerman, S. de Lange, & M. Rooduijn (Eds.), *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. Into the mainstream?* (pp. 231–253). Abingdon: Routledge.

Ivaldi, G., Akkerman, A., & Zaslove, A. (2017). La France populiste? CEVIPOF-Sciences Po, ENEF Note #30. Retrieved from https://s473c501d3c091e9a.jimcontent.com/download/version/1501506171/module/15360616425/name/LA_NOTE%2330_vague7.pdf

Kriesi, H.-P., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2008). *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mayer, N. (2013). From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: Electoral change on the far right. *Parliamentary Affairs, 66*(1), 160–178.

Perrineau, P. (Ed.). (2001). *Les croisés de la société fermée: l'Europe des extrêmes droites*. Paris: L'Aube.

Perrineau, P. (2012). *Le choix de Marianne: Pourquoi, pour qui votons-nous ?* Paris: Fayard.

Sauger, N., Brouard, S., & Grossman, E. (Eds.). (2007). *Les Français contre l'Europe?* Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

van der Eijk, C., & Niemöller, B. (1979). Recall accuracy and its determinants. *Acta Politica, 14*(3), 289–342.

CHAPTER 9

# The 2017 Legislative Elections: Manufacturing a Majority

Since 2002, French legislative elections have been considered secondary, due mostly to the realignment of the electoral calendar and the five-year presidential term. All three successive legislative elections in 2002, 2007 and 2012 had attested to a spill-over effect whereby the presidential ballot almost mechanically influenced the outcome of the legislatives. The essentially 'confirmatory function' of the legislative election suggests that the distribution of power depends first and foremost on who wins the presidential race. The majoritarian rule with a highly selective threshold for run-off participation—12.5 per cent of the registered electorate—produces majorities which exaggerate the weight of the leading party, in all three instances since 2002 that of the newly elected president, thus reinforcing the presidentialization of French politics and its traditional characterization as a 'Republican monarchy'.

This chapter compares the 2017 legislative elections with the two different subsets of legislative elections in France, namely the competitive mid-term legislatives (1978, 1986, 1993 and 1997), where the elections were held at some point during the electoral cycle, and their confirmatory post-presidential counterparts (1981, 1988, 2002, 2007 and 2012). While sharing some typical features engineered in particular by the electoral system, each type produces specific competitive opportunities in terms of party location in the party system—for example, mainstream versus periphery—and path-dependency with the previous presidential



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_9

election. We ask whether the 2017 election fit the type of post-presidential confirmatory election and look at the extent to which political renewal has been consolidated as a result of LRM's victory in the legislative arena.

## 1 A Model of French Legislative Elections

Legislative elections in France are traditionally conducive to bipolar outcomes favouring larger parties and engendering highly disproportional parliamentary majorities, a process of simplification which contrasts with the more fragmented underlying electoral party system. Overall, the political closure of the system and the exclusiveness of political opportunities to outsiders and new parties are most apparent in legislative elections.

Electorally, there are a number of political incentives for parties to run independently in legislative elections, first and foremost the imperative to maintain electoral viability and presence outside the presidential arena. While, as the example of the FN demonstrates, radical parties of the periphery may survive politically outside the *Palais Bourbon*, parliamentary representation is vital to parties of the mainstream. Moreover, France's system of public funding, which is based on the number of first-round votes received nationally by each party, clearly encourages parties to run as many candidates as possible across constituencies. Two trends illustrate the increase in presence and fragmentation of party competition in the legislatives: during the 1970s and the 1980s, there were on average 6.5 candidates per constituency, which compared with no less than 12 candidates on average since 1993; looking at the effective number of parties, it grew from an average of 3.2 parties before 1993 up to 6.6 since the early 1990s.

Such incentives interact with the strong local and regional dynamics of legislative elections. Legislative races in France typically produce an electoral premium for well-established *notables* with a strong local presence, as well as incumbents seeking re-election, profiles which evidently often overlap (Foucault 2006; Loonis 2006). Strategic voting in the form of *vote utile* is also more likely to occur in legislative elections, resulting in the inflation of support for parties of the mainstream and the relative marginalization of peripheral actors both left and right of the party system (Dupoirier and Sauger 2010). Such an effect is exemplified by the case of the FN's habitual post-presidential slump, revealed by the systematic decline of between one-quarter and one-half of support for FN legislative candidates compared with the corresponding previous presidential election.[1]

In legislative run-offs, the persistence of the model of left–right *désistement républicain* fosters intra-camp cooperation, helping larger parties within each bloc to achieve a majority while simultaneously allowing for allied minor parties' continuation albeit as political satellites dependent on the good will and at times leniency of the dominant party (e.g. PRG, PRV and the Greens). Additionally, the marked decrease in legislative voter turnout since the mid-1990s has produced a mechanical elevation of the institutional threshold for qualification in the second round, given the 12.5 per cent of registered voters required since the statutory change in 1976. Conducive to bipolarization, this rule has considerably reduced fragmentation in legislative run-offs, as demonstrated by the decreasing number of three-way contests from 79 in 1997 down to 10, 1 and 35 in 2002, 2007 and 2012 respectively. In the latter, national turnout was as low as 57.2 per cent in the first round giving an average threshold of 21.8 per cent of the valid vote cast which stopped many electorally relevant third candidates from progressing into the second round.

The institutional manufacturing of legislative outcomes accounts for the relative stability of a 'formal' dual party system represented in national institutions, which has also permitted the uninterrupted series of alternations in power of the two main left and right-wing blocs since the early 1980s (Cole 2003). The number of effective parties that achieve presence in the parliamentary arena attest to the 'simplification' of the formal party system which has occurred since the 1970s, from 4.2 parties in 1978 down to 2.8 in 2012.

The distorting effect of the majoritarian electoral law is visible across all types of legislative elections. As can be seen from Table 9.1, since 1978, disproportionality has occurred with the same magnitude across both confirmatory and competitive legislative races, showing similar values of about 16. Both types of legislative races have also produced relatively similar sizes of parliamentary majorities at about 61 per cent of all National Assembly seats on average since the late 1970s. Whilst voters are traditionally keen on providing their newly elected president with a working majority, there is no indication, however, that the presidential spillover effect produces larger majorities than those achieved by parties in more competitive mid-term legislative elections.

More substantial variation is found on the other hand within each category, which emphasizes the importance of context and shorter-term opportunities for party competition. The largest majority achieved since the late 1970s was that of the right-wing UPF alliance in 1993, which

**Table 9.1** Summary indicators for competitive and confirmatory legislative elections (1978–2012)

| *Indicator* | *Competitive* | *Confirmatory* |
|---|---|---|
| % turnout first round | 74.5 | 63.6 |
| % turnout second round | 74.4 | 64.1 |
| Mean effective number of electoral parties first round[a] | 6.1 | 4.7 |
| % of three-way run-offs | 5.5[c] | 2.0 |
| Disproportionality[b] | 16.5[c] | 16.2 |
| Size of majority (% of seats) | 60.8 | 60.6 |
| Effective number of parliamentary parties | 3.6 | 2.7 |
| Elections | 1978, 1986, 1993, 1997 | 1981, 1988, 2002, 2007, 2012 |
| *(N)* | *4* | *5* |

[a]Effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979)
[b]Least-Squares Index
[c]Excluding 1986, which was fought under proportional representation

secured no less than 81.8 per cent of parliamentary seats. Post-presidential legislative races show substantial variation, from 67 per cent after Mitterrand's election in 1981, down to 57.4 for Hollande in 2012. Post-presidential effects may be partially offset by short-term and campaign events, as illustrated in the policy debate surrounding the '*TVA sociale*' during the 2007 campaign and Valérie Trierweiler's public support to dissident socialist candidate Olivier Falorni against Ségolène Royal in the 2012 elections.

Finally, the two subsets of legislative races vary in terms of the competitive opportunities they provide to parties, which is reflected in levels of fragmentation both electorally and within the parliamentary arena. As illustrated in Table 9.1, party fractionalization is higher on average in competitive legislatives at 6.1 parties as opposed to 4.7 in the confirmatory type, a difference which is perceptible across adjacent elections over time. Similarly, the distorting institutional effect is more pronounced in legislative elections immediately following presidentials at an average 2.7 parties in the National Assembly compared with 3.6 in the more competitive legislative races. Overall, the evidence suggests that, in the context of a legislative election following the presidentials, an incentive to *voter utile* to provide a president with a working majority is likely to grant a premium to the presidential victor's party.

## 2 The Context of the 2017 Legislative Elections

We turn now to look at the extent to which these expectations bore out in 2017, in a situation with a brand-new political party (LRM) relying entirely upon its presidential linkage to mobilize support. Because of the complete reshuffling of party competition that occurred in the immediately preceding presidential election, the 2017 legislatives had the potential for a significant departure from the typical model of 'confirmatory' election, posing in particular the question of the extent to which opportunities for the successful restructuring of presidential competition by Emmanuel Macron could be emulated in the more complex and spatially fragmented dynamics of legislative races in France.

### *2.1 Establishing LRM as a Presidential Party*

Following Macron's victory in the presidential, the legislative elections of June 2017 played a crucial institutional role and their political consequences were far from shallow. The size, structure and longer-term cohesion of the LRM majority would be of tremendous importance to the future functioning of the newly appointed Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's government throughout the legislature, with memories of the political damage caused by the *frondeurs* socialist deputies during Hollande's previous presidency fresh in everyone's minds. Looking at the history of French elections, the 2017 legislatives were also reminiscent of the 1988 elections that had immediately followed François Mitterrand's re-election, where the socialist president had failed to win a parliamentary majority resulting in feeble governments attached to an unstable coalition with small parties of the centre–right. One notable difference with 1988 was of course that Mitterrand was seeking *re*-election, rather than enjoying a potential electoral honeymoon.

A first set of issues concerned therefore the extent to which the presidential spill-over effect would play out for a presidential bid outside the two main blocs and, what is more, operating against the traditional left, mainstream and radical right. The first round of the presidential election in April had shown four parties of approximately equal size at about a fifth of the valid vote, heralding a possibly highly competitive legislative race. Moreover, the first presidential approval ratings released after the election suggested only moderate momentum for Macron. Nonetheless, as we have seen in Chap. 6, soon after the appointment of Philippe's government, national

voting intention polls indicated a post-election bounce with an increase in support for LRM at about 30 per cent of the first-round vote.

This reflected that the choice of appointing a member of LR, close to Alain Juppé, as prime minister had been successful in sending a signal to centre–right voters. For instance, in the Harris-Interactive Poll of 18 May 2017,[2] no less than 25 per cent of Fillon's supporters in the presidential expected to move to LRM candidates, an increase of 12 percentage points on the previous poll conducted before the formation of the new government. Other signals to the centre–right included the appointment of former LR primary candidate Bruno Le Maire as minister of the economy, and of Gérald Darmanin, a close supporter of Nicolas Sarkozy in the Republicans, as minister of the budget. Finally, the roster of LRM candidates in the legislatives confirmed that no fewer than 76 constituencies had been allocated to their allies in Modem, which together with Bayrou's appointment, albeit short-lived, as minister for justice attested to the influence of the centrist wing within Macron's administration.[3]

Local polls showed significant variation across individual constituencies, however, reflecting the complex interplay between post-presidential momentum at national level and local competition where LRM candidates would be challenged by both their more established mainstream and radical counterparts. During the presidential campaign, *En Marche!* had been careful not to become a shelter for disgruntled socialists and Republicans. At the organizational level, a specific issue concerned the risk of accommodating organized socialist factions that could disrupt the left–right balance of support within the movement. With the exception of Bayrou's Modem, most of Macron's supporters were individuals with a low party profile or no partisan attachment, and independence from the PS and other parties was achieved through rejecting dual membership, requiring from all supporters of *En Marche!* that they abandon their previous affiliation as a prerequisite in particular for future legislative nominations.

The final list of LRM candidates confirmed that the new presidential party would run independently in 461 constituencies, featuring about 75 per cent of candidates from civil society with no previous official mandate—however, as will be discussed below, showing, for a substantial number of them, a previous ideological affiliation with either the left or the right—such as former bullfighter Marie Sara, mathematician Cédric Villani and former Judges Eric Halphen and Laurence Vichnievsky. Keeping with the objective to stay away from France's 'old politics', the LRM's roster of candidates included only 29 former deputies, mostly among those who

had supported Macron's presidential bid before the first round, such as PS deputies Richard Ferrand and Christophe Castaner, and former EELV members such as François de Rugy and Barbara Pompili. With the exception of Bruno Le Maire, the few candidates from within the ranks of the Republicans showed a much lower national profile and were primarily found among the *juppéistes*. The imperative of not being politically associated with Hollande's disastrous presidency also led LRM to reject disgruntled socialist leaders, most evidently Manuel Valls, despite their offer to run under the presidential colours.

Notwithstanding the 76 constituencies allocated to their Modem partners, the adoption of a more conciliatory attitude by LRM in the preparation for the legislatives was visible in the remaining 40 constituencies with no LRM presence. These concerned cases of socialist and Republican candidates deemed both ideologically and strategically 'compatible' with the new presidential majority. To the right, LR candidates such as Thierry Solère, Franck Riester and Benoist Apparu, and members of the UDI such as Yves Jégo would not face opposition from an LRM candidate, a situation similar to that found to the left with socialist leaders such as Stéphane Le Foll, Jean-Marie Le Guen, Ericka Bareigts and George Pau-Langevin, as well as would-be LRM candidate Valls. The political calculation behind this strategy was twofold. First, LRM would avoid fighting a losing battle against political *notables* with national notoriety and a strong local presence, while incorporating those potential external allies into the presidential majority after the election; second, such a position would leave intact LRM's claim to operate outside traditional political channels and party alternatives, thus fulfilling Macron's promise of renewal and change.

The ambiguity in the strategy of the 'non-aggression' pact at constituency level was revealed in the campaign by previous members of Valls's government such as Marisol Touraine and Myriam El Khomri who would run under the banner of the presidential majority yet without any formal LRM endorsement. Finally, Macron's leniency showed its limits in Paris as it was clear that the capital city had become an important target for the newly elected president. Following Macron's exceptional showing in the second round of the presidential election at 89.7 per cent of the Paris vote (34.8 per cent in the first round), Paris was increasingly seen as the future political promised land for LRM, setting Benjamin Griveaux on course to challenge current Mayor Anne Hidalgo in the 2020 municipal elections. With the exception of George Pau-Langevin and Myriam El Khomri, LRM ran candidates across all 18 Parisian constituencies, challenging

other mayoral hopefuls such as LR candidate Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet and former EELV leader Cécile Duflot, as well as prominent socialist leaders such as Jean-Christophe Cambadélis.

### *2.2 From Presidential Failure to Partisan Decline: PS and LR*

The political expansion of LRM contrasted sharply with the electoral decline of the PS. With an average national support of about 6 per cent, voting intention polls confirmed the potential collapse of traditional socialism in its local constituencies, which would deliver another and potentially more damaging political blow to the old party of Epinay. The presidential debacle had left the party in tatters and profoundly divided over their strategy vis-à-vis Emmanuel Macron's EM!. Just before the first round, the PS had secured an agreement with EELV in exchange for Yannick Jadot's support of Benoît Hamon, which gave the Greens 42 reserved constituencies, including in particular the 10 incumbent EELV deputies, while the ecologist movement withdrew in another 53 constituencies to get out of the way of their socialist counterparts. Earlier in March, the PS had also brokered a deal with the left radicals of the PRG giving the latter a total of 40 constituencies, including the 12 PRG incumbents.

Beyond electoral tactics, the PS 'wait and see' legislative campaign confirmed a heavy dose of political fatalism and apparent lack of spirit in the socialist troops, reflecting the strategic and political deadlock in which the PS had found itself in the presidentials, with virtually no campaigning space between the radical and social–liberal left-wing alternatives represented by Mélenchon and Macron. The party's legislative platform approved by the National Bureau on 9 May marked a significant departure from Hamon's presidential programme, abandoning in particular his most cherished idea of a universal income, and reflecting the attempt to moderate policies and take the PS closer to the new presidential majority in what was deemed an 'autonomous but constructive attitude'.[4] On 10 May, Hamon announced that he would launch a new political movement in the summer, while remaining a member of the PS. This was complemented by a number of other initiatives within the PS, in particular the announcement by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, socialist Mayor of Lille Martine Aubry and former Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira of the creation of a new movement *Dès Demain* ('As soon as tomorrow') to the left of the PS, explicitly opposing Macron's social liberal agenda.

A similar array of issues confronted a profoundly divided mainstream right in the aftermath of the disastrous presidential campaign by François Fillon. Despite the latter's withdrawal from the political stage, there was little indication that LR could fully perform its role as the 'natural' party of opposition, while simultaneously facing an increasing risk of a split that could sign the end of the UMP era of right-wing unity since the early 2000s. Whilst LR's campaign claimed that the party would secure an absolute majority in the *Palais Bourbon* to force cohabitation on the newly elected president, there was little doubt that this would be a very difficult objective to achieve. Post-presidential voting intention polls showed the LR–UDI alliance capped at a national average of about 20 per cent, which suggested that local candidates of the right would face strong opposition from both LRM and the FN in the constituencies, failing also to fully dissociate themselves from Fillon's fiasco in the presidentials. This provided strong incentives for the continuation of the UDI–LR alliance that had been formed in the 2014 municipals: at the height of the Fillon crisis during the presidential campaign in March, the centrists had managed to seal an advantageous electoral pact with their dominant Republican partners, whereby the UDI would lead the right-wing alliance in 96 constituencies in the legislatives, including its 28 outgoing deputies and another 40 'winnable' seats, in exchange for its support for the Fillon campaign. In June, common UDI/LR candidates were to be found in 507 of the 577 constituencies, with the UDI effectively leading the right-wing coalition in 86 cases and the Republicans representing the moderate right in another 421 constituencies. Elsewhere, the right was represented by a *divers droite* candidate.

As regards LR party leadership, the marginalization of Juppé and Sarkozy that had occurred in the Republican primary in November 2016, together with Fillon's forced exile, had left the French right without a clear leader. The compromise reached on 2 May by LR's political bureau on the appointment of François Baroin as campaign leader hardly concealed deep party factionalism and disagreement over policies and strategies, opposing moderate centre–right elites such as Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Thierry Solère and Christian Estrosi, more open to cooperation with the newly elected president, to right-wing hardliners such as Brice Hortefeux, Eric Ciotti and Bruno Retailleau under Interim LR president Laurent Wauquiez, who would clearly favour taking the party closer to the Front National. The legislative campaign showed some strategic recalibration of LR's position vis-à-vis the FN, with François

Baroin suggesting that the 'neither nor' line adopted since the 2011 cantonals could be reviewed on a case-by-case basis in constituencies with a strong FN presence. The preservation of the *front républicain* against the FN had already profoundly divided the LR leadership between the two rounds of the presidential election, with moderates such as Alain Juppé, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Valérie Pécresse, François Baroin, Luc Chatel, Thierry Solère and Xavier Bertrand explicitly supporting Macron—'grasp[ing] the hand offered by the new President Macron'[5]—whilst others such as Laurent Wauquiez and Eric Ciotti would simply call to stop the FN.

At the policy level, the legislative campaign revealed the crisis of identity amongst Republican and centre–right leaders and the need to overcome the most politically sensitive aspects in the liberal–conservative legacy of the short-lived episode of Fillonisme in the French right. The new legislative manifesto adopted by LR's political bureau on 9 May resulted from a political compromise between the party's various strands arising from the need to moderate Fillon's pro-austerity presidential platform to reach out to younger voters and increase the right's appeal to working class and lower-salariat voters. Changes to the party's programme included, for instance, abandoning Fillon's proposal to augment VAT rates and increasing the timescale for reducing the number of civil servants by 500,000 from five to seven years, while simultaneously advocating a 10 per cent tax cut for all households against Macron's proposal to increase social security contributions (CSG).

### *2.3 The Legislative Hangover of the Radical Alternatives: LFI and FN*

The 2017 legislative campaign revealed the weakening of the two radical alternatives embodied by *La France Insoumise* and the *Front National*, which had captured a sizeable share of the presidential vote. This suggested a traditional pattern of *vote utile* and recalibration of party competition in the legislatives, while simultaneously pointing to the political isolation resulting from the populist anti-establishment strategy endorsed by both parties. It was increasingly clear that both LFI and the FN were failing to capitalize fully on their presidential performances beyond a few 'safe seats' where they had achieved their best scores, which raised doubts as to their ability to ensure a strong presence in the future assembly and win enough seats to form their own parliamentary groups.

Mélenchon entered the legislative campaign with a view to establishing his leadership over the left-wing opposition to President Macron, hoping to ride the political momentum that he had created in the presidentials and to bring the process of political marginalization of both the socialists and the communists to its conclusion. That LFI was leading a strong offensive charge was confirmed by the presence of its candidates in traditional PC strongholds such as Ivry (Val-de-Marne), Grigny (Essonne) and Montreuil (Seine-Saint-Denis), as well as against Benoît Hamon in Trappes (Yvelines). A few exceptions included cases of outgoing communist MPs who had publicly endorsed Mélenchon in the presidential race, such as Marie-George Buffet (Seine-Saint-Denis) and Nicolas Sansu (Cher).

Consistent with the populist anti-establishment posture that he had endorsed in the presidential, Mélenchon's strategy of *tabula rasa* had led him to turn a blind eye to the many efforts by Pierre Laurent's PCF, Yannick Jadot's EELV and Benoît Hamon's PS to build a joint platform for the legislatives, a decision which was at odds with the more traditional pattern of left-wing party cooperation in recent French legislative elections, and which also reflected important financial issues relating to the allocation of public funds to parties with larger number of candidates and votes. Moreover, Mélenchon's campaign was punctuated by a number of controversies, as revealed, for instance, in his attacks against former Ministry of Interior Bernard Cazeneuve whom he accused of the 'murder' of the ecologist activist Rémi Fraisse who had been accidentally killed by a police grenade during a demonstration in 2014.[6]

During the campaign, voting intention polls showed a substantial decrease in support for LFI candidates at about 13 per cent on average, down from Mélenchon's 19.6 per cent in the first round of the presidential, potentially giving only a handful of seats. Whilst present in 556 constituencies, the relatively inexperienced LFI candidates operated in a highly fragmented party sub-system of the left, confronting well-established socialist incumbents as well as the traditional presence of far left parties with LO and the NPA running independent candidates across 553 and 339 constituencies, respectively. Reflecting the emancipation from their former communist allies, LFI candidates were faced with another strong challenge from PCF representatives in 484 constituencies. The latter managed to forge a number of tactical pacts with other left-wing forces such as EELV, Clémentine Autain's *Ensemble* as well as a number of socialist candidates locally, also endorsing 72 candidates from outside the party.

Post-presidential 'blues' and political disgruntlement were particularly perceptible in the FN's legislative campaign. Despite amassing a record 10.6 million votes in the presidential run-off, Marine Le Pen had failed to dislodge the *front républicain* and break the glass ceiling, which had created both political disillusionment and friction within the party. Strategic disagreement over party strategy and policies were publicly exposed during the legislative campaign, showing the presence of profoundly diverging strategic orientations in the FN and, for the first time ever since 2011, of internal contestation of Marine Le Pen's leadership following her poor performance in the second-round debate.

As had already been the case after the 2015 regionals, where the FN had failed to win regional councils, most of the criticisms concerned the influence of Florian Philippot and his taking the FN too far to the left of French politics, ignoring its historic right-wing location. Leaders such as Gilbert Collard also criticized the FN's plan to shed the euro, which had alienated many moderate voters in the presidentials.[7] As the internal crisis grew, the announcement by Marion Maréchal-Le Pen of her retirement from politics on 10 May 2017 dealt another heavy blow to the legislative campaign, particularly in the southern region where she had established strong political leadership since 2015.

Finally, the FN legislative campaign was marked by the breakdown of the electoral agreement with Nicolas Dupont-Aignan's DLF. The two parties had started negotiations between the two rounds of the presidentials to examine the conditions for local agreements in about 50 constituencies, rejecting common lists, however, as both parties needed to seek the largest possible roster of candidates to access public funding. The political divorce occurred on 13 May, whereby both parties returned to their previous situation as politically isolated actors at the radical right fringe of French politics. DLF announced their intention to run in nearly all constituencies, yet failed to produce enough candidates, eventually managing a presence in only 388 constituencies. This contrasted with the more widespread presence of FN candidates across 571 constituencies, including Dupont-Aignan's home town of Yerres (Essonne).

As had already been the case in 2012, an electorally and politically isolated FN would also compete against rival splinter far right groups under the banner of the *Union des Patriotes* (Union of Patriots) cartel, with Jean-Marie Le Pen leading the charge against his daughter together with the Civitas extreme right catholic movement, former FN's Secretary General Carl Lang's *Parti de la France* (PDF) and Karim Ouchikh's *Souveraineté, Identité*

*et Libertés* (SIEL), previously allied with Marine Le Pen in the *Rassemblement Bleu Marine* (RBM) in 2012. The *Union* ran a total of 156 candidates, including constituencies with prominent FN leaders such as Gilbert Collard (Gard) and Jean-Lin Lacapelle (Bouches-du-Rhône), sparing, however, Marine Le Pen in the north.

## 3 The 2017 Legislative Results

The presidential party, LRM, received 28.2 per cent of the first-round vote and it managed to secure an absolute majority in seats (see Table 9.2). Nationally, the party enjoyed just over a 4 percentage point surplus relative to Macron's first-round presidential vote. Across the other parties, the standard 'zero-sum' pattern of alternation, with the incumbent losing seats and the previous opposition gaining, did not hold true. Both LR but most notably—and expectedly—PS lost a substantial proportion of their seats, and proportionately far more than the change in their voting score. As the lead-up to the polls suggested, both LFI and FN performed poorly relative to their presidential candidates, with the latter in particular disappointed in its inability to reach double figures of deputies, let alone form a parliamentary group in the Assembly. LFI did manage to form a parliamentary group, but its win remained limited to pockets of support in certain localized areas, rather than evidence of a broader national movement gaining traction.

### *3.1 Another 'Confirmatory' Election?*

As the results in Table 9.2 suggest, the 2017 legislative elections seem to conform very strongly to the confirmatory model. If we combine LRM and Modem's seat share—350 seats in total making up 60.7 per cent of all National Assembly seats—the 2017 majority is identical to the average of 60.7 per cent across all previous legislatives elections since 1978, whether confirmatory or mid-term (see Table 9.1). The majoritarian logic of the electoral system is seen more clearly in looking at the filtering mechanism the two rounds provide. Disproportionality scores 21.2, which is very high, much larger in magnitude than 16.2 average across all previous confirmatory elections since 1981.

This reflects the higher degree of party fragmentation in the first round, most obviously visible in the 7881 candidates. Looking across the two rounds, the winning party, LRM, alone benefits from a huge vote–seat deviation, with 28.2 per cent of the first-round vote, but over 53 per cent

**Table 9.2** 2017 Legislative election first- and second-round results

| *Party* | *First round* | | | *Second round* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Votes** | **% valid** | **Seats** | **Votes** | **% valid** | **% seats** |
| Extreme left | 175,214 | 0.77 | | | | |
| PCF | 615,487 | 2.72 | | 217,833 | 1.20 | 10 |
| LFI | 2,497,622 | 11.03 | | 883,573 | 4.86 | 17 |
| PS | 1,685,677 | 7.44 | | 1,032,842 | 5.68 | 30 |
| PRG | 106,311 | 0.47 | | 64,860 | 0.36 | 3 |
| Other left | 362,281 | 1.60 | 1 | 263,488 | 1.45 | 11 |
| Ecologist | 973,527 | 4.30 | | 23,197 | 0.13 | 1 |
| Other | 500,309 | 2.21 | | 100,574 | 0.55 | 3 |
| Regionalist | 204,049 | 0.90 | | 137,490 | 0.76 | 5 |
| LRM | 6,391,269 | 28.21 | 2 | 7,826,245 | 43.06 | 306 |
| Modem | 932,227 | 4.12 | | 1,100,656 | 6.06 | 42 |
| UDI | 687,225 | 3.03 | 1 | 551,784 | 3.04 | 17 |
| LR | 3,573,427 | 15.77 | | 4,040,203 | 22.23 | 112 |
| Other right | 625,345 | 2.76 | | 306,074 | 1.68 | 6 |
| DLF | 265,420 | 1.17 | | 17,344 | 0.10 | 1 |
| FN | 2,990,454 | 13.20 | | 1,590,869 | 8.75 | 8 |
| Extreme right | 68,320 | 0.30 | | 19,034 | 0.10 | 1 |
| | **Votes** | **% registered** | **% valid** | **Votes** | **% registered** | **% valid** |
| Registered | 47,570,988 | | | 47,293,103 | | |
| Abstention | 24,403,480 | 51.30 | | 27,128,488 | 57.36 | |
| Voted | 23,167,508 | 48.70 | | 20,164,615 | 42.64 | |
| Blank | 357,018 | 0.75 | 1.54 | 1,409,784 | 2.98 | 6.99 |
| Spoiled | 156,326 | 0.33 | 0.67 | 578,765 | 1.22 | 2.87 |
| Valid | 22,654,164 | 47.62 | 97.78 | 18,176,066 | 38.43 | 90.14 |

Source: Ministry of the Interior official results

of the seats without its Modem allies. Conversely, for the smaller radical parties, the institutional framework works against them—8 seats (1.3 per cent) for the FN on a first-round vote share of 13.2 per cent; and 17 (2.9 per cent) for LFI on a vote share of 11.0 per cent. LR and PS's inertia as governing parties ensures that, while neither wins any bonus given LRM's dominance, the vote/seat share is roughly equal. In the final make-up of the National Assembly, the fragmentation of the first round drops down to three effective parties—comparable to the average level in confirmatory legislative elections at 2.7 parties.

Evidence of an institutional premium too for the presidential party from the simple fate of the candidates. Of the 529 LRM sponsored-

candidates, only 19 failed to make the second round. Eight of these were in DOM–TOM constituencies, as well as the two Corsican candidates, and the rest fell in a very narrow North-East band in Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Haute-Marne, Aisne and the Ardennes. All eight of these constituencies featured FN candidates (all defeated) in the *ballottage*. In the remaining 510 constituencies, LRM managed to exploit its centrist position to establish itself as the counter to either a left or a (radical) right opponent in the second round—enabled, to some extent, by the confirmatory nature of the election. Secondly, all six ministers from the Philippe government who put themselves up for election—Annick Girardin (Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon), Bruno Le Maire (Eure), Christophe Castaner (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence), Richard Ferrand (Finistère), Mounir Mahjoubi and Marielle de Sarnez in Paris—won their seats.

Overall, the majority achieved by LRM looks to constitute a popular landslide. However, there are very good reasons to believe that this majority did not constitute a popular wave of support for Macron's party. First, abstention had increased markedly across both rounds. For the first time, abstention exceeded turnout: voter participation plunged to 48.7 per cent in the first round and 42.6 per cent in the second. Second, as had already been the case in the presidential election, most notably in the run-off, the level of blank and spoiled ballots reached a record high as well—an unremarkable 2.8 per cent in the first round, but some 9.8 per cent in the second. Part of the low turnout, particularly in the second round, was due to the anticipated success of LRM. Perceptions of the Macron electoral machine led supporters of other parties, particularly FN and LFI, to regard support for their parties as a wasted vote. Polls showed that Mélenchon and Le Pen supporters from the presidential first round were much more likely not to turn out. However, the level of spoiled and blank votes in the second round echoed the similar increase in the second round of the presidential vote. Almost one in ten voters could not choose between the two candidates presented by the 'simplifying logic' of the majoritarian system.

Given the low turnout in the first round, that simplifying logic was even more brutal than normal. With an effective threshold for progression to the second round of 25.7 per cent, only one third-placed candidate, the *frontiste* Bruno Subtil in Aube, managed to make it to a *triangulaire* (three-way run-off), compared with 35 in 2012. This was exacerbated by the number of parties in competition—6.8, compared with 4.7 on average in confirmatory elections. Indeed, this even exceeded the average number

of parties in mid-term elections (6.1 on average, see Table 9.1), and resulted from the presence of a large new party, LRM, as well as the lack of cooperation amongst parties of the radical left, a stronger FN, and presence—if disappointingly—of the two former 'parties of government'. In this respect, the equal fragmentation of the presidential electorate across four evenly matched candidates was replicated and even amplified in the legislative election.

On 18 June, there were a total of 573 second-round run-offs, of which 516 involved a LRM/Modem candidate, while the left, the right and the FN were present in 165, 316 and 120 constituencies, respectively. Confirming the decline of bipolar politics, there were only 16 constituencies with a traditional left/right opposition. Moreover, the configuration of the 2017 run-offs proved the chameleon nature of LRM in the legislatives and the winning location that it occupied at the centre of the party system, most evidently at the electoral expenses of a left in tatters. Contrasting the 2017 situation with the previous elections of 2012, LRM replaced the left in a total of 256 constituencies, in 241 of these against the moderate right. There were on the other hand fewer cases where the right had given way to LRM, concerning a total of 94 constituencies where LRM challenged a left-wing candidate. Finally, replicating the presidential run-off, LRM was the main competitor against the FN in over a hundred constituencies where the radical right had progressed to the run-off.

### *3.2 Party Performances*

The dominance of LRM candidates in their presence in the vast majority of the second-round *ballottages*, shared across left and right (as well as radical right) competitors can be dissected further. Whilst candidate selection occurred behind closed doors, through the nine-person *commission d'investiture* (Evans 2017), there is strong evidence that the 'goodness-of-fit' of LRM candidates played a role in their electoral performance. Candidates with a right-wing background performed better than average in constituencies that had elected a right-wing deputy in 2012, but worse than average in left-leaning constituencies (Evans and Ivaldi 2017). However, there was no similar effect for those from a left background standing in right-wing constituencies, suggesting that the pools of support open on the left were largely conquered in the presidential race, whereas on the right, the appointment of Philippe, Le Maire and Darmanin

had opened up sections of the right-wing electorate to the governing party.

As with Hamon's performance in the presidential race, the PS saw its vote collapse in all but a few of its strongholds, returning one-tenth of its 2012 contingent at a mere 30 seats. Former ministers who were spared competition from LRM managed to hang on, including Stéphane Le Foll in Sarthe, Manuel Valls in Essonne and Ericka Bareigts on the island of Réunion. Similarly, PS deputies who had been identified as 'compatible' with Macron's government and were not challenged by LRM also won, such as Christophe Bouillon in Seine-Maritime, whose campaign material did not mention the PS, and François André in Ille-et-Vilaine, who had explicitly stated his support for Macron over Hamon in the first round of the presidential election. A few *frondeurs*, such as Régis Janico by a handful of votes in Loire, and Delphine Batho in Ségolène Royal's old constituency in Deux-Sèvres, held on, as did a coterie of pro-government deputies, including Olivier Faure, the departing head of the parliamentary group, and Laurence Dumont, vice-president of the National Assembly in Calvados. However, these are all exceptions to a general rule of loss which extended to significant *éléphants* of the modern PS—First Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis in the first round in Paris, and Patrick Mennucci in Marseille, still weakened locally by disastrous municipal elections in 2014, and successfully targeted by Jean-Luc Mélenchon for his own seat.

As well as the unpopularity of Hollande and the government, the left was weakened by a continued inability to unite, both across parties spanning the radical left/social liberal segment of the political spectrum, but also, in the case of the PS, those same divisions within their own party. LFI managed to win 17 deputies, many in traditional strongholds of the left and radical left, such as Seine-Saint-Denis, where it won six seats, Nord, where it won two, and Ariège, a South-West bastion of the PS. However, whilst some of these were in cooperation with the PCF due to agreements at the local level—for example, Stéphane Peu in the second *circonscription* of Seine-Saint-Denis—at the national level, the two parties were steadfastly unable to forge an agreement, a division which had poisoned the relations between the two parties throughout Hollande's presidency (see Chap. 4) and which continued into the Assembly with LFI and PCF forming two separate parliamentary groups. LFI thereby found itself competing against more established PCF candidates in many constituencies, without the benefit of a well-organized national infrastructure to mobilize support. The PCF for its part managed to win 10 seats which, together

with four overseas deputies, allowed it to reform its parliamentary group. Overall, this resulted in a split of the left into fundamentally four tranches of voters, across the three main parties, but with a fourth segment just as sizeable having moved to support Macron and LRM from the liberal wing.

Despite falling far short of its stated ambition to constitute the cohabitation partner with Macron, LR managed to secure its position as the second-largest group in the National Assembly, consolidating this with a much greater resilience against LRM's siren-call—only Bruno Le Maire left the party to stand for LRM, as compared with 23 from the left—and the continuation of the alliance with the UDI, despite the pressure this came under from Fillon's candidature. LR faced competition on both flanks, but proved remarkably resilient against the FN challenge, particularly in regions of strong support for Le Pen's party, for example, Alpes-Maritimes, where LR won six of the nine constituencies, and losing to LRM, rather than the FN, in the others. The situation in the Alpes-Maritimes illustrates the local presence of the moderate right through its well-established network of *notables* such as Eric Ciotti in Nice. As we have argued elsewhere (Evans and Ivaldi 2017), right-wing incumbents were generally more resilient to the LRM wave in the second round of the legislatives. Overall, then, the moderate right secured just over 130 seats, enough to establish its profile as main opposition party, yet still the worst performance achieved by the French right since 1988 and nothing resembling the halcyon days of 1993 where the RPR and the UDF together had seized over 470 seats against the left.

The FN's performance fell well short of the gains expected even shortly before the presidential election. Indeed, even compared with the traditional post-presidential slump highlighted earlier, 2017 is the largest post-presidential depression at 8.1 percentage points compared with a previous high of 6.7 point in 2002. FN voter disgruntlement; the impact of Le Pen's failure in the presidential run-off; an extremist profile in the presidential debate; party factionalism; political scandals; Marion Maréchal's retirement from politics—all chipped away at the party's legislative vote share. Whilst certainly a disappointment for Le Pen, the smaller number of FN run-offs should be contrasted with the party's previous performance in 2012, however, where a roughly similar vote share in the first round had only given 59 second-round run-offs to the FN, compared with 120 this time, reflecting the party's consolidation in its traditional strongholds, mostly in the Northern and Mediterranean regions.

### *3.3 The Degree of Political Renewal*

In the lead-up to the legislative elections, a key focus of media coverage was the likely renewal of personnel in the National Assembly that would result. Even prior to the expected domination of LRM, attention had been drawn to the large proportion of deputies who would not be recontesting their seats—216, or 37 per cent in total.[8] There were a number of motivations for retiring, from a wish to withdraw from political life—most notably, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, but also former prime ministers Jean-Marc Ayrault and Bernard Cazeneuve. Others, such as Jean-François Copé and Alain Rousset, fell foul of *cumul des mandats* legislation, preventing them from holding a seat in the *Palais Bourbon* and a mayoral position. Indeed, this legislation still affected 223 members of the new Assembly, who were in a position of *cumulard* at the end of June.[9] Still others were obliged by criminal investigations to withdraw. However, undoubtedly many others, particularly socialists, will have realized the mountain needing to be climbed in securing re-election with their government and president so low in the polls. Unsurprisingly, then, the largest absolute number of withdrawals (106) came from the socialist group in the Assembly, followed by 75 candidates from LR. When added to the number of seats won by LRM in 2017, the tally reached 72 per cent new entrants to the Assembly.[10] Even the Fifth Republic's founding legislature in 1958 only had two-thirds new entrants.

A related focus was on the profile of those candidates standing for election, particularly for LRM which had put in place a series of quotas on the number of civil society candidates (i.e. candidates who had never held an elected position before), strict gender parity, and a limit to the number of previous mandates (3). Among the new intake, a similar evolution was visible. A total of 224 women were elected in 2017 (38.8 per cent) as opposed to 155 (26.9 per cent) in 2012, continuing the substantial increase since the mid-1990s.[11] Also noticeable was the winning rate of female candidates. In 2007, almost the same proportion of female candidates had been rostered (40.0 per cent) but with 12 percentage points fewer elected—and many more than in 2007, when fewer than one in five deputies was female. In short, women had been selected for a large number of winnable seats than previously.

Whilst not the subject of legislation like gender parity, the age of the Assembly members was symbolic in an election dominated by the need for renewal. From an average of 53 in 2012, the new Assembly dropped some five years to 48—still hardly a group of youngsters, but a significant change

**Table 9.3** Average age of legislative candidates by party (2017)

| *Party* | *Average age of candidates* |
|---|---|
| PCF | 51 |
| DLF | 51 |
| LFI | 46 |
| LR | 50 |
| Modem | 52 |
| LRM | 46 |
| PS | 50 |
| UDI | 51 |
| FN | 47 |

Source: Ministry of the Interior candidate data (https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/elections-legislatives-des-11-et-18-juin-2017-liste-des-candidats-du-1er-tour/)

from the past. Yet this was reflected in the candidate selection, and was not simply a favouring of younger candidates by voters. Table 9.3 shows the breakdown of average age by the main parties across all candidates, and by the main parties. As one might expect, the three parties of renewal—LRM, LFI and FN—all have average ages lower than the established former parties of government. Also, deputies from an immigrant background (ethnicity not being a legal designation in France) rose from eight socialists in 2012, to 35, excluding overseas constituencies.[12]

However, in terms of occupational strata, the Assembly remains highly elitist, with the vast majority of deputies coming from what would be called 'middle-class' jobs—managers, entrepreneurs, professionals and so on. Conversely, there are no *ouvriers* at all in the *Palais Bourbon*.[13] Inevitably, those with a university degree and graduates of *les grandes écoles* are over-represented—some 70 per cent of deputies.[14] LRM deputies have strong representation across these latter elite institutions, but among its candidates, it is worth noting that the technical expertise wanted by Macron among his Parliamentary support favoured engineering, commerce and marketing, rather than the traditional *énarques* and *polytechniciens* (Rouban 2017: 8) which remain more represented among LR–UDI deputies.

## 4 Conclusion: A Reconfiguration of the Party System?

The legislative elections confirmed the majoritarian logic of the electoral law, and the broader institutional logic of a post-presidential confirmatory election. It is inconceivable that a new party, formed only just over a year

before its first electoral test, could win such a sizeable majority without the election being decidedly second-order, and specifically designed to provide the incumbent president with a working majority. As we have seen in previous chapters, the institutional logic was also backed up by a desire on the part of a substantial proportion of the electorate to see renewal within the political system. Whilst the level of success of LRM may seem to suggest that this was the party of renewal, we should recall that, for their respective electorates, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and particularly Marine Le Pen represented the opportunity for renewal. From another perspective, Macron, Mélenchon and Le Pen all played the role of anti-system parties, in their opposition to the to-date dominant parties of government.

In winning the election, LRM by definition can no longer be considered anti-system. Continued opposition to the new government and to many constitutional and institutional foundations of the Fifth Republic in its modern manifestation does, however, still imbue LFI and FN with an anti-system status. Characterizing the FN as anti-system is not a new label (Ysmal 1992; Ivaldi and Evans 2007; Camus 2012) and, despite the internal tensions between the social conservatives and radical populists in the party over whether or not rapprochement with LR is strategically desirable, the continued ostracization of the party by other political movements confirms this as a functional label. The label for LFI is less common, but many elements of its programme and that of its leader, particularly the establishing of a constituent assembly and the abolition of the 'presidential monarchy',[15] plus its unwillingness to cooperate with its nearest neighbours, the PCF, or the radical wing of the PS, places its relatively clear in an anti-system position.

To the respective moderate flanks of these two parties, we find the two former parties of government, LR and PS, who are split into *constructifs*, willing to work with Macron, and for want of a better label, *non-constructifs* who see the parties' future in opposition to LRM and, for many, looking more to the anti-system flank for cooperation. These parties therefore find themselves competing on both sides, in party competitive terms. Finally, we find the coalition of LRM and Modem in the centre, explicitly placing themselves across the left–right divide, and also competing with the moderate left and right flanks.

It would be difficult to design a better model of the polarized pluralist type of party system (Sartori 1976). From a Fifth Republic which has conventionally been seen as shifting the party system of the Fourth Republic into an exemplar of moderate pluralism (Bartolini 1984; Evans 2003), the context of 2017 has apparently allowed the majoritarian and presidentialized

institutional drivers to enforce the *status quo ante*. This characterization of the current party array is further reinforced by the effective number of parties in the presidential and legislative races: 5.3 and 6.8, respectively. While the National Assembly features an 'average' number of effective parties, the electoral array is far more crowded. If this is the case, then the competitive dynamics on the wings will see a continued pressure on the radical flanks of PS and LR towards LFI and FN. The *porosité* increasingly seen between LR and FN (Gougou and Labouret 2013) will dog the former's electoral future, most evidently assuming that hardliners such as Laurent Wauquiez take over the party in the next months, and present the unwelcome opportunity of coalition (assuming that LR remains coherent, pulled on its moderate wing by LRM). Similarly, the position of the PS vis-à-vis LFI, *Dès Demain* and, potentially, Hamon's *Mouvement du 1er juillet*, if it does not merge with the PS, will tend to radicalize the party's discourse. Memories of the effect of such centrifugal dynamics in the 2017 presidential primaries—namely, the loss of the presidential ballot, and subsequent legislative losses—are unlikely to undermine this evolution.

Of course, the key variable in this return to polarized pluralism is the cohesiveness of LRM. As a party formed exclusively as a presidential support vehicle, to provide a legislative majority not requiring any necessary cooperation with either LR or PS, it currently has no democratic life of its own. LRM is yet to contest an election independently. Given the majority of its deputies, and indeed members, are political newcomers, its capacity to assert itself as a significant actor in the French party system is still limited. However, it is unlikely that its deputies will remain subservient to their presidential leader in the longer term. Once the system is understood, the party will begin to assume a life of its own, similar to other, established parties. How stable is a centrist position? In the polarized pluralist setting, appeals from extreme anti-system parties can be countered by offers from the centre—the oil-slick of the Italian First Republic which, if unsustainable in the long term, shored up power for *Democrazia Cristiana* for some 40 years. However, dissatisfaction with leadership can equally lead to schisms, whereby the uneasy alliance between left and right within a party disintegrates under pressure from an appeal from a neighbouring party.

How the parliamentary group deals with these pressures internally, and how LRM performs in the second-order elections from 2019 onwards, will be the acid test of whether the realignment of the French political system around a centrist force proves to be long-lasting, or simply an

unsustainable by-product of a victorious presidential candidate's electoral strategy.

## Notes

1. Specifically, in confirmatory elections—1988: 14.4 per cent (P) to 9.8 per cent (L); 2002; 19.2 per cent (P) to 12.5 per cent (L); 2007: 10.4 per cent (P) to 4.7 per cent (L); 2012: 17.9 per cent (P) to 13.8 per cent (L). In 1981, Jean-Marie Le Pen could not stand in the presidential election due to a lack of *parrainages*. In the legislative elections, the party won 0.28 per cent of the vote, nationally.
2. 'Intentions de vote pour les élections législatives de 2017', http://harris-interactive.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/05/Rapport-Harris-Indeed-Intentions-vote-elections-legislatives-LCP.pdf.
3. This followed, however, a short-lived crisis between LRM and Bayrou after LRM had announced their first list of candidates on 12 May, which had only 38 seats reserved for their centrist partners, whereas, Bayrou claimed, the initial agreement concerned 120.
4. 'Le PS abandonne plusieurs propositions d'Hamon dans son projet pour les législatives', http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/05/09/legislatives-le-ps-s-accorde-sur-une-plate-forme-programmatique_5124972_5076653.html.
5. 'Des élus de droite et du centre appellent leur famille politique à "répondre à la main tendue" par Macron', http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/05/15/des-elus-de-droite-et-du-centre-appellent-leur-famille-politique-a-repondre-a-la-main-tendue-par-macron_5128049_823448.html.
6. 'Bernard Cazeneuve veut porter plainte contre Jean-Luc Mélenchon', http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/05/29/bernard-cazeneuve-va-porter-plainte-contre-jean-luc-melenchon_5135179_823448.html.
7. On 15 May 2017, Philippot denied that he would leave the FN, announcing the launch of his personal movement within the party, named *Les Patriotes* (The Patriots), a weapon of war ahead of a potentially heated party congress in 2018.
8. 'Des ténors politiques en danger aux législatives', http://lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/04/28/des-tenors-politiques-en-danger-aux-legislatives_5119157_5076653.html.
9. 'Non-cumul : au moins 223 députés vont devoir abandonner un mandat', http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/06/25/non-cumul-au-moins-223-deputes-de-la-nouvelle-assemblee-vont-devoir-abandonner-un-mandat_5150843_4355770.html.

10. 'L'enquête électorale française: comprendre 2017', https://www.enef.fr/app/download/16035155325/LA_NOTE_%2340_vague15.pdf?t=1498229069.
11. 'Législatives 2017: 224 femmes élues, un chiffre historique', http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/06/19/legislatives-2017-223-femmes-elues-un-record_5146848_5076653.html.
12. 'Les nouveaux députés LRM issus de l'immigration discrets sur leurs origines', http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/06/21/la-discretion-des-nouveaux-deputes-lrm-issus-de-l-immigration_5148401_5076653.html.
13. 'Législatives: une Assemblée plus jeune, plus paritaire, mais toujours peu représentative', http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/06/19/legislatives-une-assemblee-plus-jeune-plus-paritaire-mais-toujours-peu-representative_5147523_4355770.html.
14. 'Les diplômés de grandes écoles surreprésentés à l'Assemblée nationale', http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/06/26/les-diplomes-de-grandes-ecoles-surrepresentes-a-l-assemblee-nationale_5151066_4355770.html.
15. 'Mélenchon veut abolir "la monarchie présidentielle pour faire la VIe République"', http://www.leparisien.fr/politique/melenchon-veut-abolir-la-monarchie-presidentielle-pour-faire-la-vie-republique-28-08-2016-6075045.php.

## References

Bartolini, S. (1984). Institutional constraints and party competition in the French party system. *West European Politics, 7*(4), 103–127.

Camus, J.-Y. (2012). Le Front national français: entre projet de normalisation démocratique et positionnement anti-système. *Anuario del Conflicto Social*, 2.

Cole, A. (2003).

Evans, J. (2003). Introduction. In J. Evans (Ed.), *The French party system* (pp. 1–9). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Evans, J. (2017). La candidatura di Macron e il movimento En Marche! In R. Brizzi & M. Lazar (Eds.), *La Francia di Macron*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2017). An atypical 'honeymoon' election? Contextual and strategic opportunities in the 2017 French legislative elections. *French Politics*. 15, 322–339.

Foucault, M. (2006). How useful is the cumul des mandats for being re-elected? Empirical evidence from the 1997 French legislative elections. *French Politics, 4*(3), 292–311.

Gougou, F., & Labouret, S. (2013). La fin de la tripartition? Les recompositions de la droite et la transformation du système partisan. *Revue Française de Science Politique, 63*(2), 279–302.

Ivaldi, G., & Evans, J. (2007). L'extrême-droite à la dérive: rééquilibrage du système partisan et recomposition à droite. *Revue politique et parlementaire, 1044*, 113–122.

Loonis, V. (2006). Les déterminants de la réélection des députés français de 1871 à 2002. *Histoire & Mesure*, *21*(1), 221–254.

Rouban, L. (2017). Le profil des candidats investis par la République en Marche: un renouveau limité. *L'Enquête Electorale Française: Comprendre 2017*, note #39. Retrieved from https://www.enef.fr/app/download/15911765625/LA_NOTE_%2339_vague15.pdf?t=1498144334

Ysmal, C. (1992). La diversité des forces "anti-système". In P. Habert, P. Perrineau, & C. Ysmal (Eds.), *Le vote éclaté* (pp. 187–208). Paris: Presses de Sciences Po (PFNSP).

CHAPTER 10

# Conclusion

The election of Emmanuel Macron to the French presidency in 2017 constituted one of the biggest disruptions to the French political system under the Fifth Republic to date. As we have considered across the last nine chapters, the basis for this disruption was explicable in the normal terms of political analysis. We can understand how Macron arrived at the Elysée in terms of the executive record, party system structure, party primary dynamics and voter alignments. Perhaps of greater novelty is the role of the legislative elections in this realignment. Relegated to secondary status by the presidentialization of the French political system, legislative elections have been seen as the logical follow-through of the presidential race, and of little analytical interest beyond that. However, in this election, the importance of the confirmatory process was in allowing the president to redefine the competitive structure of the party system through the endorsement of a centrist majority bloc, thus amplifying the process of electoral dealignment that had occurred in the presidential election.

The choices Macron made in not allowing former socialist colleagues to change horses to LRM mid-electoral stream, in allying with Modem for the legislative rounds, and in appointing key ministerial positions from LR *notables,* ensured an electoral balance that straddled centre–left and centre–right in the Assembly. In so doing, the rejection of the remnants of the Socialist Party, and the relatively intact Republicans, once again pushed these parties to an ideological position away from the centrism that to date



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0_10

had been the pull for electoral victory. Democratic, but strategically sub-optimal, primaries had already polarized their support. The legislative programmes these parties presented had then tried to move closer to the centre, rejecting many of the more radical positions of the Hamon and Fillon's respective platforms. But the threat these parties still pose to LRM, after all a formal party of less than four months standing, is to begin to unpick the centrist stitching, both among former colleagues, particularly from the PS, but also among the political neophytes making up a large proportion of LRM's parliamentary group numbers.

The spatial and ideological proximity between LRM and moderates across both the PS and the LR increases the probability that the 'old' parties may eventually reclaim what was abruptly ripped from them in the 2017 elections. Flank attacks on the Macron presidency have already started, with Juppé creating hostility on the right, demonstrating the readiness by LR's centrists to capitalize on voter disenchantment with Macron's promises to *gouverner autrement*.[1] On the left, Hollande has broken his political silence, criticizing the 'unnecessary sacrifice' that the new president is asking from the French, in reference to the first set of measures announced by the government to cut public spending.[2] More surprisingly perhaps, critics of Macron include his ephemeral Minister of Justice, François Bayrou, who has voiced concerns about the general 'direction' taken by the government and the lack of a 'clear vision' of where Macron's presidency is heading.[3]

More broadly, the resilience of party system dynamics, a theme to which we have returned across the book, suggests that the opportunity structures of the French political system should still be at play underneath a party system which, as we discussed at the end of the previous chapter, now resembles the polarized pluralist type more than the moderate pluralist baseline which has characterized party dynamics since the late 1960s. If the centrist party dominance is to be retained in the longer term, what conditions are conducive to this becoming the new norm?

In the longer term, it is difficult to envisage a balanced two-bloc system where one bloc occupies the centre ground of the political system. Either that party, or constituent parties, shift to one side of the centre ground; or the institutional type needs to be one that allows for more fluid dynamics across the centre. As we have seen in Chap. 8, a realignment of blocs in ideological terms appeared possible in terms of an open/closed dimension, pro-European globalized support on one side, anti-European national protectionists on the other. Yet, as we shall see shortly, the capacity

of the political parties to align themselves around any sort of balanced two-bloc system in this regard is currently very weak. In the short term, the French political system outside the LRM majority looks more likely to be fragmented and reactive. Electorally, proportional representation is the electoral system which tends to support party fragmentation and cooperation that potentially bridges the centre ground, and as with the French Fourth Republic, allows the formation of pragmatic, short-term coalitions.

And indeed Emmanuel Macron has proposed the introduction of a 'dose' of proportionality into the legislative elections, which is also a demand of his allies in the Modem, as illustrated by Bayrou's comments in August 2017 regarding the need to 'reconstruct France's democratic model', which would notably imply reducing the number of parliamentarians and introduce proportional representation. Macron's predecessor, François Hollande, had made a similar promise, but it never saw the light of day. Macron confirmed in his address to the parliamentary Congress in Versailles on 3 July 2017 that this was still a priority, but his Prime Minister Edouard Philippe indicated afterwards that the 'dose' was of the order of 10–20 per cent.[4] In other words, the electoral system would remain majoritarian with a proportional corrective for smaller parties. Whilst depictions of the current National Assembly under different levels of assumed proportionality by definition give LRM a progressively smaller tranche of seats, passing from its current significant majority to an uneasy plurality under a completely proportional system, ostensibly weakening LRM's centre dominance, this would resemble more the polarized pluralist ideal-type, with a significant centre party cooperating with parties on its left and right flanks to maintain an executive majority.

However, a full proportional system is not being proposed, and we must not overlook that the current LRM majority is artificial—a result of the presidential confirmatory effect. How political parties outside the LRM majority organize themselves between now and the next direct elections, the 2019 Europeans; how LRM reacts to the exigencies of the governing majority in the first wave of radical reforms proposed by the Philippe government; and how both confront the respective challenges which we detail below, will determine how the party system realigns.

In the more immediate future, we do better to examine the first 100 days of Macron's presidency to identify the strengths of the LRM majority and its possible challenges. With even an optimistic eye, Macron's initial months in the Elysée look more challenging than his election and

legislative landslide might originally have suggested. In the first three months, his opinion poll ratings have dropped quicker than for any other president in the Fifth Republic. A distant presidential style matched by a monarchical bearing already in evidence at his victory speech on 7 May—hardly a surprise, given his self-assumed label as a 'Jupiterian' president—has not disposed France's press well towards the new commander-in-chief. This sense of executive infallibility was deepened by the resignation of France's most senior general, Pierre de Villiers, in a visceral response to the budget cuts proposed for France's armed forces.

Compared with both Hollande and Sarkozy, Macron's dedicated time for the media is much more limited, despite the counter-tendency of his press team to provide a large number of 'informal' press releases. Second, his announcement of the pursual of labour law reform and pensions has apparently caught many voters by surprise, despite being a salient point in his presidential programme. When these laws are completed after the *rentrée politique* in autumn, the fallout is likely to go beyond declining polls, with industrial action and street protests akin to those which assailed Alain Juppé in the 1990s.

Third, Macron and his government were undoubtedly caught off-guard by the resignation of the three Modem ministers in the light of investigations into their European parliamentary assistants, shortly after the departure of the former First Secretary of LRM, Richard Ferrand. This was particularly embarrassing, given François Bayrou had been tasked even before the legislatives with championing the law on the moral reform of political life. There is no sense of venality to the Modem issue, indeed it functions more to draw attention to the significant issues which still remain in the resourcing and funding of French political life, particularly for smaller parties. Nonetheless, it speaks to a lack of preparation, if not naivety, in the appointment of ministers for a government, party and president committed to investing only politicians with unblemished records.

Under normal circumstances, such challenges to popularity and governmental stability would be unwelcome, but hardly a major blow to a governing party such as the PS or LR. For LRM, however, its lack of grassroots infrastructure or organizational embeddedness means such issues are potentially more significant in undermining its new foundations. The *société civile* candidates in particular may have much less commitment to their new political party, given that their route to the National Assembly has been extremely short and has not required the extended dues-paying, or local political commitments, required of national candidates who have

progressed through traditional party structures. Moreover, given the occupational profile of LRM leans heavily towards entrepreneurs and other independent employment, abandoning an Assembly position would be much less personally disruptive than for someone leaving private-sector employment, or certainly than for a professional politician.

There is a similar fragility to the political roots of the majority party. As a personal support-vehicle for Macron's election, the absence of a grass-roots organization or developed party infrastructure provides the party's representatives with a relative vacuum in organizational or programmatic mobilization. This represents one fundamental weakness of multi-speed membership parties, such as LRM, which rely heavily on 'instant' grass-roots members affiliated through the Internet, and who generally lack the commitment and degree of loyalty normally associated with partisan activism. Let us recall, for instance, that the substantial growth in instant 'low-cost' party membership that had accompanied Ségolène Royal's presidential campaign in 2007, channelled through the *Désirs d'avenir* organizational umbrella, rapidly waned after the elections. For those moving from another political party, principally the PS, a capacity to realign politically once more is undoubtedly present, particularly if governmental legislation loses popular support. In a system where latent bipolar dynamics are still institutionally framed, the capacity of a centrist party to resist these stresses rests on its internal cohesion, even without the strain of an election. Within a majority parliamentary group such as LRM's, then, where the need for party discipline is less compelling, given the size of the majority, an array of representatives from centre–left to centre–right over time must inevitably be prey to centrifugal pulls from flanking movements.

The first test of the coherence and reach of LRM will come early in the electoral cycle, with the Senate election in September 2017, and then, after a hiatus, with the European elections in 2019. The Senate elections are particularly awkward for LRM, as the electoral college is made up of local and regional politicians, where LRM has had no opportunity to win seats. It is consequently relying upon forming alliances as broadly as possible, to convince candidates to stand under an LRM label. Again, the fall in the president's opinion ratings, a relatively shaky start of the LRM group in the National Assembly, and especially Macron's announcement in July of a cut in the number of local representatives, and the cancellation of the *taxe d'habitation (local council tax)*, which mayors and local councils opposed, will all make that task harder than might otherwise have been the case. In the short term, a healthy Senate majority (in a rolling election where only half

the *Palais du Luxembourg* number are up for election) is of particular importance to the executive for constitutional reform: to implement the much-vaunted disbanding of the *Cour de Justice de la République* and reform judicial responsibility and independence requires a three-fifths majority of both chambers. Without this, the only other avenue is by referendum, a route Macron would doubtless wish to avoid.

What for the moment reduces this threat to the integrity of the LRM parliamentary group is the current, continued weakness of those parties hit hardest by Macron's success, namely the PS and the LR. For the former, the post-election period has been one of recrimination and departure, reflecting the deeper crisis of identity amongst French socialists and their current difficulties in adjusting to the narrow ideological and political space that is left for them to occupy between Mélenchon's LFI left-wing radical and Macron's LRM social–liberal policies. Two of the party's highest profile politicians, Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, and Mayor of Lille and former First Secretary Martine Aubry, have set up a new movement, *Dès Demain*, with the former Minister of Justice, Christiane Taubira. Benoît Hamon similarly launched his *Mouvement du 1er juillet* a few weeks later. The vast majority of moderate left socialists have implicitly or explicitly thrown in their lot with LRM, either expressing a desire to work constructively with the government, or in the case of 25 socialist Senators, forming their own LRM parliamentary group. At the local level, party membership has shrunk considerably (a decline that substantially predates the 2017 elections) and mobilization of remaining activists is increasingly difficult without a visible national leadership. In regions such as Pas-de-Calais, traditionally a stronghold for the PS, local infighting threatens to destabilize the party. Perhaps most symbolically, however, the financial status of the party was hit by the poor election results slashing the amount of state funding the respective campaigns received, resulting in the party national apparatus having to vacate their headquarters in the iconic Rue Solférino in Paris.

For the Republicans, there are equal challenges to be faced. Financially, the party had rescued itself from near-bankruptcy after the 2012 elections, but its worse-than-expected results in both races have reduced its state funding. The status of money given to Fillon's presidential campaign micro-party, A3F, has still not been resolved between the now-retired politician and his former party. However, of greater concern in the long term is the potential split in the party, between the moderate wing, including Thierry Solère and Franck Riester, who wish to work constructively

with the Philippe government, and indeed formed a separate parliamentary group, *Les Constructifs*, with the UDI to that end, and the hardline core of the party, including Laurent Wauquiez, Eric Ciotti, Christian Jacob, head of LR's parliamentary group, and Bernard Accoyer, General Secretary of the party, who oppose cooperation, and who have threatened party sanctions against the so-called *Macron-compatibles*, including the LR ministers and prime minister.[5]

While these individuals could reasonably expect to find a new political home in LRM, LR risks alienating a large tranche of its electorate, particularly in areas such as Le Havre, Edouard Philippe's constituency, where the popularity of the prime minister is very high. The hardline position of the party leadership also threatens to destabilize the support of more moderate *notables* in key areas, such as Christian Estrosi in Nice, or indeed Alain Juppé in Bordeaux. The November leadership election, where hardliner Laurent Wauquiez is expected to win comfortably, will likely decide the Republicans' strategic line going forward—and who is willing to accompany it.

For the Republicans, the one issue which they had expected to face in the post-election period, but which has failed to materialize, is the FN's challenge on its right flank. In the *entre-deux-tours* of the presidentials, Marine Le Pen had made it clear that her party now constituted, if not the future governing party of France, certainly its main opposition party. The vote shares from the preceding local and European elections had supported that claim, and her place in the run-offs suggested that from late June 2017, the party would be well placed to claim an 'official' role. The subsequent debate debacle, disappointing result in the second round, and paltry haul of eight deputies in the legislative elections removed any illusion that the party had progressed beyond its pariah party status on the radical right. At astonishing speed, Marine Le Pen went from anointed symbol of her party to a weak leader under pressure not just from party factions who had doubted her programmatic line on Europe and on tactics towards LR, but also from her vice-president and chief advisor, Florian Philippot. In September, the FN was delivered another severe blow as Philippot left the party amid bitter infighting and disagreement over his electorally failed policy of leaving the Euro.[6]

Having avoided her *mise en examen* for misuse of public funds during the presidential campaign, Le Pen's eventual placing under investigation at the end of June weakens her position further. One threat, namely her niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who comes from the Catholic conservative wing of the party which sees a future for the FN anchored more firmly

to the right of the party system, refocused on its core immigration, security and market liberal policies, and seeking tactical alliances with the Republicans, has disappeared, having stood down from re-election, ostensibly for family and professional reasons. However, the party still has a number of local 'young Turk' *notables* with growing support bases who could challenge a beleaguered Le Pen in the longer term. The party's Congress in March 2018 where it will decide on its future name, among other things, will be a key test of the party's, and its leader's, future direction.

On the radical left, the legislative elections have left a similarly deflated populist leader. After the above-expected performance in the presidential first round, Mélenchon's easy victory against the damaged socialist Mennucci in Marseilles was not matched by most of his legislative candidates. The split with the PCF has led to two small independent parliamentary groups, relegating Mélenchon to a relatively anonymous 'backbench' position, as president of the group of 17 LFI deputies. How the group makes its presence felt in the short term remains to be seen. Mélenchon clearly intends to act as a disruptive force in the Assembly, as demonstrated by his refusal to attend Macron's address to the parliamentary Congress in Versailles, which he deemed to be a specific assertion of '*la prééminence présidentielle*' (presidential pre-eminence), despite being a presidential right exercised by his predecessors.

LFI and Mélenchon's one advantage in the 2017 Assembly is to be a movement joining with a parliamentary group for the first time, and therefore on the rise. In the wake of the 2017 elections, and despite Le Pen's presence in the presidential run-off, the general public perception is still very much one of political momentum for LFI, as opposed to a feeble and politically debilitated FN. In July 2017, Mélenchon showed the second highest level of popularity at 40 per cent, behind Environment Minister Nicolas Hulot, whereas Marine Le Pen would be trailing nearly 20 places below, at a mere 19 per cent, down 10 points since May.[7] As such, the claim Marine Le Pen wished to make as being the official opposition is one that Mélenchon can more reasonably make, given the internal divisions of the PS and LR, and the absence of any larger group to take that mantle. However, returning to the notion of a realignment of politics around the open/closed society, a cleavage where LFI finds itself firmly on the more 'closed' side—the *Assemblée Nationale* is skewed towards the 'open' bloc, with over seven in ten of the current deputies belonging to pro-globalization parties and factions, in no state of balanced opposition whatsoever.

On the demand side of the elections, this leaves a huge disproportionality in the representation of the share of the electorate that precisely supported the 'closed' bloc on 23 April 2017. As we have emphasized throughout this book, alongside the programmatic appeals and individual competencies of candidates, French voters sought renewal in their political system—a renewal of policy efficacy, but also a renewal of elites and of representation. Yet, for a majority of voters at the presidential race—where Macron received under 44 per cent of the registered electorate—and a crushing majority of voters at the legislative elections—where LRM received under 17 per cent of the registered electorate—the existing executive has not begun to provide renewal in a recognizable sense. For the remainder, either their political parties have been weakened by a political movement which itself has no tangible organizational strength; or, for nearly as many, no political party, old or new, offered a convincing political narrative.

We have yet to see measures of political trust and satisfaction with democracy among the French electorate, post-elections. It may be premature to expect significant improvements in these so soon into Macron's executive term. However, in the light of his own personal polling collapse, it would seem unrealistic to expect that the electoral revolution will have shifted public opinion significantly upwards. If the renewal that was promised in his programme is to take hold, it must now do so far beyond any 'honeymoon' period of inflated support engendered by his conquering the Elysée, but rather with the prosaic weight of opposition to economic and social reform pulling it back. A process of policy reform and political rebuilding may in the long term reinvigorate the democratic process in France, and mobilize increasing numbers of political faithful. To date, however, the political reformation has yet to establish a renewed representative church.

## Notes

1. 'Juppé éreinte le début du quinquennat Macron: "C'est de la com'"', http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2017/08/24/01002-20170824ART-FIG00269-juppe-juge-le-debut-du-quinquennat-macron.php.
2. 'François Hollande met en garde Emmanuel Macron', http://www.rtl.fr/actu/politique/video-francois-hollande-met-en-garde-emmanuel-macron-7789793860.

3. 'Hollande, Bayrou… Comment ils torpillent la rentrée de Macron', http://www.rtl.fr/actu/politique/hollande-bayrou-comment-ils-torpillent-la-rentree-de-macron-7789815059.
4. 'À quoi ressemblerait l'Assemblée avec une dose de proportionnelle', http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/legislatives/2017/06/13/38001-20170613ARTFIG00193--quoi-ressemblerait-l-assemblee-avec-la-dose-de-proportionnelle-promise-par-l-executif.php.
5. 'Les Républicains: Bernard Accoyer évoque des sanctions contre les Constructifs', http://www.leparisien.fr/politique/les-republicains-bernard-accoyer-menace-les-constructifs-d-exclusion-03-07-2017-7105746.php.
6. 'Florian Philippot annonce qu'il quitte le Front national', http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/09/21/florian-philippot-annonce-qu-il-quitte-le-front-national_5188871_823448.html.
7. 'Baromètre politique (juillet 2017): légère baisse pour l'exécutif', http://fr.kantar.com/opinion-publique/politique/2017/barometre-politique-juillet-2017-legere-baisse-pour-l-executif/.

# Appendix

**Table A1** Results of the EELV primary elections of October/November 2016

| *Candidate* | *First round* | | *Second round* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Votes* | *% valid* | *Votes* | *% valid* |
| Yannick JADOT | 4395 | 35.61 | 7430 | 54.25 |
| Michèle RIVASI | 3723 | 30.16 | 5513 | 40.75 |
| Cécile DUFLOT | 3013 | 24.41 | | |
| Karima DELLI | 1212 | 9.82 | | |
| Blank | 174 | 1.38 | 495 | 3.66 |
| Spoiled | 65 | 0.82 | 182 | 1.35 |
| Voters | 12,343 | | 13,348 | |

Source: http://eelv.fr/primaire-de-lecologie-resultats-du-1er-tour/



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0

**Table A2** Results of the Republican primary elections of 20 and 27 November 2016

| *Candidate* | *First round* | | *Second round* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Votes* | *% valid* | *Votes* | *% valid* |
| François FILLON | 1,890,266 | 44.1 | 2,919,874 | 66.5 |
| Alain JUPPÉ | 1,224,855 | 28.6 | 1,471,898 | 33.5 |
| Nicolas SARKOZY | 886,137 | 20.7 | | |
| Nathalie KOSCIUSKO-MORIZET | 109,655 | 2.6 | | |
| Bruno LE MAIRE | 102,168 | 2.3 | | |
| Jean-Frédéric POISSON | 62,346 | 1.4 | | |
| Jean-François COPÉ | 12,787 | 0.3 | | |
| Blank and spoiled | 9883 | | 13,040 | |
| Voters | 4,298,097 | | 4,404,812 | |

Source: http://www.primaire2016.org/resultats/

**Table A3** Results of the PS primary elections of 22 and 29 January 2017

| *Candidate* | *First round* | | *Second round* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Votes* | *% valid* | *Votes* | *% valid* |
| Benoît HAMON | 596,647 | 36.03 | 1,201,166 | 58.69 |
| Manuel VALLS | 521,238 | 31.48 | 845,462 | 41.31 |
| Arnaud MONTEBOURG | 290,070 | 17.52 | | |
| Vincent PEILLON | 112,718 | 6.81 | | |
| François DE RUGY | 63,430 | 3.83 | | |
| Sylvia PINEL | 33,067 | 2.00 | | |
| Jean-Luc BENNAHMIAS | 16,869 | 1.02 | | |
| Blank | 11,766 | 0.70 | | |
| Spoiled | 10,114 | 0.61 | | |
| Voters | 1,655,919 | | 2,046,628 | |

Source: http://www.lesprimairescitoyennes.fr/communique-de-haute-autorite-primaires-citoyennes-23-janvier-2017/

**Table A4** Multinomial logit model of first-round presidential vote (2017)

| | *Le Pen* | | | | *Fillon* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Variable* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* |
| Age | −0.025 | 0.003 | −7.41 | <0.001 | 0.021 | 0.003 | 7.23 | <0.001 |
| Female | 0.022 | 0.087 | 0.26 | 0.800 | 0.262 | 0.078 | 3.36 | 0.001 |
| No quals | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| CAP-BEP | 0.063 | 0.151 | 0.42 | 0.676 | −0.096 | 0.150 | −0.64 | 0.522 |
| Bac | −0.278 | 0.154 | −1.80 | 0.072 | 0.082 | 0.147 | 0.56 | 0.579 |
| University | −0.735 | 0.161 | −4.56 | <0.001 | 0.298 | 0.144 | 2.07 | 0.039 |
| Patrimony | −0.129 | 0.042 | −3.03 | 0.002 | 0.008 | 0.034 | 0.24 | 0.813 |
| No religion | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Catholic | 0.156 | 0.089 | 1.76 | 0.079 | 0.615 | 0.081 | 7.64 | <0.001 |
| Other | −0.604 | 0.221 | −2.73 | 0.006 | 0.245 | 0.175 | 1.40 | 0.162 |
| Once/week | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Once/month | 1.481 | 0.447 | 3.31 | 0.001 | 0.899 | 0.299 | 3.01 | 0.003 |
| Less often | 1.796 | 0.419 | 4.28 | <0.001 | 0.392 | 0.280 | 1.40 | 0.162 |
| Prof/manag | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Independent | 0.545 | 0.246 | 2.22 | 0.026 | 0.447 | 0.199 | 2.24 | 0.025 |
| Technician | 0.386 | 0.169 | 2.28 | 0.022 | −0.212 | 0.139 | −1.52 | 0.128 |
| Employee | 0.642 | 0.150 | 4.28 | <0.001 | −0.128 | 0.125 | −1.02 | 0.307 |
| Blue-collar | 0.942 | 0.222 | 4.24 | <0.001 | −0.327 | 0.269 | −1.22 | 0.224 |
| Inactive | 0.429 | 0.148 | 2.89 | 0.004 | 0.153 | 0.108 | 1.42 | 0.157 |
| lr | 0.414 | 0.021 | 20.04 | <0.001 | 0.675 | 0.021 | 31.72 | <0.001 |
| econ1 | 0.050 | 0.024 | 2.10 | 0.035 | 0.136 | 0.021 | 6.35 | <0.001 |
| econ2 | 0.038 | 0.030 | 1.26 | 0.209 | −0.183 | 0.025 | −7.35 | <0.001 |
| wc | 0.301 | 0.050 | 5.99 | <0.001 | 0.091 | 0.048 | 1.90 | 0.057 |
| eu | 0.715 | 0.025 | 28.40 | <0.001 | 0.085 | 0.028 | 3.07 | 0.002 |
| islam | −0.189 | 0.023 | −8.24 | <0.001 | −0.058 | 0.021 | −2.83 | 0.005 |
| ssm | −0.109 | 0.022 | −4.87 | <0.001 | −0.185 | 0.020 | −9.20 | <0.001 |
| mondial1 | −0.252 | 0.029 | −8.64 | <0.001 | −0.099 | 0.029 | −3.47 | 0.001 |
| antie | 0.358 | 0.030 | 12.12 | <0.001 | 0.156 | 0.026 | 5.93 | <0.001 |
| libert | −0.092 | 0.030 | −3.11 | 0.002 | −0.043 | 0.028 | −1.54 | 0.124 |
| auth | −0.021 | 0.026 | −0.82 | 0.410 | 0.041 | 0.024 | 1.73 | 0.084 |
| pop | 0.280 | 0.043 | 6.54 | <0.001 | −0.060 | 0.033 | −1.81 | 0.070 |
| Constant | −7.492 | 0.645 | −11.62 | <0.001 | −6.535 | 0.520 | −12.58 | <0.001 |

(*continued*)

**Table A4** (continued)

| | *Mélenchon* | | | | *Hamon* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Variable* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* |
| Age | −0.026 | 0.003 | −9.72 | <0.001 | −0.015 | 0.003 | −4.93 | <0.001 |
| Female | −0.067 | 0.071 | −0.94 | 0.345 | 0.331 | 0.085 | 3.89 | <0.001 |
| No quals | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| CAP-BEP | 0.453 | 0.142 | 3.19 | 0.001 | 0.097 | 0.171 | 0.57 | 0.572 |
| Bac | 0.289 | 0.142 | 2.04 | 0.042 | −0.053 | 0.170 | −0.31 | 0.754 |
| University | 0.119 | 0.142 | 0.83 | 0.405 | −0.071 | 0.167 | −0.42 | 0.672 |
| Patrimony | −0.118 | 0.035 | −3.39 | 0.001 | −0.115 | 0.042 | −2.77 | 0.006 |
| No religion | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Catholic | −0.182 | 0.076 | −2.41 | 0.016 | 0.043 | 0.090 | 0.48 | 0.632 |
| Other | 0.170 | 0.150 | 1.14 | 0.256 | 0.090 | 0.181 | 0.50 | 0.619 |
| Once/week | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Once/month | 0.775 | 0.354 | 2.19 | 0.029 | 1.538 | 0.573 | 2.68 | 0.007 |
| Less often | 0.750 | 0.324 | 2.31 | 0.021 | 1.316 | 0.550 | 2.39 | 0.017 |
| Prof/manag | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Independent | 0.206 | 0.225 | 0.92 | 0.359 | 0.076 | 0.286 | 0.27 | 0.789 |
| Technician | 0.272 | 0.119 | 2.29 | 0.022 | 0.187 | 0.137 | 1.37 | 0.171 |
| Employee | 0.303 | 0.110 | 2.75 | 0.006 | 0.147 | 0.128 | 1.15 | 0.251 |
| Blue-collar | 0.459 | 0.191 | 2.40 | 0.016 | 0.360 | 0.242 | 1.49 | 0.137 |
| Inactive | 0.219 | 0.105 | 2.08 | 0.037 | −0.059 | 0.121 | −0.48 | 0.628 |
| lr | −0.367 | 0.018 | −20.54 | <0.001 | −0.378 | 0.022 | −17.20 | <0.001 |
| econ1 | 0.041 | 0.021 | 1.98 | 0.048 | 0.012 | 0.025 | 0.47 | 0.639 |
| econ2 | 0.318 | 0.031 | 10.31 | <0.001 | 0.198 | 0.037 | 5.39 | <0.001 |
| wc | −0.128 | 0.038 | −3.36 | 0.001 | −0.207 | 0.045 | −4.64 | <0.001 |
| eu | 0.357 | 0.024 | 14.98 | <0.001 | 0.090 | 0.033 | 2.73 | 0.006 |
| islam | 0.043 | 0.019 | 2.21 | 0.027 | 0.104 | 0.025 | 4.21 | <0.001 |
| ssm | −0.004 | 0.022 | −0.18 | 0.854 | 0.004 | 0.029 | 0.14 | 0.890 |
| mondial1 | −0.282 | 0.024 | −11.53 | <0.001 | −0.207 | 0.030 | −7.02 | <0.001 |
| antie | 0.251 | 0.025 | 10.23 | <0.001 | 0.090 | 0.029 | 3.08 | 0.002 |
| libert | 0.021 | 0.029 | 0.73 | 0.463 | 0.032 | 0.037 | 0.87 | 0.386 |
| auth | −0.209 | 0.020 | −10.55 | <0.001 | −0.167 | 0.024 | −7.06 | <0.001 |
| pop | 0.314 | 0.033 | 9.50 | <0.001 | 0.116 | 0.037 | 3.09 | 0.002 |
| Constant | −1.181 | 0.512 | −2.31 | 0.021 | −0.571 | 0.729 | −0.78 | 0.434 |
| *n* | | | | 11,093 | | | | |
| Pseudo-$R^2$ | | | | 0.37 | | | | |

Note: Reference category in dependent variable is vote for Macron; 'other' presidential vote contrast omitted for clarity; religiosity variables—church attendance 'once/week', 'once/month', 'less often'

**Table A5** Multinomial logit model of second-round vote destinations of Fillon first-round voters

| | *Fillon (1) → Le Pen (2)* | | | | *Fillon (1) → Macron (2)* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Variable* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* |
| Age | −0.021 | 0.007 | −2.98 | 0.003 | −0.007 | 0.005 | −1.36 | 0.173 |
| Female | −0.148 | 0.169 | −0.88 | 0.381 | −0.103 | 0.135 | −0.76 | 0.449 |
| No quals | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| CAP-BEP | 0.063 | 0.302 | 0.21 | 0.836 | 0.354 | 0.521 | 1.41 | 0.157 |
| Bac | −0.161 | 0.299 | −0.54 | 0.590 | 0.177 | 0.240 | 0.74 | 0.462 |
| University | −0.122 | 0.291 | −0.41 | 0.674 | 0.178 | 0.231 | 0.77 | 0.441 |
| Patrimony | −0.094 | 0.072 | −1.30 | 0.194 | −0.049 | 0.056 | −0.88 | 0.381 |
| No religion | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Catholic | 0.280 | 0.197 | 1.43 | 0.154 | 0.071 | 0.149 | 0.47 | 0.636 |
| Other | 0.079 | 0.471 | 0.17 | 0.867 | 0.873 | 0.342 | 2.55 | 0.011 |
| Once/week | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Once/month | 0.800 | 0.661 | 1.21 | 0.226 | 0.035 | 0.471 | 0.07 | 0.940 |
| Less often | 0.734 | 0.641 | 1.15 | 0.252 | 0.040 | 0.452 | 0.09 | 0.929 |
| Prof/manag | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Independent | −0.086 | 0.423 | −0.20 | 0.839 | −0.012 | 0.319 | −0.04 | 0.971 |
| Technician | −0.187 | 0.345 | −0.54 | 0.587 | −0.154 | 0.262 | −0.59 | 0.557 |
| Employee | 0.457 | 0.295 | 1.55 | 0.121 | −0.317 | 0.244 | −1.30 | 0.193 |
| Blue-collar | 1.155 | 0.674 | 1.71 | 0.087 | −0.623 | 0.657 | −0.95 | 0.343 |
| Inactive | 0.051 | 0.251 | 0.20 | 0.838 | −0.312 | 0.190 | −1.65 | 0.100 |
| lr | 0.215 | 0.053 | 4.05 | <0.001 | −0.153 | 0.041 | −3.76 | <0.001 |
| econ1 | 0.013 | 0.046 | 0.29 | 0.772 | −0.108 | 0.037 | −2.90 | 0.004 |
| econ2 | −0.069 | 0.048 | −1.44 | 0.151 | 0.065 | 0.040 | 1.64 | 0.102 |
| wc | 0.316 | 0.110 | 2.86 | 0.004 | −0.013 | 0.090 | −0.15 | 0.884 |
| eu | 0.244 | 0.048 | 5.13 | <0.001 | −0.237 | 0.049 | −4.85 | <0.001 |
| islam | −0.052 | 0.049 | −1.07 | 0.283 | 0.140 | 0.037 | 3.80 | <0.001 |
| ssm | 0.020 | 0.040 | 0.49 | 0.621 | 0.077 | 0.033 | 2.37 | 0.018 |
| mondial1 | −0.112 | 0.055 | −2.05 | 0.041 | 0.176 | 0.049 | 3.62 | <0.001 |
| antie | 0.092 | 0.059 | 1.58 | 0.114 | −0.243 | 0.046 | −5.27 | <0.001 |
| libert | −0.088 | 0.051 | −1.71 | 0.087 | −0.005 | 0.044 | −0.10 | 0.918 |
| auth | 0.127 | 0.055 | 2.32 | 0.020 | 0.096 | 0.043 | 2.23 | 0.026 |
| pop | −0.049 | 0.074 | −0.66 | 0.510 | −0.196 | 0.056 | −3.47 | 0.001 |
| Constant | −3.152 | 1.187 | −2.66 | 0.008 | 3.033 | 0.904 | 3.35 | 0.001 |
| *n* | 1801 | | | | | | | |
| Pseudo-$R^2$ | 0.20 | | | | | | | |

Note: Reference category in dependent variable is blank or spoiled ballot; religiosity variables—church attendance 'once/week', 'once/month', 'less often'

**Table A6** Multinomial logit model of second-round vote destinations of Mélenchon first-round voters

| | *Mélenchon (1) → Le Pen (2)* | | | | *Mélenchon (1) → Macron (2)* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Variable* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* | *B* | *se* | *z* | *p* |
| Age | −0.021 | 0.008 | −2.53 | 0.012 | −0.004 | 0.004 | −0.84 | 0.403 |
| Female | 0.404 | 0.202 | 2.00 | 0.046 | 0.291 | 0.119 | 2.45 | 0.014 |
| No quals | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| CAP-BEP | −0.149 | 0.333 | −0.45 | 0.655 | 0.088 | 0.241 | 0.37 | 0.715 |
| Bac | −0.296 | 0.348 | −0.85 | 0.395 | 0.090 | 0.243 | 0.37 | 0.709 |
| University | −0.570 | 0.378 | −1.51 | 0.131 | 0.352 | 0.246 | 1.43 | 0.152 |
| Patrimony | −0.106 | 0.108 | −0.98 | 0.328 | 0.050 | 0.062 | 0.81 | 0.417 |
| No religion | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Catholic | 0.128 | 0.216 | 0.59 | 0.554 | 0.089 | 0.137 | 0.65 | 0.514 |
| Other | −0.671 | 0.503 | −1.33 | 0.182 | 0.773 | 0.273 | 2.83 | 0.005 |
| Once/week | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Once/month | −0.822 | 1.033 | −0.80 | 0.426 | 0.352 | 0.726 | 0.49 | 0.628 |
| Less often | −1.074 | 0.921 | −1.17 | 0.244 | −0.106 | 0.670 | −0.16 | 0.874 |
| Prof/manag | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Independent | −0.285 | 0.781 | −0.36 | 0.716 | 0.260 | 0.412 | 0.63 | 0.528 |
| Technician | 0.741 | 0.412 | 1.80 | 0.072 | −0.159 | 0.208 | −0.77 | 0.444 |
| Employee | 0.558 | 0.380 | 1.47 | 0.141 | −0.020 | 0.191 | −0.10 | 0.917 |
| Blue-collar | 0.776 | 0.457 | 1.70 | 0.090 | −0.108 | 0.289 | −0.37 | 0.710 |
| Inactive | 0.016 | 0.396 | 0.04 | 0.968 | −0.116 | 0.186 | −0.62 | 0.534 |
| l*r* | 0.125 | 0.044 | 2.85 | 0.004 | −0.011 | 0.029 | −0.39 | 0.699 |
| econ1 | 0.005 | 0.054 | 0.08 | 0.933 | 0.018 | 0.034 | 0.54 | 0.592 |
| econ2 | −0.118 | 0.086 | −1.38 | 0.168 | −0.047 | 0.059 | −0.80 | 0.425 |
| wc | 0.668 | 0.115 | 5.82 | <0.001 | 0.144 | 0.062 | 2.34 | 0.019 |
| eu | 0.209 | 0.051 | 4.11 | <0.001 | −0.329 | 0.034 | −9.67 | <0.001 |
| islam | −0.125 | 0.051 | −2.45 | 0.014 | 0.110 | 0.032 | 3.42 | 0.001 |
| ssm | −0.064 | 0.053 | −1.19 | 0.233 | 0.010 | 0.039 | 0.26 | 0.795 |
| mondial1 | −0.038 | 0.062 | −0.61 | 0.541 | 0.176 | 0.037 | 4.72 | <0.001 |
| antie | 0.115 | 0.076 | 1.50 | 0.133 | −0.166 | 0.045 | −3.71 | <0.001 |
| libert | −0.034 | 0.070 | −0.48 | 0.633 | 0.023 | 0.049 | 0.47 | 0.641 |
| auth | 0.162 | 0.055 | 2.95 | 0.003 | 0.116 | 0.033 | 3.48 | <0.001 |
| pop | 0.101 | 0.115 | 0.87 | 0.384 | −0.167 | 0.063 | −2.64 | 0.008 |
| Constant | −2.638 | 1.475 | −1.79 | 0.074 | 0.890 | 0.975 | 0.91 | 0.362 |
| *n* | 1900 | | | | | | | |
| Pseudo-$R^2$ | 0.20 | | | | | | | |

Note: Reference category in dependent variable is blank or spoiled ballot; religiosity variables—church attendance 'once/week', 'once/month', 'less often'

# Index[1]



[1] Note: Page number followed by 'n' refer to notes.



J. Evans, G. Ivaldi, *The 2017 French Presidential Elections*,
French Politics, Society and Culture,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68327-0