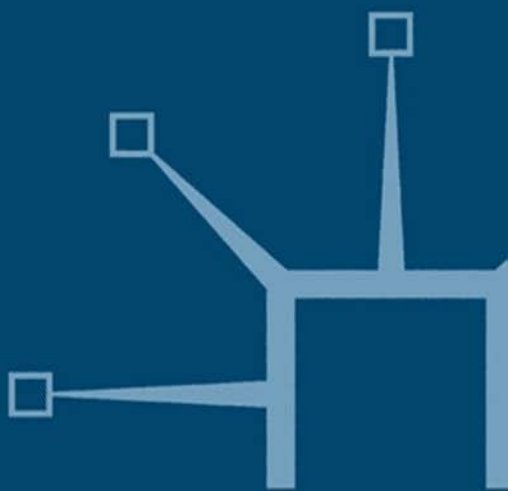


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French Presidential Elections

Michael S. Lewis-Beck
Richard Nadeau
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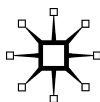
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To Philip E. Converse and Maurice Duverger

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Foreword

French Presidential Elections makes an important contribution to research on voting and elections in mature democracies. Scientific studies of electoral choice in such polities were massively invigorated some six decades ago by the trailblazing inquiries conducted by Angus Campbell and his colleagues at the University of Michigan (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960, 1966). Since that time, the “Michigan” election studies have made foundational theoretical and methodological contributions to our understanding of factors affecting voting behavior and election outcomes. In *French Presidential Elections*, Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Bélanger employ these theoretical and methodological tools with an admirable combination of skill and insight to explain voting behavior in a major Western democracy.

The theoretical approach adopted by the authors has its roots in what may be called “the puzzle of ‘52.” As readers of “a certain age” will recall, this puzzle involved the inability of the once-dominant sociological model of voting behavior, which emphasized the stabilizing effects of ponderous social forces, to provide a satisfactory account of the landslide victory by Dwight Eisenhower, the candidate of the seemingly perennial minority Republican Party, in the 1952 (and 1956) US presidential elections. The sociological model could explain stability – but not change. Large-scale swings in parties’ vote shares across the relatively brief four-year periods separating successive American presidential elections were beyond the model’s theoretical reach.

The Michigan model provided an attractive solution to the puzzle. By translating social forces into social psychology via the concept of party identification, which normally demonstrated remarkable durability, the model allowed for long-term factors to influence the vote. Equally important, by explicitly recognizing the significance of possibly highly mutable candidate and issue orientations that operated much nearer to the tip of the famed “funnel of causality,” the model could explain short-term and medium-term political change. The solution to the puzzle of ‘52 thus involved recognition that the

Republican victory was a consequence of a complex of issue concerns and candidate images quite different from those at work in the New and Fair Deal eras of the 1930s and 1940s.

Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Bélanger's adaptation of the Michigan model to the French case is carefully informed by controversies springing from previous electoral research in France and elsewhere. Perhaps most noteworthy is how they handle the long-standing debate regarding the relative importance of party identification and left-right ideological orientation as long-term influences on the vote. Estimating a model that allows for simultaneous causal linkages between partisanship and ideology leads them to conclude that ideology dominates (but does not obliterate) partisanship as the long-term influence on voting behavior in France. This methodology acknowledges the limitations of existing French survey data while avoiding an unfortunate tendency among some political scientists to try to settle data-impovertished theoretical debates either by fiat or by "hand-waving" commentary about endogeneity problems in models they oppose.

Following in the Michigan tradition, the authors of *French Presidential Elections* also pay close attention to short-term influences on the vote. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that the images of presidential candidates regularly have sizable effects. This finding accords very well not only with American research, but with studies in countries such as Canada and Great Britain, where multivariate statistical analyses have repeatedly demonstrated that public reactions to competing party leaders are highly significant for understanding electoral choice (e.g., Clarke, 2004, 2009a, 2009b). Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Bélanger rightly note that their finding of strong candidate image hearkens back to very early research by Converse and Dupeux (1966) on voters' images of Eisenhower and de Gaulle. In *French Presidential Elections* we learn that presidential candidates need not be such towering historical figures to exert consequential impact on how the electorate behaves.

There is more – much more – for the reader to appreciate in *French Presidential Elections*. Due attention is paid to important perennial and contemporary issues (such as the economy and immigration), election campaigns, and various sociological variables that have tried to lay claim to explanatory pride of place. And, as befits a work

with strong intellectual roots in Ann Arbor, the analyses are informed by the idea of a structure of causality flowing from society and economy to political beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, to voting behavior, and, ultimately, to election outcomes. At every stage in their analyses, the authors assess the power of competing explanations of the vote via appropriate multivariate statistical methods. Here, they demand that the claims of rival theoretical models must be adjudicated by consistently strong in-sample statistical performance across data sets gathered in successive national elections. Models that do not perform well are rightly designated as demonstrably inferior to those that can.

Like all good scientific works, *French Presidential Elections* answers important existing questions and poses new ones. As is often the case, a key to answering the latter will involve gathering new and better data. Perhaps particularly valuable will be survey data that will enable scholars to study the short-term dynamics of party and candidate support during French election campaigns and how these are affected by salient events and conditions as reported in the mass media. More generally, there is an evident need for high-quality multiwave panel data that will permit sophisticated multivariate analyses of the individual-level dynamics of key variables in the kinds of models studied in *French Presidential Elections*. Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Bélanger have given us a most useful roadmap that will guide such future inquiries. The result of their efforts is an outstanding example of the contemporary science of electoral choice.

Harold D. Clarke

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Preface

Our study of French politics grows out of intellectual curiosity and deep affection. For two of us, France is much more than simply a foreign country – it is the land of our ancestors, and as such it can be considered as a motherland in the deepest sense of the word. For the third, France is truly a *pays d'adoption*. In pursuit of explaining, even predicting, French elections, we have spent considerable time in the country itself. Formally, we have participated in conferences, exchanges, residencies, studying, teaching, and research in Paris and other centers of French scholarly life. Informally, we have been “on the ground” a good deal, talking to French citizens, consuming the food and wine, and traveling over the captivating countryside. (Among us, in fact, we have visited all the departments of metropolitan France). As students of comparative politics, we believe that clear understanding of a nation’s electoral ways begins with thorough fieldwork, including immersion in the language and culture. French elections have been under our microscope for a long time. All together, the three of us have published, in English and in French, over 65 works on the subject. While the book at hand draws on findings from many of these studies, it goes well beyond them.

French Presidential Elections contains much useful description, and factual information, about voters and the institutions they interact with. However, it extends itself further, into the field of election theory. That is, the presidential vote choice of the French citizen is submitted to a general inquiry. Why do French presidential voters act the way they do? We explain this simple act of political behavior, in a way that is applicable across Fifth Republic contests. We see that the French vote, while subject to issues of the moment, is heavily determined by deep, enduring sociological and ideological forces. This said, to paraphrase the title of a famous book on elections in France – *France de gauche, vote à droite* – we have tried to demonstrate how the moderate right has been successful on many occasions by putting forward leaders perceived to have the right stuff to be president, by running efficient campaigns, and by being on the “right” side of the issues. Understanding what drives the individual French

voter, we understand also much about the national vote. Electoral change reveals itself as difficult, but not impossible. France, in this way, looks much like other advanced democracies. The lack of French "exceptionalism" here, however, does not diminish its politics. Instead, it simply shows that French voters are citizens, *de facto*, in the larger family of democratic nations.

There are many individuals and institutions in France, Canada, Quebec, and the United States that have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the development of this volume. We attempt to list them all, but undoubtedly will miss some. With respect to institutions, we would like to recognize the following: the United States National Science Foundation (six different grants); the Rockefeller Foundation (one conference), the German Marshall Fund (fellowship); the Camargo Foundation (two fellowships); the *Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture* (FQRSC, research funding); *Centre d'Étude de la Vie Politique Française* (CEVIPOF, as visiting scholars); *Université de Paris I* (as visiting faculty); *Ecole d'été de Lille* (as faculty); *Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris* (as student and faculty); *Université de Paris II* (as visiting faculty); *Université de Nantes* (as visiting scholar). With respect to individual scholars of French politics, we would like to recognize the following: Andrew Appleton, Frank Baumgartner, Daniel Boy, Bruno Cautrès, Jean Chiche, Bernard Dolez, Robert Elgie, Christine Fauvelle-Aymar, Martial Foucault, Jacques Gerstlé, Bernard Grofman, Gérard Grunberg, Bruno Jérôme, Véronique Jérôme-Speziari, Alain Lancelot, Jean-Dominique Lafay, Annie Laurent, Bertrand Lemennicier, Philippe Maarek, Nonna Mayer, Amy Mazur, Rainbow Murray, Pascal Perrineau, Roy Pierce, William Safran, Martin Schain, Alan Spitzer, Vincent Tiberj, and Marie-France Toinet.

Besides general contributors, there are those who made essential contributions to the physical production of the volume itself. Here we would like to acknowledge the fine work of Thomas Didier, Angelo Elias, and Chris Chhim. Finally, we want to thank the very helpful people at Palgrave Macmillan, especially our editor, Liz Blackmore, and our series editor, Jocelyn Evans.

Last, but not least, we wish to extend a special thanks to our families, who have patiently supported us through endless (so it seemed) work sessions away from them. We could not have done it without their love and support.

1

Introduction

French elections appear to be a labyrinth of parties, institutions, behaviors. But France's presidential contests serve as a guide through that labyrinth. Over the last 30 years, France has known three presidents of the Republic: Socialist François Mitterrand (1981–1995), Gaullist Jacques Chirac (1995–2007), and the current leader from the right, Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–). Having only three national leaders across this length of time gives the impression that the country has had great continuity of government, drawing on a narrow, traditional political class to replenish itself. In some ways, this impression of political inbreeding rings true. (Take the example of Chirac. He was prime minister for Mitterrand in 1986, and ran against him in 1988 and against Jospin in 1995 and in 2002.) However, this apparent continuity mask the complexity of French electoral politics. When we look at the multitude of parties involved over this period, together with the institutional changes, the notion of seamless power transitions vanishes. By way of introduction, we sketch the contemporary changes in French parties and institutions. Against this backdrop, the behavior of the French voter fits. We explain that fit through an analysis of the dominant, ordering election in the system – presidential selection.

We propose a theory of the presidential vote in France, and test that theory across the four most recent contests – 1988, 1995, 2002, and 2007. What this allows us to do is focus, as never before, on continuities in French electoral choice at the mass level. Furthermore, it is in the nature of this approach that deviations from these continuities can be highlighted. Thus, we can carefully examine the

stability of the French system, while at the same time documenting changes in it. This ability to examine the dynamics of French presidential elections is extremely important because of what has happened to the parties and institutions surrounding the election of the president. Below, we analyze this shifting background, examining in turn French party competition, presidential electoral institutions, and election theories. Finally, we offer our own theoretical approach to the study of presidential elections in France, and describe how that approach unfolds in this book.

1.1 French party competition

The French multi-party system has rightly earned its reputation for rowdiness. As one distinguished observer, Jacques Fauvet, commented some time ago: “France contains two fundamental temperaments – that of the left and that of the right ... three principal tendencies, if one adds the center; six spiritual families; ten parties, large or small, traversed by multiple currents: fourteen parliamentary groups without much discipline; and forty million opinions” (see Ehrmann, 1983, p. 211). These remarks from the past resonate in the present, with only slight modification, as France experiences the sixth decade of the Fifth Republic. Under its constitution, executive authority was intended to flow from the president. One reason for this presidential strength is the force of the personalities occupying the office. De Gaulle stands out, but he is not alone. In addition, the rules of governance were designed to make the office strong, even stronger after the 1962 referendum on direct election by popular majority vote.

The power of the presidential office, some would contend, has made for a less complex and more disciplined system of parties, a system accountable to the dictates of government. In Table 1.1, we observe the array of leading French political parties that have contested the four most recent elections. We must emphasize that this table displays a necessary simplification of the French system. In fact, there are many political parties, groups, or *tendances* in France, and they may not resemble the reader’s idea of a typical political party. Take, for example, the 1997 National Assembly contests, where no fewer than 48 “partisan groups” registered candidates (Lewis-Beck, 2000, p. 4). Some of these groups stood for a single issue, a

Table 1.1 French political parties, first-round vote share, presidential elections 1988–2007

	1988	1995	2002	2007
Extreme Left	4.5	5.3	10.0	5.4
Communists	6.8	8.6	3.4	1.9
Socialists/Left Radicals	34.1	23.3	18.5	25.9
Ecologist/Green	3.8	3.3	5.2	1.6
UDF/MODEM	16.5	18.6	6.8	18.6
RPR/UMP	19.9	20.8	19.9	31.2
National Front	14.0	15.0	16.9	10.4

Notes: Entries are percentages of votes cast (*suffrages exprimés*). Columns do not add up to 100% because not all candidates were included for purposes of this table. The extreme left candidates are Bousset, Laguiller, and Juquin in 1988; Laguiller in 1995; and Laguiller and Besancenot in 2002 and 2007. Communist candidates are Lajoinie in 1988; Hue in 1995 and 2002; and Buffet in 2007. Socialist/left radical candidates are Mitterrand in 1988; Jospin in 1995; Jospin and Taubira in 2002; and Royal in 2007. Ecologist/Green candidates are Waechter in 1988, Voynet in 1995, Mamère in 2002, and Voynet in 2007. UDF/MODEM candidates are Barre in 1988, Balladur in 1995, and Bayrou in 2002 and 2007. RPR/UMP candidates are Chirac from 1988 to 2002 and Sarkozy in 2007. The National Front's candidate is Le Pen for all elections.

Source: Conseil constitutionnel français (1988, 1995, 2002, 2007).

splintered faction, an individual, or a generic type. Nevertheless, it makes for a crowded political playing field. At the presidential level the party playing field is simpler, but not by as much as might be expected. Here we examine only the major party groupings. There are still seven of them, but they do manage to account for over 90 percent of the votes cast. They are listed on a continuum from left to right, as Fauvet suggested above, accompanied by their percentage share of the first-round presidential vote.

The parties are several, and not frozen in time. The biggest party of the Fourth Republic, the Christian Democratic Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP), no longer exists. The Gaullists, with various party label incarnations, most notably the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR), were a strong presence until 2002, under the direction of their founder, Chirac. Since then, the traditional right has tried to represent itself as more of a catch-all party, in the guise of the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), formed during Chirac's last term and nurtured by his successor, Sarkozy (who still occasionally draws on the Gaullist symbol for political

purposes). The traditional left continues to express itself through the long-standing Socialist party. Some analysts, in considering these leading traditional partisan forces, impose a view of France as a two-party coalition system, with Government facing Opposition. One factor that would sustain this model would be rotation in office, from one coalition to the other. This test implies a successful switch from right to left, as happened with the Popular Front of 1936.

Such *alternance* actually happened for the Fifth Republic when Mitterrand wrested the presidency from Giscard d'Estaing in 1981. After that, the Socialists regained the presidency with the victory of Mitterrand in 1988, establishing that the presence of a left executive in the Fifth Republic was not to be a unique event. What is more, the 1988 contest saw the first strong showing of the National Front in presidential elections, in the person of Jean-Marie Le Pen. Contrasting with this powerful surge on the extreme right, the Communists began their long-term electoral decline. Today the Communist party still exists, although in a much reduced, even old-fashioned, or *passé*, form. This does not mean that the extreme left lacks vitality. On the contrary, some splinter parties are capable of capturing a reasonable proportion of the vote, as did the Trotskyite Workers' Struggle (Lutte Ouvrière, LO) in 1995.

Indeed, the 1995 presidential contest provides a vivid example of the many varieties of meaningful partisan struggle in French presidential elections. Here are the first-ballot returns for the 1995 presidential vote in some detail. Altogether, eight candidates received 3 percent or more of the total vote: Jospin (Socialist), 23.3 percent; Chirac (Gaullist), 20.8 percent; Balladur (Gaullist), 18.6 percent; Le Pen (FN), 15.0 percent; Hue (Communist), 8.6 percent; Laguiller (Workers' Struggle), 5.3 percent; De Villiers (Mouvement pour la France), 4.7 percent; and Voynet (Greens), 3.3 percent. Clearly, the French presidential voter has considerable choice, in terms of ideological and policy options. This is perhaps one reason why voter turnout in these contests has averaged over 80 percent. (We return to the implications of these turnout numbers below.)

On the extreme right, the National Front enjoyed a surge from the late 1980s. Its electoral weight is clearly seen in the vote totals for Jean-Marie Le Pen, which reached a peak in 2002 when he actually got through to the second, decisive vote round. The seemingly impossible occurred. In the first round, he beat out Socialist Jospin

for second place by a whisker (16.9 percent to 16.2 percent). No one, politician or pundit or proletarian, had foreseen this outcome. In response, leaders of the mainstream left and right rallied together, calling for a triumph of traditional republican virtues against the xenophobic National Front champion. President Chirac roundly thrashed Le Pen at the second round with 82.2 percent of the vote. But the foundations of the democracy were shaken.

The fortunes of the center have fluctuated, depending partly on the presence of an appealing candidate, such as Bayrou in 2007. He was offered an unusual opportunity in that contest because, unlike in the past contests (of 1988, 1995, and 2007), neither a prime minister nor a president was running. Both Socialist Royal and UMP Sarkozy were, of course, major party leaders. Nevertheless, they lacked the executive stamp of presidential candidates in the recent past. This situation made for a bracing ideological contest, waged by personalities lacking the armor of office. The absence of these traditional constraints helped to make the centre position more attractive, and Bayrou took full advantage. Indeed, at different points in the campaign, polls actually showed him the “Condorcet winner,” capable of besting all comers in a series of straight, paired fights (Abramson, 2007). How Sarkozy, in the end, took the prize is an interesting story, which we will tell in the chapters to come.

1.2 French electoral institutions and the presidency

French presidential elections, like elections in all modern democracies, are governed by rules. But France possibly has more rules, and certainly the rules change more than in most other democracies. The Fifth Republic has a written constitution. However, since the French Revolution the country has had 16 written constitutions, and more than a dozen national election laws have been used since 1870 and the start of the Third Republic. Today, the election rules for the different levels of office (president, National Assembly, Senate, European Parliament, regional councils, departmental councils, and municipal councils) vary: they use either proportional representation or a majority, and have one or two rounds, which are held at the same or different times. As a sage observer of the French scene famously declared, political institutions in France have “been treated as a weapon in the struggle between different political camps and between different

political forces for the control of State and society” (Campbell, 1965, p. 17). The contemporary set of institutions, formed under the 1958 Constitution of the Fifth Republic, establishes a hybrid presidential-parliamentary system with the dual executive of a president and a prime minister.

Currently, the president acts as head of state, may declare a state of emergency, and holds office for a fixed five-year term, with the opportunity for reelection. He or she formulates general policy before the National Assembly, validates that body’s legislation, and designates the prime minister to lead the government in parliament. The president may dissolve parliament and call for new legislative elections. With Charles de Gaulle, presidential power was extensive, unchecked by the prime minister, who was, in the words of Macridis (1975, p. 28) “the President’s man.” Subsequently, only one woman has served as prime minister: Edith Cresson, under Mitterrand in 1991. Although no women have held presidential office, one was a serious presidential candidate: Ségolène Royal, the Socialist opponent to Nicolas Sarkozy in the second round of the 2007 contest. Table 1.2 shows the results from the second ballot of all the French presidential elections during the Fifth Republic.

As noted, the many parties of the Fifth Republic are often largely represented within two broad ideological divisions, the left and the right. Until the Socialist *alternance* of 1981, the presidency of the Fifth Republic had been in the hands of the traditional right.

Table 1.2 French presidential election results, second ballot, Fifth Republic, 1965–2007

	Incumbent candidate	Vote (%)	Opposition candidate	Vote (%)
1965	De Gaulle	55.2	Mitterrand	44.8
1969	Pompidou	58.2	Poher	41.8
1974	Giscard d’Estaing	50.8	Mitterrand	49.2
1981	Giscard d’Estaing	48.2	Mitterrand	51.8
1988	Mitterrand	54.0	Chirac	46.0
1995	Jospin	47.4	Chirac	52.6
2002	Chirac	82.2	Le Pen	17.8
2007	Sarkozy	53.1	Royal	46.9

Note: Entries are percentages of votes cast (*suffrages exprimés*).

Source: Conseil constitutionnel français (1965–2007).