

Where does Macron's success come from? A look at electoral shifts with an eye on the legislative elections

Aldo Paparo

May 24, 2017

Emmanuel Macron is therefore the new French President. The result of the second ballot against Marine Le Pen did not give any surprises, and the front-runner of the eve confirmed in the polls its advantage. The surprise, perhaps, was in the proportions of his victory. The latest opinion polls credited Macron with about 60% of the votes, possibly even some points over that threshold. But no one had predicted that he was going to be capable of basically doubling up the votes received by the challenger from the Front National.

The turnout, though close to 75%, was the lowest recorded in a second round of a presidential election since 1974. It is also the first case since 1969 in which the turnout was lower in the second than the first round. The series of seven presidential elections, which had seen a higher participation in the second round than the first, was then interrupted. As we shall see, this may be mainly attributed to the choices of Mélenchon voters who appear to have defected the electoral polls in a much more significant way than other electorates did. Moreover, it was also the only electorate who had not received a clear endorsement from their first-round candidate.

The traditional increase in electoral participation between first and second rounds emerges when looking at turnout, and not valid votes. Often the increase in the blank and null votes was higher than the one in turnout, so that there was a contraction in the valid votes even in presence of an increase in the number of voters – this has actually happened in four of the seven elections mentioned above. That being said, still it deserves to be underlined that, in the 2017 runoff, the increase in the blank and null votes compared to the first round has been extraordinarily higher than usual. In the last thirty years the difference between turnout and valid votes in presidential second rounds was between 3 and 5 percentage points. And before that it was even lower.

This year was 9 percentage points, while in the first round it was 2 points, absolutely in line with the previous elections. It means that over four million French went to the polls voters on May 7 but did not validly vote for either Macron or Le Pen.

The next, decisive, electoral moment in France will take place in less than a month – the legislative election. As for presidential elections, they will be

Table 1. Electoral results in the French presidential election, first and second rounds

	Second round			First round		
	Total	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)	Total	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)
Registered voters	47,568,693			47,582,183		
Turnout	35,467,327	74.6		37,003,728	77.8	
Abstentions	12,101,366	25.4		10,578,455	22.2	
Valid votes	31,381,603	66.0	88.5	36,054,394	75.8	97.4
Blank votes	3,021,499	6.4	8.5	659,997	1.4	1.8
Null votes	1,064,225	2.2	3.0	289,337	0.6	0.8
Candidate	Votes	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)	Votes	% (on registered voters)	% (on total turnout)
Macron (En Marche !)	20,743,128	43.6	66.1	8,656,346	18.2	24.0
Le Pen (Front National)	10,638,475	22.4	33.9	7,678,491	16.1	21.3
Fillon (Les Republicains)				7,212,995	15.2	20.0
Mélenchon (La France insoumise)				7,059,951	14.8	19.6
Hamon (Parti Socialiste)				2,291,288	4.8	6.4
Dupont-Aignan (De- bout la France)				1,695,000	3.6	4.7
Lassalle (Résistons !)				435,301	0.9	1.2
Poutou (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste)				394,505	0.8	1.1
Asselineau (Union po- pulaire républicaine)				332,547	0.7	0.9
Arthaud (Lutte ouvrière)				232,384	0.5	0.6
Cheminade (Solidarité et progrès)				65,586	0.1	0.2

Where does Macron's success come from? A look at electoral shifts with an eye on the legislative elections

held under a two-rounds, single-member-district electoral system. With some differences. First, there will be 577 different competitions in the 577 districts each electing a member of the National Assembly. Then there will be only one week (and not two) between the two rounds. Finally, if no candidate immediately reaches the majority in the first round, they will not enter the ballot for the two most voted but all those who have collected at least 12.5% (of the overall district registered voters).

The legislative election will be crucial because now that Macron has conquered the Élysée, it remains to be seen whether he will have a parliamentary majority with him. How many seats will candidates from his movement (La République En Marche!) conquer? How many will be the elected Gaullist MPs? – Whom the new President seems willing to seek a coalitional agreement with, judging by the early appointments in the executive. How many MPs will the Socialist Party succeed in electing? – After the incredible debacle of the presidential election. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see whether the two-round French electoral system will be once again able to marginalize the extremes (Duverger 1954), represented by the parties of Mélenchon and Le Pen – as perfectly demonstrated by the presidential elections this year. Again, the voters' second preferences will be decisive.

For all these reasons, as well as, of course, to better understand the outcome of the presidential elections, we have estimated the electoral shifts between the first and second round of the presidential election. Let's start from Table 2, which shows how the first-round electorates of the various candidates spread up in the second round – between abstention and vote for the two contenders. We can first observe how both Macron and Le Pen have maintained virtually all of their first-round voters, without any direct passage to the rival. However, it should be pointed out that the latter has a slightly higher transition rate towards abstention (7%), and that the relative coefficient is significant (i.e. it represents more than 1% of the French electorate).

We then come to the second preferences of those voters who did not have in the second-round their favourite candidate running. It is clear how Macron was clearly preferred among these voters. Proceeding in order of size of the relative first-round electorates, we observe how among Fillon's voters there are more than three who voted for Macron for each one who choose Le Pen. The portion of Mélenchon's electorate who voted for Macron is exactly the same than the Gaullists (57%), but much fewer have voted than Le Pen – more than a third have actually abstained from voting, the highest transition rate towards non-voting being recorded by any first-round electorates. Therefore, the ratio between votes to Macron and votes to Le Pen among the Mélenchon voters is even more unbalanced in favour of the former – more than twice that of Fillon, reaching 7 votes for Macron for each vote for Le Pen.

Among the (few) socialist voters, Macron has dominated. Twenty votes for him for each vote for the Front National candidate. It should also be noted how this was the group (if we exclude the electorates of the two challengers facing each other on May 7) who less deserted the polls: only one out of six did so. Le Pen won only among the smallest of all first-round electorates, Dupont-Aignan's, and with a much narrower margin, four votes to her every three for Macron. The new President also had a clear advantage among the sixth of first-round abstainers who voted in the second round – almost three votes to him for each vote to Le Pen.

Table 2. Electoral shifts between first and second round of the 2017 French presidential election, destinations

Second-round vote	First-round vote							No vote
	Mélenchon	Hamon	Macron	Fillon	Dupont	Le Pen	Others	
Macron	57%	80%	97%	57%	30%	0%	39%	11%
Le Pen	8%	4%	0%	18%	41%	93%	30%	4%
No vote	35%	16%	3%	25%	30%	7%	32%	85%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In short, Macron had a slight advantage after the first round ([Michel in this volume \(a\)](#)), and was clearly favoured by the second preference of voters whose candidates had not reached the second round. This explains his great success. The cross-cutting nature Macron's vote is clearly visible in Table 3, showing how Macron's and Le Pen's second-round electorates are formed in terms of first-round electorates. It can be noted that the Front National candidate obtains two-thirds of her second-round votes by voters who had already voted for her in the first round. An eighth comes from Fillon, half of that from Dupont-Aignan, and a twentieth from Mélenchon. These are her only significant entries (i.e. representing more than 1% of the electorate).

In contrast, Macron only obtained 40% of his (twice as many) votes from his first-round electorate. A fifth comes from Fillon's voters and a substantially identical portion from Mélenchon's. Almost a tenth comes from Hamon's first-round voters. Moreover, all other coefficients for incoming shifts are significant as well: the one from first-round abstainers, but also the ones from Dupont-Aignan and voters of minor candidates.

Macron's greater competitiveness in gaining second preferences is clearly visible in Figure 1, in which first-round electorates occupy the left half of the

Where does Macron’s success come from? A look at electoral shifts with an eye on the legislative elections

Table 3. Electoral shifts between first and second round of the 2017 French presidential election, sources

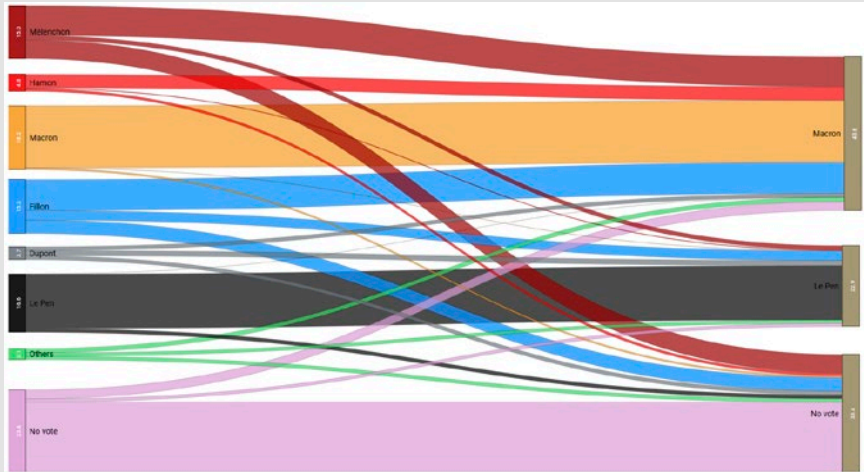
Second-round vote	First-round vote								Total
	Mé- lenc- hon	Hamon	Ma- cra- ron	Fillon	Du- pont	Le Pen	Others	No vote	
Macron	19%	9%	40%	20%	2%	0%	3%	6%	100%
Le Pen	5%	1%	0%	12%	6%	67%	4%	4%	100%
No vote	16%	2%	1%	11%	3%	3%	3%	60%	100%

chart, and second-round electoral choices the right half. The different first-round electorates are represented by a colour, and each shift is shown through a strip, whose height represents its electoral size.

The figure shows how the only large entry for Le Pen (in black) is that her own first-round electorate; while for Macron (orange), in addition to the more or less same-sized entry from his first-round voters, there are significant in-comings basically from all first-round electorates.

In short, our analyses seem to show that a certain Republican front against Le Pen operated. Although not entirely rejected by voters of other candidates, as also indicated by the particularly low electoral participation, the Front Na-

Figure 1. Electoral shifts between first and second round of the 2017 French presidential election



tional candidate has proved poorly able to compete for the second preferences. If in the legislative election *Republique En Marche!* candidates will prove capable of a transversal appeal similar to that of its founder, perhaps even exploiting the bandwagon effect streaming from the *Élysée's* take, no possibility appears impossible. Not even winning a majority of districts. The agreements and nested games that parties will put in place before the vote, or between first and second rounds, will be crucial. Now it's a few weeks and we'll have all the answers¹...

References

- Duverger, M. (1954), *Political parties: Their organization and activity in the modern state*, London, Methuen.
- Goodman, L. A. (1953), 'Ecological regression and behavior of individual', *American Sociological Review*, 18, pp. 663-664.
- Michel, E. (2018a), 'French presidential election: An expected surprise', in De Sio, L., and Paparo, A. (eds.), *The year of challengers? Issues, public opinion, and elections in Western Europe in 2017*, Rome, CISE, pp. 87-90.
- Michel, E. (2018b), 'French parliamentary elections: Macron's successful bet', in De Sio, L., and Paparo, A. (eds.), *The year of challengers? Issues, public opinion, and elections in Western Europe in 2017*, Rome, CISE, pp. 113-114.
- Michel, E. (2018c), 'Macron with a comfortable majority undermined by record low turnout', in De Sio, L., and Paparo, A. (eds.), *The year of challengers? Issues, public opinion, and elections in Western Europe in 2017*, Rome, CISE, pp. 115-118.
- Plescia, C., and De Sio, L. (2017), 'An evaluation of the performance and suitability of $R \times C$ methods for ecological inference with known true values', *Quality & Quantity*, Online First.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The shifts here reported were calculated applying the [Goodman](#) (1953) model to data from almost 70,000 French electoral polls. Specifically, we have estimated separate shifts matrices for each of the 577 single-member districts of the legislative election, then re-aggregated according to their relative populations into the national matrices shown here. We have removed from the

¹ Regarding the results of the first and second round of the legislative elections, see Michel in this volume ([b](#); [c](#)).

Where does Macron's success come from? A look at electoral shifts with an eye on the legislative elections

analysis electoral polls with less than 100 voters (in the first or in the second round), as well as those that show a variation rate above 20% in the number of registered voters (both in increase or in decrease). Finally, we excluded from the analysis those districts whose number of polls was too low to accurately estimate the desired coefficients (less than 48 polls). The average value of the VR index in the 554 overall analyses is 6.3.

