



THE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, 2007

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Raymond Kuhn

The victory of Nicolas Sarkozy over the Socialist candidate Sérgolène Royal in the second round of the 2007 presidential election marked the start of a new era in the politics of the French Fifth Republic. Although he had served as a prominent member of the outgoing conservative government since 2002 as well as leader of the dominant party of the right – the UMP – since November 2004, Sarkozy successfully presented himself during the campaign as the incarnation of change following the 12 years of immobilism under Jacques Chirac's presidential tenure (Giesbert 2006). The result was a triumph for Sarkozy, who had consistently been the front-runner in opinion polls since the start of the year, and a bitter disappointment for the Socialists, who succumbed to their third successive defeat in presidential elections.

Sarkozy's victory was followed by the re-election of the mainstream right in the parliamentary election in June. Yet while the UMP retained their overall majority in the National Assembly with 313 seats out of a total of 577, the final margin of victory over the Socialist Party was much smaller than had been anticipated. Indeed the number of UMP deputies was significantly lower than the 2002 total of 369, with the Socialist Party benefiting from a swing in public opinion between the two rounds of voting. The biggest shock of the parliamentary contest was the defeat of the former Prime Minister Alain Juppé in his Bordeaux constituency, which resulted in his resignation from the new government. Nonetheless, President Sarkozy still obtained a clear parliamentary majority for his reform platform, while the regime's dominant institutional model based on mutually supportive presidential and parliamentary majorities once again reasserted itself.

The Presidential Election: First Round (22 April)

The eighth presidential election since de Gaulle's 1962 constitutional amendment introduced election of the head of state by direct universal suffrage was contested over two rounds with a single national constituency that included voters from overseas departments and territories as well as French citizens living abroad (Vedel 2007). In 2007 12 candidates (eight men and four women) obtained the minimum 500 sponsoring signatures from local mayors and regional councillors (see Table 1).

The 12 included some well-known figures: Jean-Marie Le Pen was representing the Front National for the fifth time, while Arlette Laguiller went one better as the candidate for Lutte Ouvrière in her sixth successive presidential election. Three other candidates – François Bayrou, Philippe de Villiers and Olivier Besancenot – were standing for the second time. In contrast, this was the first presidential election for the two leading candidates in the opinion polls, Sarkozy and Royal. The ideological spectrum ranged from Le Pen on the extreme right to Besancenot, Laguiller and Gérard Schivardi on the extreme left. There were three candidates from the right – Bayrou (UDF), de Villiers (national sovereigntist) and Sarkozy; three from the left – Marie-George Buffet (Communist Party), Dominique Voynet (Greens) and Royal; an anti-globalisation candidate, José Bové; and, finally, the hunting/fishing/nature and traditions candidate, Frédéric Nihous.

TABLE 1
Number of candidates in the first round of presidential elections (1965–2007)

Year	No. of candidates
1965	6
1969	7
1974	12
1981	10
1988	9
1995	9
2002	16
2007	12

During the pre-campaign period of the early months of 2007 the expectation across the political class, the media and public opinion was that the contest was effectively a two-horse race between Sarkozy and Royal, both of whom had easily won the 'primary' contests within their respective parties. Indeed Sarkozy had not even been challenged by a major contender within the UMP. Juppé's presidential ambitions had been effectively destroyed by the negative judicial decision in 2004 regarding his involvement in the illegal funding of the Gaullist party. The outgoing Prime Minister and Chirac loyalist, Dominique de Villepin, also declined to put himself forward after having been discredited by his alleged involvement in a smear scandal against Sarkozy (the Clearstream affair) and by his failed attempt to introduce more flexible labour legislation for the hiring and firing of young workers (*Contrat Première Embauche*) which had been fiercely opposed in street demonstrations in early 2006. Finally, and to nobody's great surprise, Chirac himself confirmed in March his intention not to stand again; the humiliating failure of the 2005 referendum on the EU constitution and the minor stroke which required his hospitalisation later the same year had effectively put an end to any lingering hopes of an unprecedented third presidential term. In the Socialist contest, Royal had easily defeated two senior members of the party and former top government ministers, Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Laurent Fabius, in large part thanks to the votes of new party members who believed the opinion poll findings that she was best placed to beat Sarkozy.

In contrast to 2002, there was a markedly high public interest in the election campaign, evidenced by substantial viewing figures for new-style election debate programmes on television in which 'ordinary citizens' posed questions directly to the candidates. This was also the first presidential election in which the internet played a major role – including official candidate websites such as Royal's *Désirs d'avenir* and an array of political blogs by professional journalists and voters. Public interest was undoubtedly stimulated by the fact that the two leading contenders represented a clear generational shift from their immediate predecessors at the Elysée. Moreover, Sarkozy and Royal not only were relatively young major contenders for the presidency but also exuded a sense of well-publicised vitality. Both had marketed themselves as in touch with the needs and concerns of ordinary French voters, with Royal emphasising her role as a woman and mother (for example, in her condemnation of domestic violence), while Sarkozy exploited two periods as Minister of the Interior to demonstrate his toughness on the salient issue of law and order.

Unlike in 2002 when the theme of *insécurité* had virtually monopolised the election agenda, in 2007 no single issue came to dominate the campaign. Moreover, while the news media had played a major role in framing the campaign agenda in 2002 with their focus on crime stories, in 2007 the media tended to follow the campaign themes set by the leading candidates. Key issues included the economy, employment, taxation, education, crime and national identity. Prior to the campaign Sarkozy had presented himself as favouring a break with the past – *rupture tranquille* – but during the campaign itself he did not go out of his way to emphasise his commitment to radical neo-liberal economic reform.

Neither candidate addressed in depth the challenges facing France in the globalised interdependent economy, with the result that the campaign had an overwhelmingly Franco-French feel to it, particularly in relation to the issue of national identity, where Sarkozy proposed the creation of a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity and Royal played up the importance of the tricolour flag and the national anthem. The two candidates made several gaffes in referring to statistics and policy initiatives during the campaign, but the news media tended to focus more on those made by Royal, who was regarded by the electorate as having less of a presidential stature than her rival. Her image of competence was not helped by the resignation from the Socialist Party hierarchy of Eric Besson, who publicly voiced his criticism of the costing of Royal's economic pledges before moving across to support Sarkozy.

To a significant extent both Sarkozy and Royal presented themselves as outsiders with regard to their respective formations, engaging in the use of what Michael Foley has termed 'spatial leadership', whereby candidates create a sense of distance from their party so as to enhance their leadership credentials (Foley 2000). Indeed, one of the interesting aspects of the campaign was the way in which Sarkozy succeeded in both claiming any benefits from being part of the government – for example measures taken to combat crime – while at the same time managing to distance himself from its overall unpopularity with voters. One of the many defects of the Royal campaign was its inability to pin on Sarkozy the mantle of association with the policy failures of the outgoing administration. During Chirac's second term at the Elysée, Sarkozy was helped in this 'outsider strategy' by his highly mediatised conflict with the president, the origins of which dated back to the 1995 presidential contest, when Sarkozy had backed Edouard Balladur against Chirac in the internal struggle for dominance of the right. In the 2007 campaign Chirac eventually gave his support to Sarkozy's candidacy, but with no sign of any great enthusiasm.

In similar vein Royal's campaign was marked by the way in which she sought to distance herself from the Socialist Party and to present herself as a moderniser in contrast to the traditional male party bosses. The latter included the leader of the party, François Hollande, who was Royal's long-standing partner. Tension between Royal's campaign team and Socialist Party headquarters was a constant feature of the campaign and included a well-publicised disagreement between Royal and Hollande over her tax proposals. Royal was also critical of aspects of the 35-hour week, one of the flagship reforms of the Jospin-led government of the plural left (1997–2002), and was much less opposed to Blair-style social and economic reforms than most other leading members of the Socialist Party.

As well as fighting each other in the run-up to the first round, Sarkozy and Royal had to face a strong challenge from the centrist candidate Bayrou, who posed a clear danger not only to Royal in her bid to get through to the second round, but also to Sarkozy since

polls showed that if he (Bayrou) did manage to secure one of the coveted top two spots then he could defeat the UMP candidate in the decisive run-off. For different reasons, therefore, both Royal and Sarkozy had a mutual interest in seeing off the first-round competition from Bayrou.

During the campaign Bayrou made much of his provincial origins and his farming background in south-west France. In September 2006 he had criticised a 'media conspiracy' in favour of the two major candidates during a news interview on the main national television channel, TF1, which had won him public support and, ironically, started to create some media interest in his own candidacy. Despite being a former government minister, Bayrou presented himself during the campaign as not just an outsider candidate but also an opponent of the traditional political class. In so doing he was clearly seeking to benefit from voter disapproval of establishment politicians in France in recent years. Some Socialist voters seemed prepared to vote for Bayrou because of their scepticism regarding Royal's credibility and their desire to ensure Sarkozy's defeat. However, polls showed that many of Bayrou's potential voters had not fully committed themselves to his cause and so his vote was susceptible to the classic two-party squeeze, particularly as many voters still believed in the salience of the left-right cleavage.

The results of the first round of the 2007 presidential election are given in Table 2. Perhaps the most notable aspect of the first round was the extremely high level of turnout, the highest since 1974 (see Table 3). Royal was the major beneficiary of the return to the ballot box of those voters who had abstained in the first round in 2002. Among those voters who did abstain in 2007, the largest groups were among the unemployed and those with minimal educational qualifications.

TABLE 2
2007 presidential election result: first round

Registered electorate	44,472,834	
Votes	37,254,242	
Valid votes	36,719,396	
Abstentions	16.23%	
Spoiled ballots	1.44%	
<hr/>		
Candidate	Votes	% of valid votes cast
Nicolas Sarkozy	11,448,663	31.18
Ségolène Royal	9,500,112	25.87
François Bayrou	6,820,119	18.57
Jean-Marie Le Pen	3,834,530	10.44
Olivier Besancenot	1,498,581	4.08
Philippe de Villiers	818,407	2.23
Marie-George Buffet	707,268	1.93
Dominique Voynet	576,666	1.57
Arlette Laguiller	487,857	1.33
José Bové	483,008	1.32
Frédéric Nihous	420,645	1.15
Gérard Schivardi	123,540	0.34

Source: *Le Monde*, 27 April 2007 (Constitutional Council figures).

TABLE 3

Level of turnout in first round of presidential elections 1965–2007 (as percentage of registered electorate)

Year	% of electorate
1965	88.21
1969	77.59
1974	84.23
1981	81.09
1988	81.37
1995	77.88
2002	71.60
2007	83.77

Source: Duhamel and Jeanneney, 2002: 281–4; *Le Monde*, 11 June 2002; *Le Monde* 27 April 2007.

There was no major shock in the first-round results, and certainly nothing to compare with the elimination of the Prime Minister and Socialist Party candidate Lionel Jospin by Le Pen five years earlier (Kuhn 2003). Sarkozy's first-round share of the vote (31.18 per cent) was considerably higher than anything ever achieved by Chirac (19.34 per cent in 1988, 20.84 per cent in 1995 and 19.88 per cent in 2002). Sarkozy outperformed Chirac's 2002 first-round score in every department of metropolitan France with the single exception of the outgoing president's traditional rural fiefdom of Corrèze. The UMP candidate benefited from the support of voters across the whole of the traditional mainstream right. In addition, while Chirac had never appealed to or won votes from the extreme right, Sarkozy had explicitly geared his campaign to drain support from Le Pen. This allowed him to gain votes from a significant section of the Front National electorate – for example in Alsace, previously a FN stronghold. Sarkozy also did particularly well among older voters, winning 44 per cent of the over 65s (only 21 per cent of whom voted for Royal).

Royal's vote share of 25.87 per cent was a notable improvement on that of Jospin five years earlier (16.18 per cent) and its announcement was met with a huge sigh of relief by Socialist supporters. Royal outperformed Jospin's 2002 score in every department of metropolitan France. Indeed her share was comparable to Mitterrand's first-round share in 1981 (25.84 per cent), when the Socialists had won the presidency for the first time. Royal undoubtedly benefited from the desire of voters across the left to cast a so-called 'useful vote' (*vote utile*), so as not to repeat the fragmentation of the left which had functioned with such disastrous consequences in the first round in 2002. Royal did particularly well with younger voters, gaining 34 per cent of the 18–24 age group (only 19 per cent of whom voted for Sarkozy), and with ethnic minority voters. However, she secured only 27 per cent of the female electorate, in contrast to Sarkozy, who won 33 per cent of women's votes.

Although he failed in his bid to secure a place in the second round, Bayrou secured a highly creditable 18.57 per cent vote share, well up on his 6.84 per cent in 2002. Bayrou did well among middle management and teachers. In contrast to both Sarkozy and Royal, he did better among male voters (22 per cent of the total) than female (15 per cent). If one combined the votes of the leading three candidates (Sarkozy, Royal and Bayrou) then over three-quarters of voters voted for candidates of the mainstream parties – the broad

pro-system centre ground. Sarkozy and Royal between them secured double the votes won by Chirac and Jospin in 2002. There was, therefore, no sign in 2007 of the significant voting levels for extreme right and extreme left which had been such a feature of the first round of the 2002 contest.

Indeed, the major loser of the first round vote was Le Pen, whose support had been overestimated by opinion pollsters anxious not to duplicate the forecasting errors of 2002. Not only was there no repeat of his shock result five years earlier, but his vote share of 10.44 per cent was the lowest presidential score he had achieved since the rise to electoral prominence of the Front National in the early 1980s (Shields 2007). It compared poorly to his scores of 14.19 per cent in 1988, 15.00 per cent in 1995 and 16.86 per cent in 2002. Le Pen lost a million voters between 2002 and 2007. Nonetheless, it is testimony to his impact on presidential politics in France over the past 20 years that a score of over 3,800,000 votes can be interpreted as a significant failure.

For the Communists the result was an even more unmitigated disaster than in 2002. Buffet's score of 1.93 per cent was the lowest ever achieved by a Communist Party candidate in the Fifth Republic. While the desire across voters of the left to support Royal in the first round undoubtedly worked against Buffet, this tactical consideration could not mask the structural disintegration of the Communist Party as an electoral force in presidential contests. An uncharismatic candidate, Buffet was even overtaken by one of the extreme left candidates, Besancenot, who gained twice as many votes, including 6 per cent of the 18–24 age group.

The Presidential Election: Second Round (6 May)

Since no candidate obtained over 50 per cent of the vote in the first round, the two leading candidates proceeded to the decisive second-round run-off in which both had to ensure the maximisation of their potential electoral support outside their primary voter base. Sarkozy started out as clear favourite. For Royal the success of the *vote utile* in the first round was double-edged: unlike Mitterrand in 1981, she now had no significant untapped reservoir of left-wing votes to draw on. Royal was therefore heavily dependent on attracting voters from the centre, notably those who had voted for Bayrou in the first round, and gathering support from any other voters for whom a Sarkozy presidency was anathema.

The campaign between the two rounds was dominated by this strategic need of both candidates to maximise their electoral appeal. During the first week Royal arranged a heavily mediatised meeting with Bayrou in an attempt to woo the centrist leader. She also proposed that the UDF participate in any future Socialist-led government. Yet while Bayrou explicitly indicated his personal opposition to Sarkozy, he refused to give a clear call in support of Royal, aware that not all of those who had voted for him in the first round would heed any such appeal. Most UDF deputies (22 out of 29) indicated that they would support Sarkozy. Royal also played the gender card in asking women across the political spectrum to vote for her as a sign of change – a tactic which manifestly failed, since only 46 per cent of female voters voted for her in the second round.

As the decisive vote approached, polls showed Sarkozy ahead of Royal on issues such as security (a very large lead), immigration, economic policy, foreign policy, employment and Europe. Royal was ahead on education, housing, health and, most notably, the environment. Sarkozy was viewed as the candidate of 'change' and 'reform' by

a majority of voters. Moreover, while most pro-Sarkozy voters saw their vote as an expression of positive support for their candidate, many pro-Royal voters intended to vote for her as a negative vote to block Sarkozy.

The final week of the campaign was dominated by the television debate between the two candidates held on 2 May. The tradition of a televised duel between the two remaining contenders had originated in 1974 and has become a feature of all subsequent presidential elections with the exception of the 2002 contest, when Chirac refused to debate with Le Pen. Royal entered the debate well behind Sarkozy in the polls and needed to destabilise him massively if she were to have any chance of pulling off what now seemed a very unlikely victory. Despite her going on the offensive, however, Sarkozy retained his sang-froid and refused to be goaded. Indeed, a clear majority of viewers from across the political spectrum, including an overwhelming majority of Bayrou voters, thought that Sarkozy gave the better performance during the debate (53 per cent for Sarkozy, 39 per cent for Royal).

At just under 84 per cent the turnout for the second round of voting was again very high (see Table 4). The result was an easy victory for Sarkozy with just over 53 per cent of the vote and the second highest number of votes ever recorded by a winning candidate (see Tables 5 and 6).

The Parliamentary Election: First Round (10 June)

French parliamentary elections are contested over two rounds in 577 metropolitan and overseas constituencies. In 2007 there were 7,639 candidates nationwide, down from the record 8,455 in 2002. Despite the parity legislation of 2000 to ensure an equal number of male and female candidates, there was still an imbalance between the sexes. The UMP put forward 30 per cent women candidates in 2007 (up from fewer than 20 per cent in 2002), while Bayrou's newly created centrist party, UDF-Mouvement Démocrate, had 38 per cent (up from around 20 per cent for the UDF in 2002). The Socialist Party did much better with 48 per cent (up from 36 per cent in 2002), while most of the smaller parties, especially on the left, respected the parity legislation.

During the five weeks since Sarkozy's election the new president had been a dominant political and media presence. He had chosen not just the new Prime Minister,

TABLE 4

Level of turnout in second round of presidential elections 1965–2007 (as percentage of registered electorate)

Year	% of electorate
1965	84.29
1969	68.85
1974	88.33
1981	85.86
1988	84.06
1995	79.66
2002	80.14
2007	83.97

Source: Duhamel and Jeanneney, 2002: 281–4; *Le Monde*, 7 May 2002, *Le Monde*, 8 May 2007.

TABLE 5
2007 presidential election result: second round

Electorate	44,472,733	
Votes	37,342,004	
Valid votes	35,773,578	
Abstentions	16.03%	
Spoiled ballots	4.20%	
<hr/>		
Candidate	Votes	% of valid votes cast
Nicolas Sarkozy	18,983,138	53.06
Ségolène Royal	16,790,440	46.94

Source: *Le Monde*, 12 May 2007 (Constitutional Council figures).

François Fillon, but also the other leading ministers. As a sign of change the new government included personalities from the left, such as Bernard Kouchner as Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as several women. Sarkozy had also pushed ahead with the announcement of several reform measures, including the granting of 'autonomy' to universities and the introduction of a minimum service on public transport during strike action.

Following their failure in the presidential contest, the Socialists were in total disarray. There was no realistic hope of the electorate reversing its decision of 6 May and reintroducing a period of *cohabitation* between presidential and parliamentary majorities of different political complexions as had been the case between 1997 and 2002. The Socialists lacked attractive policies and a coherent strategy to present to the electorate. While Bayrou sought to capitalise on his excellent first-round presidential score through the creation of a new party, several UDF deputies preferred to align themselves with the UMP rather than risk being crushed by the Sarkozy juggernaut. These pro-Sarkozy UDF deputies went into the election under a new centre-right party label: PSLE.

The widespread expectation was that as in 2002 the parliamentary contest would confirm the result of the presidential election of only five weeks previously and deliver a

TABLE 6
Number of votes and percentage share of winning candidates in the second round (1965–2007)

Year	Winning candidate	No. of votes	% share
1965	Charles de Gaulle	13,083,699	55.19
1969	Georges Pompidou	11,064,489	58.21
1974	Valéry Giscard d'Estaing	13,396,203	50.81
1981	François Mitterrand	15,708,262	51.76
1988	François Mitterrand	16,704,279	54.02
1995	Jacques Chirac	15,763,027	52.64
2002	Jacques Chirac	25,316,647	82.15
2007	Nicolas Sarkozy	18,983,408	53.06

Source: Duhamel and Jeanneney, 2002: 281–4; *Le Monde*, 7 May 2002; *Le Monde*, 8 May 2007.

TABLE 7
2007 parliamentary election result: first round

Electorate	43,888,483	
Votes	26,525,147	
Valid votes	26,022,790	
Abstentions	39.56%	
Spoiled ballots	1.89%	
<hr/>		
Party	Votes	% of valid votes cast
UMP and associates	11,844,824	45.52
MoDem	2,019,827	7.76
Left	9,247,987	35.54
Socialists and associates	7,200,572	27.67
Communists	1,202,834	4.62
Greens	844,581	3.25
Extreme right	1,223,570	4.70
Extreme left	895,863	3.44
Others	790,719	3.04

Source: *Le Monde*, 12 June 2007.

solid parliamentary majority to the new president. If so, this would be the first time since 1978 that the same political coalition had won two parliamentary elections in succession. The result of the first round is given in Table 7.

The turnout of 60.44 per cent was the lowest ever for the first round of a parliamentary election in the Fifth Republic (see Table 8). The first-round result represented a substantial victory for the UMP and its allies, whose 45.52 per cent share of the vote was up from 43.66 per cent in 2002. The mainstream right won an impressive total of 109 constituencies in the first round, compared with 56 in 2002. The first-round result represented yet another defeat for the parties of the left: their 35.54 per cent share of the vote was down from 37.47 per cent five years previously. The Socialist Party and associates did comparatively well – 27.67 per cent compared with 26.50 per cent in 2002 – and managed to win one seat in the first round. The Greens fell back to 3.25 per cent from 4.43

TABLE 8
Level of turnout in first round of parliamentary elections 1973–2007 (as percentage of registered electorate)

Year	% of electorate
1973	81.24
1978	83.01
1981	70.86
1986	78.02
1988	66.15
1993	69.31
1997	67.96
2002	64.38
2007	60.44

Source: Adapted from *Le Monde*, 11 June 2002 and 12 June 2007.

per cent in 2002. The Communists held reasonably steady: 4.62 per cent in 2007 compared with 4.70 per cent in 2002, demonstrating the residual importance of local personalities for the Communists in parliamentary elections (Lavabre and Platone, 2003). At 3.44 per cent the parties of the extreme left were slightly up on their score of 2.86 per cent in 2002.

By far the biggest loser in the first round of the parliamentary contest was the Front National. Its score of 4.70 per cent was well down on its equivalent performances in 2002 (11.11 per cent) and 1997 (14.94 per cent). This represented the party's worst result in parliamentary elections since 1981. The party managed to proceed to the second round in only one constituency, with Le Pen's daughter, Marine, left as the sole standard bearer of extreme right hopes.

The Parliamentary Election: Second Round (17 June)

While the right abstained from any premature triumphalism in the run-up to the second round, the widespread expectation was of a significant victory, with the Socialist Party concerned simply to limit the damage. The overwhelming majority of the second-round run-offs were straight fights between UMP and Socialist Party candidates. The most notable substantive issue between the two rounds was the announcement that the government was considering increasing the rate of VAT. Along with some complacency among right-wing voters, this premature manifestation of political honesty helped reverse the first round balance of forces. The result of the second round is given in Table 9. Once again the turnout of 60.0 per cent was a record low (see Table 10).

In terms of the allocation of parliamentary seats, the functioning of the electoral system normally tends to over-reward the winning side (see Table 11). However, the imbalance was less marked in 2007 than in 2002 because of the less effective performance

TABLE 9
2007 parliamentary election result: second round

Party	Votes	% of valid votes cast
Electorate	35,223,520	
Votes	21,132,355	
Valid votes	20,406,733	
Abstentions	40.00%	
Spoiled ballots	3.43%	
Right	10,113,041	49.56
UMP and associates	9,752,628	47.79
PSLE	360,413	1.77
MoDem	115,900	0.57
Left	10,049,064	49.25
Socialists and associates	9,398,513	46.06
Communists	559,576	2.74
Greens	90,975	0.45
Extreme right	17,107	0.08
Others	111,621	0.55

Source: *Le Monde*, 19 June 2007.

TABLE 10

Level of turnout in second round of parliamentary elections 1973–2002 (as percentage of registered electorate)

Year	% of electorate
1973	81.8
1978	84.9
1981	74.1
1986	78.5
1988	70.0
1993	67.8
1997	71.1
2002	60.3
2007	60.0

Source: Adapted from *Le Monde*, 18 June 2002 and 19 June 2007.

by the UMP and its allies in the second round. Thus the parties of the right, with over 45 per cent of the vote in the first round, emerged with 58 per cent of the seats after the second, while the left with over 35 per cent of the vote in the first round managed to win 39 per cent of the seats. With almost 8 per cent of the vote in the first round, Bayrou's new party gained a mere four seats (0.69 per cent), while the National Front with under 5 per cent of the vote in the first round once again failed to win a single seat in the new National Assembly. These results indicated not so much a bipolarisation in the composition of the new legislature as a bipartism, with the UMP and the Socialist Party between them holding more than 85 per cent of the seats.

In terms of gender balance, the composition of the new legislature marked a notable advance on that of its predecessor: 107 women (45 UMP, one other right, 49 Socialist, 12 other left) were elected compared with 68 five years earlier. This meant that female deputies now constitute 18.5 per cent of the total, compared with 12.3 per cent in the outgoing parliament – still a far cry from the objectives of parity legislation (see Table 12).

TABLE 11

2007 parliamentary election result: second round (seats)

Party	seats
Mainstream right	343
UMP	313
PSLE	20
Other right	10
MoDem	4
Mainstream left	227
Socialists	184
Radicaux de gauche	7
Communists	18
Greens	4
Other left	14
Others	3

Source: *Le Monde*, 19 June 2007.

TABLE 12
Share of women in the National Assembly (as percentage of total)

Year	%
1981	5.3
1986	5.9
1988	5.7
1993	6.1
1997	10.9
2002	12.2
2007	18.5

Source: *Le Monde*, 19 June 2007.

In contrast, only one ethnic minority candidate, the Socialist George Pau-Langevin, was elected to a parliamentary seat in metropolitan France.

Conclusion

It is difficult to make any sweeping generalisations regarding voter turnout in the 2007 elections. In the two rounds of the presidential contest turnout was extremely high, while in the parliamentary election it was very low. Two tentative conclusions may help explain this contrast. First, while some electoral abstentionism is structural, it is also clear that turnout on the part of some voters is linked to their perception of the stakes involved (Bréchon 2006). The presidential contest mobilised a section of the electorate who regarded the contest as important, but for whom the subsequent parliamentary elections lacked any comparable degree of significance. There is therefore no inevitability about long-term decline in electoral participation in France, even if some social groups, notably the young and the socially marginal, are more difficult to mobilise than others. Second, the presidential election has established itself as the primary defining contest in the political system of the Fifth Republic. This is a result of the reduction of the presidential term from seven to five years and the decision that the presidential election should precede the parliamentary contest. However, this does not mean that the parliamentary election simply acts as an automatic confirmation or ratification of the presidential result. While this was true in 2002, in 2007 voters took the opportunity of the second round of the parliamentary elections to trim what would have been an overwhelming majority for the incoming president.

The 2007 election results entrenched two-party politics in France (Grunberg and Haegel 2007). For the extreme right, the 2007 elections represented a spectacular failure, both in absolute terms and in comparison with previous electoral scores, notably the high-water mark of the first round of the 2002 presidential contest. A significant section of the Front National electorate not only voted for Sarkozy in the first round of the 2007 presidential election but also abandoned the party at the subsequent parliamentary contest. Le Pen has surely fought his last presidential election and there will now be a struggle within the party over the leadership succession – a struggle which his daughter Marine is well placed to win as she seeks to embed a political persona separate from that of her father. The Front National is not going to disappear from the political map: it still retains loyal supporters and will no doubt act as a haven of protest for disaffected voters in

the future. However, its power to disrupt party competition has been severely attenuated. Its legacy is the effect it has had on the political agenda in France over the past 25 years – the so-called *l'européanisation* of political attitudes.

For the left in general and the Socialist Party in particular the 2007 results represented a significant defeat, notwithstanding the counter-offensive of the second round of the parliamentary contest. The Socialist Party failed to rise to the challenge of its humiliating result in the 2002 presidential election, content largely to surf on the unpopularity of the right-wing government – a tactic that had paid such significant dividends in the 2004 regional elections (Kuhn 2005). Sarkozy's ploy of appointing members of the Socialist Party to government posts further destabilised the party. Hollande's enforced decision to relinquish the party leadership will give rise to a new contest at the top, which Royal is well poised to win. The party badly needs a renewal of its ideas, policies, organisation and electoral strategy if it is to overcome its miserable record of only two victories in eight presidential elections, although leading Socialists outside the Royal camp doubt whether she is best equipped to deal with the required renovation (Bartolone 2007; Cambadélis 2007).

In contrast, Sarkozy and his UMP majority now have five years of uninterrupted power at the national level. Sarkozy clearly intends to be an active, interventionist president and the way in which he filled the role in the early weeks of his tenure already led to political commentators talking of 'hyperpresidentialism'. The next five years will be a test for Sarkozy in his attempt to introduce much-needed reforms in key areas of the economy and society. One of the most important issues will be employment, which has proved a thorn in the side of governments of both left and right since the late 1970s. There is a strong need to bring unemployment down from over 8 per cent (spring of 2007), both to make France more competitive and to address issues of economic and social exclusion (Smith 2004). If with his commitment, authority and parliamentary majority Sarkozy cannot achieve this over the coming five years, it will be reasonable to ask whether any politician of either left or right can do so.

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APPENDIX: PARTY TITLES

- FN: *Front National*
MoDem: *Mouvement Démocrate*
PSLE: *Parti Social Libéral Européen*
UDF: *Union pour la Démocratie Française*
UMP: *Union pour la Majorité Populaire*