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# The French Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, 2002

Raymond Kuhn

The re-election of Jacques Chirac on 5 May 2002 brought to an end the most dramatic presidential election since the foundation of the Fifth Republic in 1958. The result in itself was not a huge surprise; although by no means a foregone conclusion at the start of the campaign, a victory for the incumbent had always been a distinct possibility. Rather, the shock lay in the circumstances in which Chirac secured his re-election, following a first round which saw the unexpected elimination of the prime minister and Socialist Party candidate, Lionel Jospin, at the hands of the National Front leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen. Greeted with expressions of incredulity and dismay both within France and across the international community, the presence of Le Pen in the second round totally changed the nature of the election as a contest.

Chirac's victory was followed by a significant triumph for the mainstream right in the parliamentary election. A new catch-all (or more accurately 'catch-most') conservative formation – the Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle (UMP) – single-handedly won an overall majority in the National Assembly with 369 seats out of a total of 577. The parties supporting the outgoing government of the 'plural left' were soundly defeated, while the National Front failed to win a single seat. Thus, after five years of executive *cohabitation* between president and prime minister of different political tendencies, in 2002 the Fifth Republic returned to the historically dominant model of mutually supportive presidential and parliamentary majorities.

## The presidential election: first round (21 April)

The 2002 presidential election was the seventh since de Gaulle's 1962 constitutional amendment introduced election of the head of state by direct universal suffrage. Up until 1986 the presidential and parliamentary majorities had always coincided. However, during the next 16 years France experienced three periods of *cohabitation*: Mitterrand/Chirac (1986-88), Mitterrand/Balladur (1993-95) and Chirac/Jospin (1997-2002). In an attempt to give greater stability and clarity to the functioning of the regime, a constitutional amendment was successfully passed in 2000 to reduce the presidential term from seven to five years, thus bringing it into line with its parliamentary counterpart. It was subsequently agreed that in 2002 the presidential election should precede the parliamentary contest.

The French presidential election is contested over two rounds in a single national constituency. While in the first round a variety of candidates may stand, only the two leading candidates go forward to the second round. In 2002 no fewer than 16 candidates (12 men and four women) obtained the minimum 500 sponsoring

signatures from local mayors. This was the highest ever number of first round candidates (see Table 1).

**Table 1: French presidential election statistics, 1965-2002**

|      | Number of candidates | First round turnout (%) | Second round turnout (%) |
|------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1965 | 6                    | 88.21                   | 84.29                    |
| 1969 | 7                    | 77.59                   | 68.85                    |
| 1974 | 12                   | 84.23                   | 88.33                    |
| 1981 | 10                   | 81.09                   | 85.86                    |
| 1988 | 9                    | 81.37                   | 84.06                    |
| 1995 | 9                    | 77.88                   | 79.66                    |
| 2002 | 16                   | 71.60                   | 79.71                    |

Sources: Duhamel and Jeanneney, 2002, pp. 281-4; *Le Monde* (2002) 27 April, 8 May, 11 June; <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr>

The ideological spectrum ranged from the extreme right – Le Pen and Mégret – to the extreme left – Besancenot, Gluckstein and Laguiller. It included five candidates from the right – Bayrou, Boutin, Chirac, Lepage and Madelin; five from the left – Jospin (Socialist), Hue (Communist), Mamère (Green), Taubira (Radical de gauche) and the pro-sovereignty Republican, Chevenèment; and, finally, the hunting/fishing/nature/tradition candidate, Saint-Josse.

Despite the unprecedentedly high number of first round candidates, the expectation throughout the political class, the media and public opinion was that the contest was effectively a two-horse race between Chirac and Jospin, with the second round predicted to be a replay of their 1995 duel. In contrast to the first round of several previous presidential contests, there was no major clash within either the mainstream right or left to excite commentators. Public interest in the election in the run-up to the first round was low, no doubt exacerbated by a widespread perception that there was little substantive difference on policy between what all opinion polls consistently judged to be the two front runners. In short, the first ballot seemed a formality in terms of its main function of deciding the two candidates to proceed to the second and final round of voting.

The campaign agenda prior to the first round was narrow in its issue coverage. The dominant issue was *l'insécurité*, which not only covered law and order questions, but was also related to a popular perception that globalisation and immigration had undermined job security and French distinctiveness. Chirac, in particular, based his campaign on this theme, which opinion polls showed to be the issue which most concerned French voters. The media, especially the evening news programme of the main television channel, TF1, gave considerable emphasis to crime stories in the weeks running up to the first round. Other issues, such as the economy, taxation, pensions

and the 35 hour week, also featured in the campaign, but less prominently. In contrast, Europe, health and education never really became election issues. Nor, to the surprise of many foreign journalists, did Chirac's alleged involvement in various financial scandals during his period as mayor of Paris (1977-95) and president (1995-2002): sleaze was almost wholly absent from the election agenda.

**Table 2: French presidential election results, 2002**

|                              | First round |         | Second round |         |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| Electorate                   | 41 194 689  |         | 41 192 327   |         |
| Votes cast                   | 29 495 733  |         | 32 832 842   |         |
| Abstentions                  | 28.4%       |         | 20.29%       |         |
| Spoiled ballots              | 3.4%        |         | 5.38%        |         |
| Valid votes                  | 28 498 471  |         | 31 067 651   |         |
| Candidate                    | Total votes | Votes % | Total votes  | Votes % |
| Jacques Chirac (RPR)         | 5 665 855   | 19.88   | 25 541 709   | 82.21   |
| Jean-Marie Le Pen (FN)       | 4 804 713   | 16.86   | 5 525 942    | 17.79   |
| Lionel Jospin (PS)           | 4 610 113   | 16.18   |              |         |
| François Bayrou (UDF)        | 1 949 170   | 6.84    |              |         |
| Arlette Laguiller (LO)       | 1 630 045   | 5.72    |              |         |
| Jean-Pierre Chevènement (PR) | 1 518 528   | 5.33    |              |         |
| Noël Mamère (V)              | 1 495 724   | 5.25    |              |         |
| Olivier Besancenot (LCR)     | 1 210 562   | 4.25    |              |         |
| Jean Saint-Josse (CPNT)      | 1 204 689   | 4.23    |              |         |
| Alain Madelin (DL)           | 1 113 484   | 3.91    |              |         |
| Robert Hue (PCF)             | 960 480     | 3.37    |              |         |
| Bruno Mégret (MNR)           | 667 026     | 2.34    |              |         |
| Christiane Taubira (PRG)     | 660 447     | 2.32    |              |         |
| Corinne Lepage (CAPVS)       | 535 837     | 1.88    |              |         |
| Christine Boutin (FRS)       | 339 112     | 1.19    |              |         |
| Daniel Gluckstein (PT)       | 132 686     | 0.47    |              |         |

*Notes:* RPR – Rassemblement pour la République (Rally for the Republic – Gaullists); FN – Front National; PS – Parti Socialiste; UDF – Union pour la Démocratie Française; LO – Lutte Ouvrière (Workers' Struggle); PR – Pôle Républicain; V – Les Verts (Greens); LCR – Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire; CPNT – Chasse, Pêche, Nature, Traditions (Hunting, Fishing, Nature, Traditions); DL – Démocratie Libérale; PCF – Parti Communiste Français; MNR – Mouvement National Républicain; PRG – Parti Radical de Gauche (Left Radicals); CAPVS – Citoyenneté Action Participation pour le 21ème siècle; FRS – Forum des républicains sociaux; PT – Parti des Travailleurs.

*Sources:* *Le Monde* (2002) 27 April, 8 May, 11 June; <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr>

One of the interesting aspects of the campaign was that after five years of *cohabitation* it was the prime minister rather than the president who was widely regarded as the incumbent with a record to defend. In this respect the omens were not favourable for Jospin. Although two previous prime ministers had successfully made the transition from the premiership to the presidency in the Fifth Republic (Pompidou in 1969 and Chirac in 1995), neither had gone directly from Matignon to the Elysée. In contrast, prime ministers who had attempted to make a direct transition, such as Chirac in 1988 and Balladur in 1995, had come unstuck, with Balladur even failing to make it through to the second round.

The result of the 2002 presidential election is reported in Table 2. The great shock of the first round was Le Pen pushing Jospin out of the second place slot. A close reading of the opinion polls in the final days of the campaign might have suggested the possibility of Le Pen making it through to the second round. However, for most of the campaign Le Pen had been credited with a much lower projected share of the vote, around 10-12%, and his late run was not really picked up by the mainstream media. Le Pen's score of 16.9% – compared with 15% in 1995 and 14.4% in 1988 – was all the more remarkable in the light of the split in the extreme right vote following the departure of Bruno Mégret from the National Front in 1999. Between them these two candidates of the extreme right polled over 19% of the vote, fewer than 200,000 votes behind Chirac. Yet while Le Pen emerged as the leading candidate in 35 of the 96 metropolitan departments, in terms of the number of votes obtained his score was up only a couple of hundred thousand on his first ballot result in 1995. In this respect, therefore, the 2002 first round result did not seem to represent a spectacular breakthrough for Le Pen, but rather an incremental advance on his previous presidential performance. Given the low turnout, however (see below), the relative advance of the far right was significant.

Jospin's score of 16.2% was a catastrophe for the Socialist candidate. During the campaign opinion polls had tracked a steady decline in support for the prime minister. His campaign was marred by several gaffes, including an early reference to Chirac's age which was immediately reflected in a drop in the polls. Though the record of his government of the 'plural left' on unemployment and economic growth was objectively quite respectable, some initiatives, such as the introduction of the 35 hour week, had lost it support among its electoral base. Jospin was driven to fight the election on an issue agenda largely favourable to the right and extreme right. Rational, didactic and rather austere in his television interviews, he lacked the seductive qualities of a natural campaigner.

Most curiously, Jospin and his campaign team made the crucial error of assuming that he would go through to the second round. Therefore, instead of obeying the iron law of the two-ballot system – secure the core vote in the first round before widening the base of support in the second – Jospin alienated sections of the traditional Socialist vote without attracting sufficient support from elsewhere. His was the lowest first round score obtained by a Socialist candidate since the formation of the new Socialist

Party in 1971 and compared unfavourably with the 23.3% he had won in the 1995 contest. On receiving the news of his defeat, Jospin immediately announced his retirement from politics, to take effect after the second round, thus leaving the Socialists to fight the parliamentary election without the figure who had dominated the party in the post-Mitterrand era.

Chirac also performed worse than in his previous two outings. Though he emerged as the leading candidate on the first ballot, his score of 19.9% – compared with 20.8% in 1995 and 20% in 1988 – was disappointing. Previous incumbents had done much better in first ballot results: de Gaulle won 44.6% in 1965, Giscard d'Estaing 28.3% in 1981 and Mitterrand 34.1% in 1988. Nonetheless, there was no serious challenger to Chirac among the mainstream right. François Bayrou, the head of the centrist pro-European UDF, was way behind with 6.8%, while Alain Madelin, who had fought a campaign based on pro-market economic values and a reduction in the role of the state, obtained just 3.9%.

For the Communist Party candidate, Robert Hue, the result was an unmitigated disaster. The 1969 score of 21.3% obtained by Jacques Duclos was now a distant memory. Hue's score of 3.4% was lower than Marchais' in 1981 (15.4%), Lajoinie's in 1988 (6.8%) and his own result in 1995 (8.6%). Humiliatingly, the Communist Party leader found himself outdistanced by two candidates of the extreme left (Laguiller and Besancenot), as well as by Mamère and Chevenement. Moreover, the failure to clear the 5% hurdle meant that the party would receive from the state only minimal financial reimbursement for its election expenses. Hue's result, therefore, was a huge financial as well as electoral blow to his party.

Two other features of the first round vote are worth noting. First, the level of turnout was a record low (see Table 1 again). Second, if one combined the number of abstentions, invalid ballots and votes for extreme right and extreme left candidates, then over half the French electorate were not prepared to vote for candidates from the broad pro-system centre ground. Between them the incumbent president and prime minister obtained the votes of fewer than 25% of the registered electorate.

### **The presidential election: second round (5 May)**

The first round result effectively ended the election as a competitive battle, since Chirac was now assured of victory. Not only did all the candidates of the right call for a pro-Chirac vote in the second round. More or less explicitly, so too did the majority of the other defeated candidates. Only Mégret called for his supporters to vote for Le Pen, while Laguiller refused to choose between the two representatives of 'big business capitalism'.

The only issue on the election agenda was now Le Pen himself, with his personification of intolerance and xenophobia. In the two weeks between the two ballots a huge outpouring of anti-Le Pen sentiment was apparent across France. The most striking evidence came on the 1 May, when hundreds of thousands of people, mainly secondary school pupils and students, participated in anti-Le Pen

demonstrations in towns and cities throughout the country, most spectacularly in Paris. Various representatives of civil society – religious leaders, community representatives, intellectuals, actors and sporting heroes such as the footballer Zinedine Zidane – all expressed their opposition to Le Pen and urged their fellow citizens to defend the values of the Republic.

The mainstream news media also disseminated a strong anti-Le Pen message. The front page of the centre-left national newspaper, *Libération*, of 22 April consisted of a huge 'NON' which many demonstrators brandished during the street protests between the two rounds. The television news programmes on the main channels were considerably less than rigorous in maintaining a qualitative balance in their coverage of the two candidates. Moreover, to no discernible protest from journalists, Chirac unilaterally decided that he would not engage in a television debate with Le Pen, although such a duel had been an integral feature of French presidential elections at every contest since 1974.

With the result not in doubt, attention focused on the possible second round score of the National Front leader. The focus of the anti-Le Pen campaign between the two ballots centred on the need for a high turnout on 5 May. From this perspective, the mobilisation of the electorate between the two rounds was a great success, with over three million additional voters participating in the second round, marking a slight improvement on turnout in 1995 (see Table 1). The result was an overwhelming victory for the incumbent (Table 2). With 82.2% of valid votes, Chirac recorded a unique historic triumph. No previous winning candidate had come anywhere near the scale of his victory, either in terms of absolute number of votes or percentage share (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Number and percentage of second round votes gained by winning candidates, 1965-2002**

|      |                          | Total votes | Valid votes % |
|------|--------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| 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           | 25 541 709  | 82.21         |

Sources: Duhamel and Jeanneney (2002) pp. 281-4; *Le Monde* (2002) 8 May; <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr>

For Le Pen the result was a huge disappointment. His second round total of votes represented an increase of only just over 700,000 on his first round score, almost exactly the number of votes previously secured by Mégret. The extreme right appeared

to have no additional reservoir of potential support outside of the combined total of its two candidates in the first round. Moreover, since Le Pen had argued that he would deem a second round score below 30% to be a personal failure, not even to reach 20% was a huge blow to his self-esteem. Conversely, for the extreme right to have held on to its first round support after two week's of almost unanimously critical campaign coverage indicated the extent to which a significant section of the French electorate was prepared to support views outside of the dominant republican value system.

### **The parliamentary election: first round (9 June)**

French parliamentary elections are also contested over two rounds, but in 577 separate metropolitan and overseas constituencies. In the first round a variety of candidates may stand. Only those candidates securing at least 12.5% of the registered electorate (*not* of votes cast) in the first round may proceed to the second. In 2002 there were 8,456 candidates nation-wide, by far the highest ever number of first round candidates, giving an average of over 14 candidates per constituency.

Despite constitutional provisions introduced in 1999 to ensure parity between male and female candidates (Dauphin and Praud, 2002), most parties had more men than women standing. The exceptions were the extreme left Lutte Ouvrière (50.2% women candidates) and Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (50.1%). The Greens (49.8%), the National Front (48.9%) and the Communists (44.0%) made creditable efforts towards achieving formal gender parity, while the Socialists (36.1%) were rather less impressive. Finally, the mainstream parties of the centre-right were particularly disappointing in this regard, with Chirac's UMP (19.9%) and the centrist UDF (19.7%) preferring to accept the financial sanctions imposed by legislation.

The campaign for the first round of the parliamentary election was a strangely muted affair after the outburst of civic engagement which had marked the run-up to the second round of the presidential contest. With opinion polls showing that a majority of French citizens did not want a return to *cohabitation* but rather a parliamentary majority for the president, the new caretaker government of the right headed by Jean-Pierre Raffarin was largely content to maintain a low electoral profile. Its main concern was to display to the electorate that it would actively counter *l'insécurité*, something it demonstrated by various events deliberately staged for the television cameras, which prominently featured the new Minister of the Interior and Security, Nicolas Sarkozy. Raffarin refused a 'live' television debate proposed by the Socialist Party first secretary, François Hollande, on the grounds that as prime minister he was not the leader of a party but the head of government. Most of the candidates of the right stood under the label of a new single party ticket (the UMP), which effectively submerged the Gaullist current within a broader conservative entity that also embraced former Giscardians and centrists. Only the presence of some centrist UDF candidates under Bayrou's leadership maintained the long-standing pluralism which has characterised the forces of the French right.



**Table 4: French parliamentary election result: first round, 2002**

|                                   |                    |                     |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Electorate                        | 40 930 928         |                     |
| Votes cast                        | 26 350 320         |                     |
| Abstentions                       | 35.62%             |                     |
| Spoiled ballots                   | 2.13%              |                     |
| Valid votes                       | 25 787 902         |                     |
|                                   | <b>Total votes</b> | <b>Valid votes%</b> |
| Right                             | 11 259 909         | 43.66               |
| UMP                               | 8 826 543          | 34.23               |
| UDF                               | 1 081 368          | 4.19                |
| Others                            | 1 121 296          | 4.35                |
| Left                              | 9 662 901          | 37.47               |
| Socialists/<br>Radicaux de gauche | 6 519 691          | 25.28               |
| Communists                        | 1 210 913          | 4.70                |
| Greens                            | 1 142 723          | 4.43                |
| Republican                        | 313 589            | 1.22                |
| Others                            | 475 985            | 1.85                |
| Extreme right                     | 3 218 282          | 12.48               |
| National Front                    | 2 865 173          | 11.11               |
| MNR                               | 278 524            | 1.08                |
| Extreme left                      | 737 931            | 2.86                |
| LCR                               | 328 620            | 1.27                |
| LO                                | 303 288            | 1.18                |

Source: *Le Monde* (2002) 11 June.

The parties of the outgoing government of the 'plural left' had hoped that the parliamentary elections would give them the opportunity to reverse the outcome of the presidential contest. In particular, they argued that Chirac's presidential triumph represented a victory for the Republic rather than a mandate for his programme. However, they were severely handicapped by the unwillingness of the parties of the right to engage in a substantive electoral debate. Furthermore, since the record of the Jospin administration had been so decisively rejected in the first round of the presidential election, the Socialist Party – the keystone of any future government of the left – lacked a coherent programme to present to the electorate. In addition, the call for a parliamentary majority of the left did not square with previous critiques of the practice of *cohabitation*, such as that eloquently made by the head of Jospin's

political staff at Matignon, Olivier Schrameck, in a book published only a few months before the elections (Schrameck, 2001). Finally, in seeking to win two successive terms, the left were trying to perform a feat which no French government had succeeded in achieving in almost a quarter of a century. At every parliamentary election since 1981, the incumbent government has lost (the right in 1981, 1988 and 1997; the left in 1986 and 1993). This contrasts markedly with the period between 1958 and 1978 when parliamentary elections were consistently won by the right, thus preventing any transfer of power.

**Table 5: Turnout at French parliamentary elections, 1973-2002**

|      | First round | Second round |
|------|-------------|--------------|
| 1973 | 81.24       | 81.8         |
| 1978 | 83.01       | 84.9         |
| 1981 | 70.86       | 75.1         |
| 1986 | 78.02       | -            |
| 1988 | 66.15       | 70.0         |
| 1993 | 69.31       | 67.8         |
| 1997 | 67.96       | 71.1         |
| 2002 | 64.38       | 60.29        |

Note: All figures are percentages of registered electorate.

Source: Adapted from *Le Monde* (2002) 11 and 18 June.

Sadly lacking in policy issues, the parliamentary campaign was dominated by one institutional and one strategic question. The first centred on the advantages and disadvantages of another round of *cohabitation*. The second focused on the capacity of the National Front to maintain candidates in the second round and thus force three-way run-offs between left, right and extreme right to the likely electoral benefit of the left. The result of the first round of the 2002 parliamentary election is reported in Table 4. The turnout of 64.38% was the lowest ever for the first round of a parliamentary election in the Fifth Republic (see Table 5). It was estimated that well over half the electorate below the age of 35 abstained from voting.

The first round result represented a substantial victory for the parties of the right, whose 43.7% share of the vote was up from 36.5% in 1997. Within the mainstream right the balance of power shifted enormously to the advantage of the UMP. While in 1997 the Gaullist RPR (15.7%) had only narrowly outdistanced the centrist UDF (14.2%), in 2002 the UMP on its own had 34.2% of the share of the vote, with the UDF winning only 4.2%. The mainstream right won a total of 56 constituencies in the first round, with the UMP taking 47.

Overall, the parties of the left were clearly defeated, their 37.5% share of the vote contrasting with 41.8% five years previously. However, there were significant

variations in electoral performance within the left. The Socialist Party (including the Radicaux de gauche) held on to its share: 25.28% in 2002, compared with 25.26% in 1997. The Greens even increased theirs, from 3.6% in 1997 to 4.4% in 2002. But the Communists suffered a major setback. Whereas in 1997 they had won 9.9% of the vote, five years later they managed to secure only 4.7%, dropping in absolute numbers from 2.45 million votes to 1.21 million. At 2.9% the parties of the extreme left improved slightly on their 1997 score of 2.6%, but were massively down on the performance of their candidates in the first round of the presidential election. The left won only 2 seats in the first round.

The National Front's 11.1% share of the vote represented a marked decline on its first round presidential result in 2002 (16.9%) and its first round parliamentary score in 1997 (14.9%). The party managed to exceed the 12.5% hurdle in only 37 constituencies compared with 133 in 1997, and forced only 9 three-way second round contests. Consequently, its capacity to inflict damage on the right in the second round was virtually nullified. The extreme right won no seats in the first round. Le Pen had decided not to stand, while Mégret failed to win enough votes in his constituency to proceed to the second round.

### **The parliamentary election: second round (16 June)**

The campaign for the second round was hugely overshadowed by the main news of the week: the elimination of the French team from the World Cup football finals. The right eschewed any premature electoral triumphalism, while the left sought to limit the damage. Most of the second round run-offs were *straight fights* between left and right. The results of the second round are reported in Tables 6 and 7.

Once again the turnout of 60.29% was a record low (Table 5). In terms of the allocation of parliamentary seats, the functioning of the electoral system tends to reward the winning side. Thus, although gaining less than 44% of the vote in the first round, the parties of the right emerged with 70% of the seats after the second, while the left, with over 37% of the vote in the first round, claimed only 30% of the seats (see Table 7). The National Front, with over 11% of the vote in the first round, failed to win a single seat in the new National Assembly.

These results indicated a large degree of bipolarisation in the composition of the Assembly, with both left and right dominated by a single large formation. In addition, the Communist Party on the left and the UDF on the right managed, if only just, to win the minimum of twenty seats necessary to be recognised as official parliamentary groups, with the attendant status and resource implications.

In terms of gender balance, the composition of the new legislature marked only a slight advance on that of its predecessor. Of the original 3,284 female candidates, only 250 made it through to the second round and a mere 71 were finally elected (39 UMP, 23 Socialist, 4 Communist, 2 Radicaux de gauche, 1 UDF, 1 Green and 1 Other Left). This means that female deputies now constitute 12.3% of the total, compared with 10.9% in 1997 – a far cry from the objectives of parity legislation.

**Table 6: French parliamentary election result: second round, 2002 (votes)**

|                                   |                    |                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Electorate                        | 36 788 231         |                      |
| Votes cast                        | 22 178 500         |                      |
| Abstentions                       | 39.71%             |                      |
| Spoiled ballots                   | 4.36%              |                      |
| Valid votes                       | 21 212 502         |                      |
|                                   | <b>Total votes</b> | <b>Valid votes %</b> |
| Right                             | 11 206 086         | 52.83                |
| UMP                               | 10 368 555         | 48.88                |
| UDF                               | 594 761            | 2.80                 |
| Other right                       | 212 422            | 1.00                 |
| Left                              | 9 613 643          | 45.32                |
| Socialists/<br>Radicaux de gauche | 7 505 582          | 35.38                |
| Communists                        | 648 758            | 3.06                 |
| Other left                        | 1 489 651          | 7.02                 |
| National Front                    | 392 773            | 1.85                 |

Source: *Le Monde* (2002) 18 June.

**Table 7: French parliamentary election result, 2002: Final seat distributions after second round**

|                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| Mainstream right   | 399        |
| UMP                | 369        |
| UDF                | 22         |
| Other right        | 8          |
| Mainstream left    | 178        |
| Socialists         | 141        |
| Radicaux de gauche | 7          |
| Communists         | 21         |
| Greens             | 3          |
| Other left         | 6          |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>577</b> |

Source: *Le Monde* (2002) 18 June.

## Conclusion

With the exception of the second round of the presidential contest, the turnout for the 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections was the lowest for these national first-order elections in the history of the Fifth Republic. Some commentators interpret this as symptomatic of a more general crisis of representative politics in France, with some voters, notably the young and the socially marginalised, feeling themselves excluded from the political process. Others see in abstentionism a rational political response to electoral competition marked by a reduction in ideological conflict between parties of left and right in contemporary France, accompanied by a convergence in policy options as a result of growing European integration and globalisation.

For the left, the 2002 results mark a substantial defeat. The Socialist Party now has five years in which to rebuild itself under a new leader. This will involve a re-evaluation of the party's policies, organisation and electoral strategy, as the legacy of the five years of 'plural left' government is placed in context. For the Communists, the loss of his seat in the parliamentary election confirmed a horrific few weeks for Hue as party leader. The Communist Party seems unable to define for itself a role in a post-industrial society in which the ideological values associated with the Cold War divide and class struggle seem increasingly anachronistic. The party even appears to have lost its protest role to other political groups on the extreme left and extreme right. What, in 1945, had been the most important electoral force in France now appears to be a barely relevant rump, struggling to maintain its existence.

For the extreme right the 2002 presidential contest may come to represent its electoral high-water mark. Mégret has failed to establish either himself as a genuine rival to Le Pen or his party as a credible replacement for the National Front. Meanwhile, at 74 years of age, Le Pen may well have fought his last presidential election. There is nobody else in the party with his personality and media skills to take up the succession. Finally, there is no possibility in the immediate future of the extreme right benefiting from tactical alliances with the parties of the right as has sometimes happened at the local and regional levels in the past. Nonetheless, the National Front is not going to disappear in the short term. Since it first made its electoral breakthrough in the early 1980s, its share of the vote has only marginally dropped below 10% at any presidential or parliamentary election, while it has often performed considerably better. Not only does it still retain loyal supporters, but it will continue to act as a haven of protest for disaffected voters.

The results of the 2002 elections mean that the right can now look forward to five years of uninterrupted power at the national level. The right has a firm hold on the presidency, the premiership and the government, and dominates the National Assembly, the Senate, the Constitutional Council and the Higher Broadcasting Council. This combination of power is unparalleled in the history of the Fifth Republic; despite their general dominance of the political system, neither the Gaullists in the 1960s and early 1970s, nor the Socialists in the early 1980s, ever controlled the Senate.

The next five years will be a test for Chirac in his attempt to rebuild his presidential image after the failed premature dissolution of parliament in 1997 and the resultant period of *cohabitation* which, along with the allegations of corruption, so marred his first term. It will also mark the end of an era. In all likelihood Chirac will not stand again in 2007. Just as the left was dominated by the figure of Mitterrand for much of the Fifth Republic until his death in 1996, so since 1981 the right has been largely associated with the figure of Chirac. He first became prime minister in 1974, which means that if he sees out his new five-year presidential term he will have been around the top of the French political system for no less than 33 years. The left has never really satisfactorily replaced Mitterrand and still seeks a suitable successor. Chirac is determined that the right will not make the same mistake. Already Alain Juppé, Chirac's prime minister between 1995 and 1997, is positioning himself in readiness for the 2007 presidential contest. And unlike Jospin, Juppé has notably stood back from becoming involved in the day-to-day running of the country as he begins the long pre-campaign to become only the third prime minister to capture the Elysée.

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**Correction:**

In the last issue of *Representation* (38:4) the article on the use of the Limited Vote for Senate Elections in Spain referred in endnote 1 (p. 315) to the current use of the single non-transferable vote system (SNTV) in South Korea. Please note that SNTV has not been used for National Assembly elections in South Korea since 1988.