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The election of Emmanuel Macron and the new French party system: a return to the *éternel marais*?

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ABSTRACT

This article applies Maurice Duverger's 1964 thesis of the *éternel marais* to the French party system following Emmanuel Macron's victory in the 2017 presidential election. Duverger argued that for around 80 per cent of the period from 1789 to 1958, France had been governed from the centre, which he called the *marais*, with power shifting not between the left and the right, but between governments of the moderate left and the moderate right. At the time, Duverger believed that this tendency might be about to end due to social change and the then recent introduction of the direct election of the president that created the potential for a bipolarisation of the party system. In retrospect, Duverger's argument was very prescient. We update his figures to show that from 1959 to 2017 *marais* governments all but disappeared. However, Macron's election seems to mark a change. We show that there has been a return to a Duverger-style *marais* government. Moreover, Macron's election has challenged the established bipolarisation of the French party system, suggesting the potential for a new three- or four-pole system. In this context, we argue that the chances of a return to a new and ongoing period of *marais* governments are high.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article applique la thèse de Maurice Duverger sur « l'éternel marais » au système de partis français à la suite de la victoire d'Emmanuel Macron à l'élection présidentielle de 2017. En 1964, Duverger expliquait que pour environ 80% de la période entre 1789 et 1958, la France a été gouvernée par le centre, ce qu'il appelait « le marais, » avec un transfert de pouvoir non pas entre la gauche et la droite, mais entre les gouvernements de gauche modérée et de droite modérée. À l'époque, Duverger croyait que cette tendance était sur le point de prendre fin en raison des évolutions sociales et de l'introduction récente de l'élection du président de la République au suffrage universel direct qui permettrait une potentielle bipolarisation du système des partis. Rétrospectivement, l'argument de Duverger était plutôt prescient. Nous mettons à jour ses chiffres pour montrer que de 1959 à 2017, les gouvernements « marais » ont presque disparu. Cependant, l'élection de Macron semble marquer un changement puisqu'il y a eu, comme nous le démontrons, un retour à un gouvernement « marais » de style Duverger. De plus, l'élection de Macron a remis en question la bipolarisation du système des

partis français, impliquant la possibilité d'une nouvelle tripartition ou quadripartition de l'espace politique français. Dans ce contexte, nous proposons que les chances d'un retour à une nouvelle période de gouvernements marais sont élevées.

Introduction

This article applies Maurice Duverger's 1964 thesis of the *éternel marais* to the French party system in the light of Emmanuel Macron's election as president of France. Duverger argued that for around 80% of the period from 1789 to 1958 France had been governed from the centre, which he called the *marais*, with power shifting not between the left and the right, but between governments of the moderate left and the moderate right. At the time, Duverger believed that this tendency might be about to end, owing to the combination of social change and the then recent introduction of the direct election of the president. In retrospect, Duverger's argument was very prescient. For more than 50 years, the bipolarisation of the party system meant that *marais* governments all but disappeared. However, Macron's election seems to mark a change, challenging the party system of the Fifth Republic and suggesting the potential for a new three- or four-pole party system. Whichever system finally emerges, the chances of a return to a new-period *marais* government seems high.

In this article, we begin by outlining Duverger's *marais* argument. We then update his figures to cover the period 1959–2017, demonstrating how relatively infrequent *marais* governments became after the period in which he was writing. We then show how Macron's election meets the conditions for a Duverger-style *marais* government. We end by presenting two interpretations of the contemporary party system, both of which raise the prospect of a return to the *éternel marais*.

1. Duverger's *marais* argument

In 1964, Maurice Duverger published an article in the *Revue française de science politique* entitled *L'éternel marais: Essai sur le centrisme français* (Duverger 1964). This was not the first time that Duverger had addressed the issue of centrism in France. Indeed, in his 1964 article, he recycled some of the material on this subject from his 1951 book, *Les Partis politiques* (Duverger 1951; 245). This was also not the last time that Duverger would make the *marais* argument. He repeated it on a number of occasions thereafter, notably in his 1982 volume, *La République des citoyens* (Duverger 1982, 30–31). However, the 1964 article remained the most complete presentation of his thesis. Subsequent references to it did not change the substance of the argument. What is more, while Duverger presented data to back up his argument in the 1964 article, he focused on the period from 1789 to 1958. Yet, when he returned to the topic in later years, he did not update the data to account for events after this time. For these reasons, while the 1964 article is part of a more general body of Duverger's work, we can treat it as the mature statement of his *marais* thesis.

Duverger deliberately chose the term '*marais*,' meaning 'marsh' or 'swamp,' because it had a negative connotation. He borrowed it from the *Convention*. In that context, it was used to refer to a set of *députés* who occupied a middle ground between the *Girondins* and the *Montagnards* (Biard 2004). These *députés* were more typically known as '*la Plaine*.' Yet,

Duverger decided to employ the more derogatory term, '*le marais*,' that was sometimes used against them. This is an indication that there is a normative undercurrent to Duverger's thesis. It also suggests that we need to place the argument in the context of his own value set at the time. In 1964, Duverger was making not only the empirical argument that France had been governed from the centre for most of its contemporary history, but also a barely disguised normative argument against centrism and in favour of a left/right bipolarisation of the political system. In other work at this time, he argued more explicitly in favour of bipolarisation (Duverger 1965, 1967). In later iterations of his argument, he wrote more extensively and more eloquently in opposition to centrism, likening it explicitly to a *marais*. For example, in the 1982 version of his argument, he wrote about the centrist governments of the Third and Fourth Republics in the following terms:

Ils donnaient l'impression physique de l'enlissement dans les terres spongieuses où le pied s'enfonce dans une herbe détrempée, où l'eau recouvre les pas et les sillons, où les roseaux frémissent à chaque risée, où rien ne peut être tracé ni construit

(Duverger 1982, 275–276). There is, thus, a normative element to Duverger's 1964 article. Here, though, we focus primarily on the empirical aspects of his argument.

Duverger frames his 1964 argument in opposition to what he considers to be two alternative interpretations of French political life since 1789 (Duverger 1964, 33). The first is what he calls a 'dualist' schema, which sees France as split between the left and the right. Duverger attributes this model to contemporary scholars such as François Goguel and René Rémond. The second emphasises the ongoing factionalised, multi-party nature of the system. He identifies Raymond Aron as a proponent of this thesis. Duverger makes no attempt to elaborate on these competing interpretations. He merely claims that he is presenting a new interpretation that is different from them. In this regard, the '*trait caractéristique de la politique française*,' he asserts, '*c'est le "centrisme"*' (ibid., 34).

For Duverger, centrism means something quite specific. He spends relatively little time on this issue in the 1964 article. However, in *Les Partis politiques* (1951, 245), he states that '*le centre n'existe pas en politique: il peut y avoir un parti du centre mais non pas une tendance du centre, une doctrine du centre*'. Duverger adopts this position because he had a very dualist conception of political competition. He believed that political competition takes place between the left and the right. At the same time, he also believed that there could be a basic division within both the left and the right, between extreme and moderate versions of each. In this context, he states, '*On appelle « centre » un lieu géométrique où se rassemblent les modérés des tendances opposées: modérés de droite et modérés de gauche*' (ibid.). That is to say, he accepts that there can be a self-styled centre party that brings together both the moderate right and moderate left tendencies under one roof, but there cannot be a discrete centrist ideology. What is more, he is sceptical that a centre party of this sort can survive, because it will always experience internal competition between those on the moderate right and the moderate left. Duverger believed that in France the moderate left and the moderate right were together in the same majority, leaving the 'revolutionary left' and the 'extreme right' as separate forces that were opposed both to each other and to the centrist majority. As a consequence, there is only '*une certaine oscillation du pendule*' (ibid., 33). '*Le balancier*,' he states, '*ne se déplace pas d'un mouvement large (droite-gauche, gauche-droite), mais d'un mouvement étrié, à l'intérieur du centrisme (centre-droite-centre gauche, centre gauche-centre-droite)*' (ibid., 33–34).

To be clear, Duverger's argument about centrism is not primarily an argument about public policy. There are policy implications, but he does not dwell upon them. Equally, it is not primarily an argument about voters either. He is not engaging in a sociological exercise about the distribution of voter preferences. It is not even an argument about individual political parties. He does not deny that there are many parties in France and that they have changed over time. Instead, Duverger is making an argument about the meta-nature of party competition, or the meta-party system. Whatever form political parties have taken, he argues that *'un certain ordre se dégage presque toujours, derrière cette apparente confusion'* (ibid., 33). More specifically still, Duverger is making an argument about the nature of the governing majority in this system. For Duverger, both the moderate right and the moderate left have typically been part of the centrist governing majority in France with the majority governing against the two extremes.

To back up his argument, Duverger claims that for more than 80% of the time between 1789 and 1958 France has had a centrist government (ibid., 35). In his 1964 paper, he counts about 10 years of left government (ibid.), by which he means a government when the revolutionary left and the moderate left governed together against the right. He identifies these as the Jacobin government from June 1793 to July 1794; the provisional government of the Second Republic from February to May 1848; and the Popular Front government from 1936 to 1938. He also includes the post-war tripartite government from 1944 to 1947 and the Combes government from 1902 to 1905, even though they included some right-wing elements. In the 1982 version of his argument, he includes the 1899–1905 period as a whole. He also mentions the 1924 and 1932 Cartel governments (Duverger 1982, 30). He counts a slightly larger number of right governments (Duverger 1964; 35), meaning ones in which the extreme right and the moderate right governed together against the left. These are the governments in 1815–1816, 1820–1822, 1822–1828 and 1830. He also includes the government from 1871 to 1875, the government in May 1877, the Vichy regime from 1940 to 1944 and the Pinay government in 1952. In the 1982 version, he excludes the 1877 and 1952 governments (Duverger 1982, 31). In total, he calculates that from 1789 to 1958, France was governed by either the left or the right for only about 30 of 170 years. The rest of the time, he claims, France was governed from the centre. This is the sense in which he thinks of the *'marais'* as being *'éternel'*.

Duverger's 1964 article concludes with a mix of academic commentary and barely disguised political manifesto. At this point, Duverger was anti-Gaullist and, despite his wartime collaborationism (Hoffmann-Martinot 2005), on the left. Despite being on the left, though, he was also in favour of a presidential regime. These values are woven into his empirical analysis. He implied that France might be on the cusp of change, which he thought would be a good thing. Such change was possible because the end of the Algerian war had shown the weakness of the extreme right (Duverger 1964, 49), thus reducing the salience of one of the traditional extremes of the meta-party system. It was also possible because there was now the potential for an alliance on the left, even though the Communist Party was still loyal to the USSR. Such potential was partly due to sociological reasons and the idea that societal 'modernisation' was making the divide between the revolutionary and the moderate left outdated (ibid., 50). It was also partly due to the newly installed presidential regime (ibid., 50–51). While Duverger had concerns with de Gaulle's version of presidentialism, he believed that such a system would render parties less numerous and those that remained more disciplined (ibid., 51). He concluded the 1964 article in a very modest but nonetheless

positive way from his perspective at least. He stated: 'La fin du « marais » n'est pas sûre, ni même très probable: elle devient seulement possible' (ibid.). Even though the conclusion was tentative, this is the aspect that seems prescient in retrospect. Duverger appeared to foresee the change to the French meta-party system that subsequently occurred.

There is plenty to take issue with in Duverger's thesis. The Goguel/Rémond and Aron interpretations to which he sets himself in opposition are presented in the form of straw arguments. Indeed, Raymond Aron provided an explicit critique of Duverger's *marais* argument (*Le Figaro*, March 22, 1967). The normative aspect of his article is highly contestable. The idea that political competition can take place only between the right and the left is no less controversial. After all, what about the clerical/anti-clerical divide in France? This has not always mapped onto the left/right economic cleavage. The idea that there cannot be a centrist ideology is also highly debatable. Duverger's calculation of the different periods of left- and right-wing governments is equally open to question. Indeed, as we have seen, Duverger himself seemed to change his mind slightly in different publications. The causes of the *marais* can be challenged. In short, *l'éternel marais* is a very controversial thesis. For the purposes of this article, though, we merely note these problems and put them to one side. This is because the aim of this article is not to investigate whether Duverger provided an accurate interpretation of the French political system from 1789 to 1958. Instead, we wish to use Duverger's 1964 argument as a heuristic with which to examine the development of the French meta-party system after this time and specifically the election of Emmanuel Macron.

2. The Fifth Republic, or the *marais*, is no longer *éternel*

In his 1964 article, Duverger calculated the frequency of *marais* governments only up to 1958. We update his calculations for left, right and *marais* governments to cover the Fifth Republic. This exercise, though, is not as straightforward as it might at first appear and for two reasons.

The first is epistemological. Those on the extreme right and perhaps even some on the extreme left might be inclined to interpret the concept of a *marais* government in a primarily normative manner, arguing that most if not all Fifth Republic governments have taken this form. From this perspective, there will probably never be a 'true' left or right government until the extreme party of preference wins power. This interpretation has echoes in the acronym 'l'UMPS', which was coined by the Front national (FN) and which aimed to indicate that both the moderate right and the moderate left were effectively the same. We acknowledge that this might be one way of interpreting the Fifth Republic. We also acknowledge that from a critical perspective all interpretations are value laden, including the one presented by Duverger in his 1964 article. Here, though, we simply wish to classify left, right and *marais* governments in a manner that is as consistent as possible with Duverger's schema.

The second reason is methodological. Duverger does not systematically apply a set of criteria to identify left, right and *marais* government. Indeed, as we have seen, his list of governments varied slightly over time as he changed his mind about particular cases. We wish to be more systematic than Duverger, but in a way that is as consistent as possible with his original exercise. To this end, Duverger provides some guidance and in two respects. First, his discussion of the British case helps us to identify left and right governments. In this context, he classes Labour and Conservative governments as left and right governments respectively. This is not because he believes they are governments of either the revolutionary left or the extreme right. Instead, it is because of the left/right bipolarisation of the party system. For Duverger,

when there is a Conservative government, any extreme right element is folded into the right as a whole, with the effect that the moderate right is not governing against the extreme right. The equivalent is true for the left and Labour governments. Second, for Duverger a *marais* government is where the moderate left and the moderate right are governing together. There is some ambiguity as to whether such cooperation must be occurring solely in government, or whether it can be extended to the legislature. In his article, he does refer to cooperation in the legislature (e.g., Duverger 1964, 35). This makes sense in a system where the government is dependent for its survival in office on the support of the legislature. If we follow Duverger in both respects, then to identify a *marais* government we are looking for cases where there was cooperation between the moderate left and the moderate right in the government and/or the legislature and where such cooperation occurred when both the moderate left and the moderate right were opposed to their respective extremes.

To identify left, right and *marais* governments, we make three types of observations. First, we observe cases where there was a union of the left between the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) and the moderate left. This is the French equivalent of the British case that Duverger discusses. It means that the 1981–84 and 1997–2002 governments were left governments. By extension, we class as right governments those cases where the right was in office and where there was a formal union of the left in opposition, because in these cases there was no cooperation between the right and the moderate left against the extreme left. This means that the 1972–1977 governments were right governments. Second, we observe the formal relationship between moderate and extreme parties when a government invoked Article 49-1 of the Constitution. This Article is typically invoked at the start of a new government. It is the closest France has to a government investiture vote (Nguyễn-Duy 2015). Some governments have failed to apply it at the beginning of their term, namely the 1966 and 1967 Pompidou governments, the 1968 Couve de Murville government, the Barre 1976 government and the Rocard, Cresson and Bérégovoy governments from 1998 to 1993. Nonetheless, we can observe the relationship between moderate and extreme parties to each other at the point of government formation in most cases. Third, we observe cases where both the moderate left and the moderate right were represented in government. Applying these criteria, we extend the figures in Duverger's 1964 article to cover the whole period from 1959 to 2017 (see Figure 1).

We count 13 years of left government. We have already identified the 1981–1984 governments as left governments. During this time, the *Parti socialiste* (PS) was governing in coalition with the PCF against the right. We also count the 'plural left' government from 1997 to 2002 as a left government. In addition, we count the Fabius government from 1984 to 1986 as a left government. In 1984, the PCF left the coalition. However, when Fabius invoked Article 49-1 in July 1984, the PCF abstained on the investiture, whereas the right voted against. There was still a bipolarisation of the party system and the moderate left was not cooperating with the moderate right. A similar case is the 2012–2014 Ayrault government. Here, the moderate right had no representation in government. Moreover, when Prime Minister Ayrault invoked Article 49-1 in July 2012, the PCF abstained on the vote, leaving the right solely in opposition to the new government. We discuss the other year of left government below.

We count 35 years of right government in the Fifth Republic. We have already identified the 1972–1977 governments as right governments. Here, the extreme right existed, but it was not represented in parliament. So, we cannot observe moderate right opposition to the extreme right. However, we can observe cooperation between the moderate and extreme left in the form of the official 'union of the left.' This means that the moderate right was governing

Government	Left	Right	<i>marais</i>
Debré			1959-62
Pompidou-Barre		1962-1981	
Mauroy-Fabius	1981-86		
Chirac		1986-88	
Rocard-Cresson			1988-92
Bérégovoy	1992-93		
Balladur-Juppé		1993-1997	
Jospin	1997-2002		
Raffarin-Fillon		2002-2012	
Ayrault	2012-2014		
Valls-Cazeneuve			2014-2017
Total (years)	13	35	10

Figure 1. Updating Duverger's classification of left, right and *marais* governments for the Fifth Republic, 1959–2017.

against the left as a whole, including the moderate left. For similar reasons, we count all Gaullist governments from 1962 to 1972, the Barre 1978 to 1981 government, the Chirac 1986–1988 government, the Balladur and Juppé governments from 1993 to 1997 and the governments from Raffarin to Fillon from 2002 to 2012 as right governments, though we do discuss two more difficult cases below. For the most part, these governments are observable as right governments because even though there was no formal 'union of the left,' the moderate right was governing in opposition to the left as a whole. For example, in 1978 Prime Minister Barre invoked Article 49-1. The Gaullists voted for the government, whereas both the PS and the PCF voted against. Thus, even though there were difficulties between Barre and the Gaullists at the time, there was still a clear bipolarisation of the system. Similarly, in the 2002–2012 period, we observe the PS and the PCF in systematic opposition to the right when Article 49-1 was invoked. We also include the 1986–1988 Chirac II government as a right government. This was the only period in the Fifth Republic prior to 2017 when the FN was able to constitute a parliamentary group. In this period, the moderate right held 286 of the 577 seats in the *Assemblée* and, therefore, was slightly short of a majority. In this context, the moderate right and the extreme right could in theory have formed an alliance. Had they done so, this would certainly have met Duverger's criteria for a right government. However, even though the moderate right chose not to work with the FN and in that sense governed against the extreme right, we still class the Chirac II government as a right government because there was no cooperation with the moderate left either in the government or the *Assemblée*. The PS and the PCF voted against the government when Chirac invoked Article 49-1. Indeed, this was the period of highly conflictual cohabitation between Chirac and President Mitterrand of the moderate left.

We count 10 years of *marais* government from 1959 until the election of Emmanuel Macron in 2017. The first period is the Debré government from 1959 to 1962. In his 1964 article, Duverger alludes to this period in the context of his discussion of *marais* governments, stating that the Fifth Republic ‘a cherché au centre son équilibre, en écartant l’extrême-droite colonialiste et les communistes’ (ibid.: 37). During this time, there was very little cooperation between the moderate right and the moderate left in government. Indeed, the government included only one moderate left representative, André Boulloche, the Minister for Education. However, the period from 1959 to 1962 was marked by a very fluid majority in the legislature. The government needed the support of both the moderate right and the moderate left to pass legislation and in general was opposed by both the PCF and the anti-colonial extreme right. It is true that Jean-Marie Le Pen and a small number of other extreme-right deputies in the *Assemblée* did abstain when Prime Minister Debré invoked Article 49-1 in January 1959. However, when he did so again in October 1959, the extreme right, including Le Pen, voted against the government, while the PCF did not take part in the vote, and the moderate left voted for the government. This is a clear *marais* formula in the legislature. Thus, there was a period in the early years of the Fifth Republic when there was some cooperation between the moderate left and right against the extremes. Confirming this point of view, Duverger notes of Debré’s government that ‘une fois réglée l’affaire algérienne, il perd progressivement ses appuis du centre-gauche et glisse de plus en plus vers la droite’ (ibid.). Duverger does not provide any precise dates for the point when he believes there was a shift from a *marais* government to a right government, but his analysis is consistent with the classification of the Debré government as a *marais* government certainly from October 1959 and the classification of the subsequent Pompidou governments as right governments.

The second period of *marais* government comprises some of the PS governments that held office in the period from 1988 to 1993. There is evidence of cooperation between the moderate left and the moderate right in the legislature during this period. In May 1988, François Mitterrand was re-elected as president, and in the June legislative elections, the PS was returned as the largest party. However, the socialists and their allies in the *Assemblée* controlled only 275 of the 577 seats there. This meant that the government needed the support of 14 *députés* to secure a majority. To achieve this number, they sought the votes of those on the centre-right on some bills and the Communists on others (Elgie and Maor 1992). The fact that the PS was at least partly reliant on the PCF weakens the idea that this was a period of *marais* government. Nonetheless, the government frequently relied on the support of some or all the moderate right deputies in the Union du centre (UDC) parliamentary group. In 1988, representatives of the Christian Democratic element of the L’Union pour la démocratie française (UDF) formed a group separate from the main UDF parliamentary group. The UDC was ready to work with the PS government on certain issues, even if they were not willing to guarantee their support. Thus, there was no formal agreement, but this was certainly the most concerted period of ongoing cooperation between moderate left and moderate right parliamentary party groups in the *Assemblée* since 1962. That said, by 1992, the level of cooperation had weakened. For example, Prime Minister Bérégovoy, who came to office in April 1992, invoked Article 49-1 not in the context of an investiture vote, but in November 1992 on the issue of negotiations on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. On this vote, the PCF voted for the government, whereas all of moderate right voted against, including both the UDF and UDC groups. This suggests a return to bipolarisation in the legislature by this point.

There is also evidence of a *marais* government at the level of the Council of Ministers for some of this period. The beginning of the second Mitterrand presidency was the period of so-called *ouverture*. The incumbent president had sought re-election by appealing to the centre. Following his victory, Mitterrand appointed Michel Rocard as prime minister. Both Mitterrand and Rocard supported a policy of appointing moderate right figures to the Council of Ministers. The June 1988 Rocard II government was the largest of any in the Fifth Republic and was dominated by the PS. Nonetheless, it included six UDF figures. Indeed, in October 1990, two more UDF politicians joined the government. It should be noted, though, that they were there in a personal capacity. Over time, the number of moderate right members in the government declined. When the Cresson government took office in May 1991, the number decreased to only three. What is more, when Bérégovoy was appointed as prime minister, no *ouverture* ministers were initially appointed. However, two were included in an October 1992 reshuffle.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the Rocard government from 1988 to 1991 should definitely be classed as a *marais* government because of the relatively high level of cooperation between the moderate left and the moderate right in both the legislature and the government. By contrast, the Bérégovoy government should be classed as a left government, because the level of cooperation in both arenas had declined considerably. The case of the Cresson government is genuinely problematic. Prime Minister Cresson did not invoke Article 49-1 in a way that would allow us to observe what position the PCF and the UDC were formally willing to take on the issue of the government's survival. Nonetheless, there were *ouverture* ministers, and there was still ongoing cooperation with the UDC in the legislature. For these reasons, we include the Cresson government as a *marais* government, but in the knowledge that this classification can be contested even in Duverger's terms.

Three other cases are worthy of consideration as potential *marais* governments. The first comprises the Valls and Cazeneuve governments from 2014 to 2017. There was no official moderate right participation in government during this period, though it is worth noting that representatives of what would become *La République en Marche* (LREM), including Macron himself, were present in the government. We have also seen that in 2012, the PCF voted for the Ayrault government in the legislature, whereas all elements of the moderate right voted against. By 2014, the situation had changed. When the Valls and Cazeneuve governments invoked Article 49-1 the PCF now voted against. Indeed, even some members of the PS voted against. Thus, by this point, there was a clear distinction between the moderate left and the extreme left in the Assemblée. In an article in *L'Humanité* (March 31, 2017), Bontems and Bontems hint that the whole of the Hollande presidency should be treated as a period of *marais* government. We have suggested that the Ayrault government should be classed as a left government, but applying the criteria we have proposed, there is evidence that the Valls and Cazeneuve governments merit being classified as *marais* governments.

Two other governments also have some grounds to be called *marais* governments. The first is the Fillon II government from 2007 to 2010. This government included both Bernard Kouchner, who was a member of the PS at the time of his appointment, and Jean-Marie Bockel, who had previously been a member of the PS and who by then had formed his own party, *La Gauche moderne*. Bontems and Bontems (*L'Humanité*, March 31, 2017) imply that this was a period of *marais* government too, because there was moderate left participation in government. On balance, though, we disagree. There were only two former PS ministers in the government, and both were serving in an individual capacity. Indeed, Bernard Kouchner

was immediately expelled from the PS when he was to the Fillon government, indicating the absence of any formal or even informal cooperation between the moderate left and the moderate right. Moreover, when Prime Minister Fillon invoked Article 49-1, both the PS and the PCF voted against the government. For both reasons, we should exclude this period as an example of a *marais* government. There was no cooperation between the moderate left and the moderate right in ways that resemble the other periods of *marais* government.

The other potential *marais* government is the 1966 Pompidou III government. This government included two relatively senior ministers from the Gauche démocratique (GD)—Edgar Faure and Edgar Pisani. Faure was a prominent Radical, but he had supported de Gaulle at the 1965 presidential election, and he was excluded from the Radical party when he was appointed a minister in 1966. Pisani had a long and varied political career, but he stood as a Gaullist candidate at the 1967 legislative election, suggesting that he too should be considered as a moderate right figure at this point. Pompidou did not invoke Article 49-1. So, we cannot observe the formal relationship between the government and the left in this regard. However, this was a period when the PCF and the socialists were resolutely opposed to the government in the Assemblée. For these reasons, there is little to suggest that the Pompidou III government should be classed as a *marais* government.

In total, we calculate that there were *marais* governments for around 17% of the period from 1959 to 2017. This is the context in which Duverger's 1964 article was so prescient. It is also the context in which the election of Emmanuel Macron is potentially so significant. In the next section, we show that the Macron presidency can clearly be interpreted as a *marais* government in Duverger's terms, and we then discuss whether the changing nature of the French party system is likely to lead to a return of the *éternel marais*.

3. Macron and the return of the *éternel marais*?

There is little doubt that in Duverger's terms, the election of Emmanuel Macron has led to the return of a *marais* government. There is evidence to this effect from both the Assemblée and the Council of Ministers.

The June 2017 legislative election returned 310 *députés* who were officially members of the LREM parliamentary group as of 24 July. Many of these *députés* were elected for the first time. However, many others were previously associated with party politics. In this regard, *Le Monde* (Sénécat and Damgé in *Le Monde*, June 27, 2017) reported that 68 had previously been associated with the PS, 20 with the Union des démocrates et indépendants and 10 with Les Républicains (LR), plus a small number who had been associated with other parties. Thus, there is evidence that LREM itself corresponds to Duverger's portrait of a centre party, namely one that contains representatives of both the moderate left and the moderate right. Since the Assemblée began its work, LREM has also received support from other elements of the moderate left and the moderate right there. For example, when Prime Minister Philippe invoked Article 49-1 on 4 July, all members of the Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem) parliamentary group voted for the government. MoDem would want to see itself as a party with a genuine centrist ideology, but we treat it as a moderate right party in Duverger's terms, given it never systematically cooperated with the PS. In addition, all members of Les Constructifs group either voted for the government or abstained. This group brought together moderate right LR *députés* who had chosen to remain in LR but who were willing in principle to work with LREM. What is more, most members of the *Nouvelle*

gauche group either voted for the government or abstained in the confidence vote. This is the group that brought together what remains of the PS in the *Assemblée*. At the same time, the extreme right and the extreme left were opposed to the government. All eight FN *députés* voted against the LREM government, as did Nicolas Dupont-Aignan who rallied to Marine Le Pen at the second round of the 2017 presidential election. Similarly, all the PCF members of the Gauche démocrate et républicaine group voted against government, as did all the members of the La France insoumise (LFI) group. Overall, LREM itself can be interpreted as a combination of moderate right and moderate left *deputés* that has won some support from moderate right and moderate left *députés* in the *Assemblée* and that has been systematically opposed there by both the extreme right and what we can interpret as the extreme left in the context of the contemporary French party system. This is the classic configuration of a *marais* majority in the legislature.

There is also evidence of a *marais* government from the Council of Ministers (Bucur 2017). The Philippe I government had considerable moderate right participation. In addition to the prime minister himself, ex-LR figures were represented in the government in the form of Bruno Le Maire and Gérard Darmanin. In addition, MoDem was also represented, not least in the form of its leader, François Bayrou. There was also moderate left participation in the government. There were former PS figures in senior positions, Gérard Collomb and Jean-Yves Le Drian. The PS's long-time centre-left ally, the Parti radical de gauche (PRG), was also represented. Needless to say, there were LREM ministers too, notably Richard Ferrand who was previously in the PS. Thus, the Philippe I government was a standard *marais* mix of moderate right and moderate left ministers. The Philippe II had a slightly different composition, but the basic formulation was the same. A number of MoDem ministers soon departed because of the party's difficulties with the judicial system, but it retained nominal representation at the level of Secrétaire d'État. Former LR, PS and PRG ministers also remained in the government. For LREM, Richard Ferrand departed, but the party's Secrétaires d'État included figures who had previously been elected for both the PS and LR.

Thus, there is no question that Macron's election has led to another period of *marais* government in Duverger's terms. However, what does his election tell us about the shape of French meta-party system more generally? To what extent does the current configuration of party competition presage a return to the *éternel marais*?

The dominant interpretation of the French party system in the 1970s and 1980s was one of bipolarisation. As we have seen, this was the basis of the presence of so many right and left governments in the period after Duverger was writing. However, a new academic interpretation of the party system emerged in the late 1990s and soon became dominant. At this time and referring to changes that had occurred from the mid-1980s onwards, Grunberg and Schweisguth (1997) identified what they called the '*tripartition de l'espace politique*'. This tripolar system comprised the basic left and right poles, but also a new extreme-right pole. The left and right poles were separated by their longstanding differences on the economy. However, both the left and the right poles were separated from the extreme right by their attitudes towards cultural/universalist values, with the extreme right being opposed to universalism (Grunberg and Schweisguth 2003, 346). In this context, the left would not cooperate with the right because of basic differences in values, and neither the left nor the right would cooperate with the extreme right for the same reason.

The 2017 elections present a challenge to the standard *tripartition* thesis. Gougou and Persico (2017) have suggested four potential interpretations of the Macron-era party system,

including the continuation of the standard *tripartition* thesis. However, they do so on the basis of a study that focuses primarily on the relations between LREM, LR and the FN. We identify two similar, but nonetheless different interpretations of the new meta-party system that take account of the radical left and that interpret LREM's position differently. We present these interpretations in the context of Duverger's idea of the *marais*.

The first interpretation is a continuation of *tripartition*, but in a new form (ibid., 5). Here, the first pole would be an extreme left (or anti-system left) pole comprising LFI, the PCF and perhaps also a rump PS that would be anchored on the left and would be willing to work with other groups on the anti-system left but not with LREM. These groups would share a common set of anti-austerity economic values and cultural/universalist values. In this new *tripartition* interpretation, there would be a second pole on the extreme right comprising the FN and a set of parties that would be willing to work with it. During the two rounds of the 2017 presidential election, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan broke the taboo and formally allied with Marine Le Pen. It is at least conceivable that LR could change its strategy too. For example, Gougou and Persico (ibid.) have shown that the gap between LR voters and both LREM and left voters on cultural/universalist issues is wider than before, even if there remains a gap between LR and FN voters in this regard too. This suggests that LR may have more difficulty working with the moderate right than was previously the case and may consider working with the FN. Also, with elements of the moderate right having already formally joined LREM and with other elements having signalled that they are willing to cooperate with it, there is the possibility especially under the influence of a figure like Laurent Wauquiez that LR might decide to follow a strategy of more-or-less formal cooperation with the extreme right at least electorally. This may be perceived by LR leaders as the party's only route back to power. According to this new *tripartition* interpretation, there would also be a third pole that is separate from both the left and right extremes. In Duverger's terms, this would not be a centrist pole, which is a point of difference between the interpretation here and Gougou and Persico's presentation of a new *tripartition*. Instead, it would comprise LREM, which itself would remain a combination of moderate left and moderate right voters. It would also include other moderate right groups such as MoDem and the *Constructifs* and perhaps even a small, ex-PS moderate left party that was unwilling to cooperate with the anti-system left. The various elements of this third pole would be irreconcilably opposed to the anti-system left in terms of economic policy and to the extreme right on cultural/universalist values.

If the French party system takes on this new form of *tripartition*, then the likelihood of *marais* governments would be very high. For sure, the possibility of left and right governments could not be excluded. For example, it is possible to imagine an LR government coming to power with the support of the FN and governing against both the extreme left and the LREM pole. What is more, the possibility that LREM turns out to be merely a flash party and that support for it declines quickly, or perhaps that it splits into different elements also cannot be excluded. Duverger noted that centrist parties have difficulty remaining united. Even in this context, though, the likelihood of governments continuing to be formed from within the third pole would remain high, especially if President Macron keeps his promise and introduces a dose of proportional representation for *Assemblée elections*. With the extreme left and the extreme right unable to cooperate and with the various elements of the third pole sharing basic values whether they are expressed through LREM as the dominant party or whether they manifest themselves through a number of smaller parties, there would still be the potential for a return to ongoing *marais* governments.

The second interpretation is a *quadripartition* of the French political space, or four-pole party system. The idea that there was a *quadripartition* has already been debated (Grunberg and Schweisguth 2003, 354). In the context of elections in the 1990s and early 2000s, it was considered in the form of the standard *tripartition* of the left, right and extreme right political space plus an additional extreme left pole. This four-pole interpretation was rejected at the time because there was little evidence of any significant differences between the left and the extreme left. They shared many values, and they cooperated politically, most notably during the plural left government from 1997 to 2002. Thus, the standard *tripartition* thesis prevailed. However, this may have changed with the 2017 election. In a new interpretation of *quadripartition*, LFI, the PCF and perhaps a rump PS would be on the extreme or anti-system left; LREM would operate as a de facto moderate left party; LR and various allies would constitute a moderate right group; and the FN would be on the extreme right. The first key assumption of this interpretation is that the left would have effectively split. This seems reasonable. The difference in economic values on the left may now simply be too large to be reconciled. This was one of the main reasons why figures such as Manuel Valls deserted the PS when the party chose what seemed to be an anti-austerity *frondeur* in its presidential primary election. The second assumption is that LR would continue to refuse to cooperate with the FN. They would do so for standard *tripartition* reasons, namely that LR and the FN would be opposed on economic policy and that there would still be a gap between the two parties on cultural/universalist policies, even if the gap narrowed in 2017. The third assumption is more forward-looking and assumes that LREM would establish an identity for itself on the moderate left. Facing an electable moderate right, LREM would choose to compete with LR and its allies on economic issues by moving towards a more clear-cut centre-left position. There is little evidence of such a move from the very early period of the Macron presidency.

If the French party system were to take this form of *quadripartition*, then the prospects for ongoing *marais* governments would also be very high. Here, there would be considerable opportunity for an alternation in power, but it would be likely to take place only between the moderate left and the moderate right, both of which would always be governing against the extremes. Moreover, especially in the context of a more proportional electoral system, the legislative majority might be relatively fluid, combining elements of both the moderate right and the moderate left on an ongoing basis. This form of *quadripartition* would correspond most closely to the pre-1958 situation that Duverger outlined in his 1964 article. This was the period of the *éternel marais*.

Clearly, the Macron presidency is still in its infancy. President Macron will face many challenges in the years to come. His response to them—and that of his government—will help to shape the future contours of the meta-party system in no doubt unexpected ways. More than that, French political parties have traditionally been less institutionalised than parties in many other countries. This is at least partly the result of the impact of the personalised nature of presidential elections on party organisations (Samuels and Shugart 2010). In this context, LREM is even less institutionalised than most of the political parties that have governed France since 1958. It may turn out to be a ‘flash party’ with ‘normal service’ soon being resumed. For this reason, too, we need to be cautious when commenting on the future direction of the party and the meta-party system in France. Indeed, it is noteworthy that LREM failed to break through at the Senatorial elections in September 2017. Nonetheless, the 2017 presidential and legislative elections did mark a change in French party politics. There is evidence that Duverger’s idea of the *marais* is a useful way of thinking about the

French party system in the immediate aftermath of these elections. It may also provide a useful heuristic for thinking about ongoing developments in the French meta-party system and the modes of governing associated with them.

Conclusion

France and the French party system seems, once again, to be entering a period of flux. The value change that began in the mid-1980s has had a profound effect on political debate for a considerable time, but the election of Emmanuel Macron has broken the hegemony of the bipolar system at the institutional level. With the prospect of the introduction of a dose of proportional representation, the combination of value change and institutional change may mark the onset of a new period of political competition in France. Such competition may be expressed through a change in the meta-party system that brings with it the potential for new types of governments and legislative majorities. Paradoxically, though, this system might manifest itself in the form of a return to the *éternel marais* that Duverger identified as the dominant political system from 1789 to 1958.

The nature of the meta-party system depends on the intensity of the values that differentiate the basic groups in the political system, the support that each of these groups receives from the electorate and the institutional context through which party competition is filtered. The 2017 election seems to have marked a change in the intensity of certain values for particular groups as well as the level of support for them. For example, it may have marked a change in the salience of cultural/universalist issues on the moderate right with part of this electorate moving closer to the FN. It certainly marked a definitive break on the left in terms of attitudes towards anti-austerity economic values. It is difficult to imagine LFI and the moderate left ever cooperating in this regard, and there was certainly an increase in support for the anti-austerity left. These changes raise questions about how the party system should best be interpreted and whether the French meta-party system now takes the form of a new three- or four-block system. Whatever the favoured interpretation, there is the prospect of a return to *marais*-style governments where the moderate right and/or the moderate left govern against the extremes on an ongoing basis. This is the sense in which the election of President Macron may lead to a return to the *éternel marais*.

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