

# Towards the 2017 French election: Socialist and Republican nominees from the selection to the presidential election

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## **Abstract**

Primaries have become an important aspect of the French party system. In recent times, the process, used by different parties, has been opened up to *coopérateurs* ('sympathisers'). Both the Socialist Party and the Republicans held primaries in the 2017 presidential elections. This can be seen as an expected step towards addressing problems such as leadership and representativeness. This process is also in line with the personalisation that has become a feature of the Fifth Republic. Following the collapse of the main parties during the last elections, the primary system seems to have entered a period of crisis. This article will hence analyse the introduction of primaries in France, with particular attention to the 2017 presidential election. Our focus is on the similarities and differences between these two open selection processes and their respective effects.

## **Keywords**

France, primaries, presidential elections

**TOWARDS THE 2017 FRENCH ELECTION: SOCIALIST AND  
REPUBLICAN NOMINEES FROM THE SELECTION TO THE  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

by MARINO DE LUCA

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*Abstract.— In France, primaries have become an important part of French party system. Recently, the process, used by different parties, has been opened also to sympathisers. Indeed, both the Socialist Party and the Republicans organised primaries in the 2017 presidential elections. This can be analysed as an expected step to address problems such as leadership and representativeness. In addition, this process is also in line with the personalisation that has become a characteristic of the Fifth Republic. However, after the collapse of the main parties in the last elections, the primary system seems to have entered in a crisis time. For this reason, this article will attempt to analyse the introduction of primaries in France with a particular attention on the last presidential election focusing on the similarities, differences, and effects in these two open selections.*

Keywords: France, primaries, presidential elections

## 1. *Introduction*

Although membership of the parties and their activism have declined in recent decades (Scarrow 2014; van Haute and Gauja 2015), the new typologies of «parties without partisans» have reacted by adopting new forms of internal democracy. Whilst these challenges have been framed as the manipulation of members by party leaders (Katz 2001), the increasing role of citizens in the leader and candidate selections is the most important improvement of parties in terms of expanding the inclusiveness of the decision processes.

Early North American studies on the impact of the primaries have proven to be critical. Indeed, parties adopting primaries were defeated in the following general elections, especially when primaries were competitive and/or negative (Hacker 1965). After several decades, primaries are no longer an exclusive tool of North American politics. Indeed, several democracies use this mechanism for candidacy selection. Examples include Latin America (Carey and Polga-Hecimovic 2006), Western Europe (Barberà, Lisi and Teruel 2015; De Luca and Venturino 2015, 2017; Giannetti and Lefebvre 2015), Asia (Narita, Nakai and Kubo 2015), and Africa (Ichino and Nathan 2013).

In these new contexts, primaries appear to help parties to avoid internal conflicts in order to promote a new public image of the parties among members and supporters (Dalton and Weldon 2004).

In France, for several years, the introduction of primary elections – a further symbol of the *américanisation* of political life – has been considered as a process with few prospects of success due to the characteristics of the French political and party systems (Lefebvre and Treille 2016). Nevertheless, primaries have become an important part of French politics, which have evolved over time (Rousseau 2015). In fact, for a long time, the selection of candidates has been characterised by closed forms available only to members. Recently, the process has become rooted in greater inclusiveness within the selection process; this has been achieved by opening up with sympathisers. In addition, even if at the beginning the primary process involved only left-wing parties, in recent years it has also involved right-wing ones. Indeed, both the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (LR) used primaries in the last presidential elections. This can be explained as a necessary effort to

cope with the leadership and representativeness problems that the traditional party organisations were unable to address in an acceptable way (Mény 2015). The adoption of primaries by the two major French parties to select the presidential candidate is also in line with the personalisation issue that, in the last decades, has become a clear framework of the Fifth Republic. Until 2017, although primaries weakened the policy-making role of parties (Avril 2015), this process was also analysed in order to understand how they enhance the promoters' chance to win. This transformation provided several solutions in the past, but after the collapse of the historic parties in the last elections, the open primaries seem to have entered a difficult time in their survival. This is linked to the traditional parliamentary parties in France (Grunberg 2015).

From this perspective, this article has not an explicatory aim, but rather intends to describe the development of primaries in France with a particular focus on the last electoral round, also suggesting some possible directions of investigations for future studies in the field. In detail, the article will explore the primary outcomes of the two major parties to understand the rules, the participation, and the competitiveness. The second section will analyse the French primary elections and their adoption. The third section will describe the case of the 2017 socialist primaries and the fourth will examine the centre-right ones. Finally, a general discussion will focus on the similarities and differences in these two elections.

## *2. The development of primary elections in France*

*The first Presidential primaries.* - In France, the first experience of primary elections occurred in 1995<sup>1</sup>. At that time, the PS, after Mitterrand's retirement, was involved in a heated debate on the appointment of the new candidate. In fact, Jacques Delors' withdrawal from the race – the only candidate able to inherit Mitterrand's leadership – reopened the competition within the PS, creating a leadership vacuum problem. Thus, in the first closed selection – where approximately 80,000 socialist members participated – on 3 February 1995, Lionel Jospin won 66 per cent of the votes against the 34 per cent of the then former leader, Henri Emmanuelli. The unexpectedly huge gap between the loser and the winner, in front of a competitor who controlled the party, was attributed to Jospin's ability to better manage the presidential campaign. However, in the subsequent presidential election, he lost against the conservative candidate Jacques Chirac, obtaining 47 per cent of the vote in the runoff (Elgie 1996). This first primary was an historic moment for the PS, allowing the party to formalise the presidentialisation of the party with the investiture of the polls'

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s, one of the first to introduce the concept of primaries in France is Charles Pasqua, who proposes so-called *primaires à la française* within the then centre-right wing; cfr. Pasqua and Monzani (2015).

favourite candidate rather than the party leader, who was until 1995 the natural candidate for the presidential election (Marlière 2017). In addition, in the same year, Henri Emmanuelli gave up his leadership to Lionel Jospin to become the party leader. Subsequently, in 1997, Jospin became prime minister during France's third cohabitation government with President Jacques Chirac.

In the following presidential elections, the PS, after an internal debate, decided not to hold a new primary election. By 2002 Lionel Jospin, the outgoing prime minister, seemed to be the only candidate able to compete against the incumbent Chirac. However, Jospin in the presidential elections unexpectedly failed to pass the second round, overtaken by both right-wing candidates: Chirac, who was then re-elected as president, and the leader of the National Front (FN), Jean-Marie Le Pen (Lewis-Beck 2004). Furthermore, in the same period, two other parties experienced the primaries for the selection of the presidential candidate. The first, the French Communist Party (PCF), promoted an internal consultation to select the presidential candidate, where 63,941 voters attended alongside approximately 138,000 members. Robert Hue, a former communist candidate in 1995, was selected by 77.4 per cent of PCF members and obtained just 3.4 per cent in the 2002 presidential elections. Secondly, in the spring of 2001, the Greens organised a closed primary where Alain Lipietz was nominated to be a candidate of the party by approximately six thousand members. In the same year, after a controversial position on Corsican nationalists, Lipietz was deselected in an internal referendum by 60 per cent of the voters. His candidacy was replaced by Noël Mamère, runner-up in the primary elections, who gained 5.5 per cent of the votes in the first round of the presidential election.

*The consolidation of closed-primaries.* - The 2007 presidential election highlights an important breakthrough in the evolution of French primaries (Dolez and Laurent 2007). Indeed, the designation of Ségolène Royal – as socialist candidate to the presidential – during a close primary was characterised by three novelties: the absence of internal competition for the position of PS leader, at that time François Hollande; the mediatisation of the electoral campaign outside the PS; and the increase of membership, about 220,000 members compared to 120,000 registered in the Le Mans congress. Immediately, even before being appointed by militants, Royal was consecrated by the media and public opinion as a *présidentiables* candidate (Lefebvre 2011). Indeed, the former minister of Mitterrand's government imposed her candidacy for three reasons: an image of political novelty; the distance from the party apparatus; and her popularity in all the polls. In fact, Royal became the first Socialist female candidate with 60.6 per cent of the total vote by defeating her party's elephants, Dominique Strauss-Kahn (20.8) and Laurent Fabius (18.6).

At the same time, far from the media buzz, the other three parties applied closed primaries when choosing their presidential candidates. Firstly, the Greens, with approximately 5,000 participants, chose Dominique Voynet (45.7 per cent). He obtained only 1.6 per cent of the votes in the presidential elections. Secondly, the PCF organised an uncontested primary to select Marie-George Buffet, who gained 1.9 per cent of the votes in the next presidential elections. Finally, the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) was appointed before Nicolas Sarkozy, with the votes of approximately 230,000 voters (of approximately 340 thousand party members) between 2 and 14 January 2007, and subsequently by acclamation within the Congress of January 14th in front of more than 100,000 members. In the first round of the presidential elections, Sarkozy gained 31.2 per cent of the votes, ahead of Ségolène Royal with 25.9. In the second round, Sarkozy became president, winning with 53.1 per cent of the votes ahead of Ségolène Royal with 46.9 (Ivaldi 2007; Grunberg and Haegel 2007).

*From closed to open primaries.* - The way towards a more inclusive participation in the candidate selection came in 2009 from the PS through a report by the French National Secretary for Renewal, Arnaud Montebourg, entitled *Pour des primaires ouvertes et populaires*. It was subsequently approved through the favourable vote of 68 per cent of members. In this document, Montebourg highlighted three main reasons to adopt the open primaries: the low legitimacy conferred by members only; the need to test the best candidate among a large number of candidates to allow increases in popularity; and overcoming the crisis of socialist leadership through the presidential primary. In the same year, the media coverage of the primary debate increased thanks to the support of several French personalities, such as sociologist Alain Touraine, and important political figures<sup>2</sup>. This pushed the then party leader Martin Aubry to accept a more inclusive process for the selection of the PS candidate. Thus, in 2011, the PS and the Radical Party of the Left (PRG) organised the first open primary, the so-called *primaires citoyennes*, to select their candidate for the 2012 presidential election (Audemard and Gouard 2014; Bergounioux 2011; De Luca 2014). After the first round with six candidates, François Hollande and Martine Aubry contested a runoff election in October 2011. Almost 2.9 million voters participated in the second round and Hollande won the primary with approximately 57 per cent of the vote, becoming the candidate of the PS and the PRG, and gaining the French presidency against Nicolas Sarkozy in the 2012 presidential election.

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<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Duhamel and Ferrand [2008], «Pour une primaire à la française», in *Rapport de la fondation Terra Nova*; Colin A.; Lanathoua M. and Chopin, D. [2011], «Des primaires à l'américaine pour le président de la Commission européenne: une révolution démocratique et stratégique?», in *Rapport de la fondation Terra Nova*; Ferrand O. and Montebourg A. [2009], *Primaire: comment sauver la gauche*, Paris, Seuil.

However, in the 2012 presidential election, two other parties were also involved in the selection of their candidates. On the one hand, the PCF held an articulate process to choose the project of the Left Front (FDG), a leftist federation of parties, and to select Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Left Party (PG) as the candidate for the presidential election, obtaining 59 per cent in the closed primary where more than 48 thousand members participated. In the presidential election, Mélenchon took fourth place, achieving 11.1 per cent of the vote, behind François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, and Marine Le Pen. On the other hand, 25 thousand Green members chose Eva Joly as the presidential candidate through a two-round primary. The ecologist primary included the participation of the members of Europe Ecology – The Greens (EELV) and *coopérateurs*, i.e. the sympathisers, through a fee payment of 10 euros. Subsequently, Joly obtained only 2.3 per cent of the votes in the presidential election.

#### **TABLE 1 - HERE**

After the 2012 presidential elections and Hollande's victory, the open primaries received more attention by becoming a key factor in the candidate selection process at local levels. In fact, in the 2014 municipalities elections, the two main French parties selected their candidates in several cities using open primaries (see Table 2). The PS held primaries in five cities on 13 and 20 October 2013: Aix-en-Provence, Béziers, Boulogne-Billancourt, Le Havre and Marseille. The UMP organised primaries in Paris and Lyon. The transfer of this procedure at the local level for the 2015 municipal elections was also a democratic success. Indeed, local primaries seem destined for future application, because they were not envisaged as a duplication of a national process, but as a real democratic implementation based on the revitalisation of local democracy (Fekl 2015). However, while on the one hand communal primaries have improved local participation, on the other hand, they did not have any “magical effect” on local elections. In fact, a peculiarity of these municipal elections is that no candidate selected by the primaries has succeeded in winning in the mayoral elections.

#### **TABLE 2 - HERE**

To return to the national level, in the 2017 presidential elections, the open primaries have become the main selection tool both for the centre-right and the centre-left parties. In fact, as seen above, Table 1 shows four primaries. The EELV organised a primary to select Yannick Jadot who, however, withdrew his candidacy for the presidential election and supported Benoît Hamon after an



electoral agreement with the PS. The online primary of the Association Democratech, so-called LaPrimaire.org, selected Charlotte Marchandise-Franquet who, however, failed to obtain the signatures needed to participate in the presidential elections. Finally we see the two primaries of the PS, on the model of the 2011 open primary, and the republicans who experienced for the first time an open primary for the candidate to the presidential election.

### 3. *The 2017 Primaires citoyenne*

*Rules and candidates.* - The very idea of primaries reinforces the importance of the presidential elections. However, for some scholars, primaries are a factor of depresidentialisation; by dividing the presidential candidacy from the party leadership, the primary elections open the way for the nomination of an outsider, weakening the power of the new president over his or her own party and vice versa (Dolez 2015). Regarding the PS, primaries became a central point of the socialist Statute after the 2012 Toulouse Congress (modified in the 2015 Poitiers Congress), where the PS included several articles in order to select its candidate through an inclusive process. The timing of open primaries for the presidential candidates is decided by the National Council of the PS through a timetable at least one year before the presidential elections (art. 5.3.1). The minimum requirements for participation, such as being enrolled in the French electoral lists or being 18 years old by the day of the presidential elections or being enrolled in the promoter parties, need to be met in order to sign the statement of the principles. One must pay one euro (art. 5.3.2) and a national committee in charge of the organisation of the primaries must be established (art. 5.3.3).

Thus, the PS and its allies organised a two-round primary to select their candidate for the 2017 presidential elections. The 2017 open primary was held on 22 and 29 January 2017 on the basis of the 2011 model, in which François Hollande became the Socialist nominee and, after defeating the incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy, the new French president (Clift 2013). However, after his complicated presidency (Gaffney 2015), Hollande decided not to become involved for a second term in the 2017 presidential elections. In this context, the primaries were used as a solution to the socialist impasse and to contain the collapse of the consensus.

The left coalition, the so-called *Belle Alliance populaire* (BAP), consisted of three others parties aside from the PS: the Ecologist Party (PE) created in 2015 to support Hollande after a split in the EELV following the decision to make alliances with the FDG; the Democratic Front (FD), a centre-left French political party created by Jean-Luc Bennahmias in June 2014 with the contribution of the Union of Democrats and Ecologists (UDE); and the Radical Party of the Left (PRG), the main ally of the PS since 1972. As for the candidacy, the requirements to become a

candidate in the BAP were determined by the individual parties<sup>3</sup>. Thus, on December 2016, the High Authority announced the seven candidates accepted to run for the open primary: the former prime minister Manuel Valls, Arnaud Montebourg, Benoît Hamon, and Vincent Peillon for the PS; François de Rugy for the PE; Sylvia Pinel for the PRG; and Jean-Luc Bennahmias for the FD.

Among the four socialist candidates, Valls and Montebourg also ran for the nomination of the socialists in 2011. In that race, Valls achieved only 6 per cent of the vote in the 2011 primary, but after Hollande's victory in the presidential elections, he was first appointed as minister of the interior, and then prime minister. In the 2017 presidential elections, Valls, taking advantage of Hollande's crisis, participated in the primary as the expected frontrunner. Instead, Montebourg, the former minister of the economy, gained approximately 17 per cent in the 2011 primary. His candidacy was presented in response to the policy changes of Hollande. The third socialist candidate was the former education minister Benoît Hamon. He was another opposing candidate to Hollande with a leftist proposal on work policies. Both Montebourg and Hamon, after the first Valls government, clashed with Hollande over several economic issues. Indeed, after the internal crisis between the *frondeurs* led by Montebourg-Hamon and the pro-administration wing led by Valls-Hollande, in the second Valls government they were not re-confirmed as ministers. This prolonged the conflict until the primaries. Finally, the fourth socialist candidate was Vincent Peillon, former minister of national education and MEP, in opposition to the left-wing rebels led by Montebourg and Hamon.

*Participation in primary election.* - Regarding the participation, the first problem in this new candidate selection was the number of polling stations. Indeed, only 7,350 polling stations were planned in the first phase and later 7,208 polling stations were open during the primary (6,915 in Metropolitan France, see Table 3) compared to 9,425 in the 2011 primary and 10,228 in the primary of the right. Regarding the turnout, in the first round there were 1,655,919 voters, and in the second there was an increase that led to a turnout of 2,045,343. In general, the 2017 primary was characterised by a collapse of participation compared to previous experience. In fact, in the first round of the 2011 primary elections, the turnout was 2,661,231, while in the second round it was 2,860,157.

Table 3 shows the number of electoral stations and the results of the participation in the first and second round aggregated according to the new 13 metropolitan regions provided by the recent French reform. In general, the turnout is the first indicator to be analysed in order to better

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<sup>3</sup> Socialist, for example, used the same rules of the 2011 primary: the support of 5 per cent of the members of the National Council; or parliamentarians, regional and departmental councillors in at least 4 regions and 10 departments; or mayors representing more than 10,000 people in at least 4 regions and 10 departments.

understand the importance of the primary elections. However, scholars have always had difficulty in calculating this figure. For example, in a closed primary, it is possible to use a party's members lists. In an open primary, however, it is necessary to estimate the potential electorate. Indeed, in this aim, Table 3 presents the participation rate that is calculated as the primary turnout as a proportion of the total votes cast for the Socialist candidate in the first round of the 2012 presidential elections.

The participation rate in the first round shows higher peaks in the regions where historically the PS has taken more votes, such as Ile de France (22.3 per cent), Bretagne (19.3) and Occitanie (19.1), while reaching a lower rate in Hauts de France (9.6), Corse (11.3) and Grand East (11.7). As for the second round, the turnout increased by approximately 400,000 voters with a variation of between 2.6 and 5.6 per cent. The largest increase occurred in the regions where the participation rate was higher, such as in Ile de France (+5.6), Bretagne (+4.7) and Occitanie (+4.4), while it appears to grow less in regions where in the first round the participation rate was lower, except for Corse where it was +4.1.

#### **TABLE 3 - HERE**

*Results and primaries' aftermath.* - Regarding the primary results, Hamon won in the first round of the primary (36 per cent), followed by Valls (31.5); as neither of the two gained more than 50 per cent of the vote, a second round was held one week later. Montebourg gained third place (17.5), declaring immediately to vote for Hamon in the second ballot. The other candidates' results were: Peillon (6.8), de Rugy (3.8), Pinel (2), and Bennahmias (1). Of these minor candidates, Pinel and Bennahmias endorsed Valls for the second round; Peillon promoted the mobilisation of voters without expressing any endorsement; and de Rugy chose not to endorse Hamon but without directly supporting Valls.

Table 4 shows the results of the first round according to the regions of Metropolitan France. As shown, Hamon came first with respect to all the candidates except in Corse, where Valls prevailed, and Bourgogne Franche Comté where Montebourg was first. Kenig's index (2008)<sup>4</sup> is 0.521 at the level of Metropolitan France, reaching 0.533 in Grand-Est where the competition is more balanced, 0.531 in Bourgogne Franche Comté, and 0.528 in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. While it reaches lower values in Corse (0.411) and Bretagne (0.469). The index indicates a moderately competitive race.

#### **TABLE 4 - HERE**

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<sup>4</sup> Kenig's index varies between a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1 and is calculated as the ratio between the effective number of candidates and their actual number.

Regarding the second round, after an increase in participation, Hamon was nominated as the Socialist candidate for the presidential election, winning the 58.7 per cent of the votes against the 41.3 obtained by Valls. Table 5 shows Hamon's result, who won in all regions except the Corse. For the second round, we have used closeness as a competitive indicator. The figure shows a high margin for Hamon, who reached the highest percentage in Bretagne (23.3 per cent), in Hauts de France (21.9), and Bourgogne (20.7), while tapering in Occitanie (11.7), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (14.3) and Grand- Est (15.6).

#### **TABLE 5 - HERE**

The analysis of the results shows how Hamon obtained the highest percentages in the most urbanised areas such as: Ile de France, with territories like Seine-Saint-Denis and Paris; Hauts-de-France with Lille, Bretagne with Rennes; or Pays de la Loire with Nantes. Valls, on the other hand, was able to reduce the gap only in small circumscriptions, but tendentially in areas historically close to the right. In general, the whole of the north east showed low participation rates, with Hamon appearing to have benefited by voting patterns in areas historically close to the left (and ecologists), whilst Valls failed to convince a moderate electorate who, as we will see later, preferred Macron. In 2011, the difference between Hollande and Aubry was smaller than that shown between Hamon and Valls, and was much more tied to the candidates' influences in various territories. In this case, the polarisation between the pros and cons of the government nationalised the vote with the huge impact of the media emphasising the internal conflict (Lefebvre 2015).

However, the main problem of the socialist primaries was not low participation, but rather high divisiveness after the vote. After several weeks, de Rugy announced his support for Emmanuel Macron, former minister of the economy, who founded an independent political party (En Marche!) before the presidential elections. De Rugy's decision to break the engagement was expected by all the primary candidates; in order to support the winner, it caused an internal debate. The PRG, after a controversial period in which the possibility of supporting Macron was discussed, finally decided to respect the primary voting for Hamon. This confirmed the presidential support and created an agreement with the PS for the legislative elections. However, the most striking case was that of Valls' statements, which announced a personal support for Macron without expressing the public engagement behind his candidacy.

#### 4. *The first time of the right parties*

*Rules and candidates.* - The introduction by the French right of a more inclusive system to select one's own candidate has been a long process. It was discussed again in the 2014 municipal elections in order to overcome a long internal crisis. By copying the PS model, on April 2015, the centre-right parties discussed a general charter to organise a primary for the presidential elections. This was the first time that France's centre-right had organised an open primary for the presidential elections, where any citizen signing a 'statement of allegiance' to the values of the right and paying a small contribution of two euros could participate (art. 2.2 of the Primary Charter). This important adoption has transformed the organisational model of the right-wing parties by engaging it in a competitive and regulated process (Haegel 2015). In this context, while the PS held its own primary elections in January 2017, the main centre-right party, the LR, the Christian Democratic (PCD, centre), and the National Centre of Independents and Peasants (CNIP) selected their respective candidates in a two-round system in November 2016.

Until the official closing date for candidacies, several politicians expressed their interest in running in the 2016 primary election. The LR required each candidate to obtain the sponsorship of 250 elected representatives (of which at least 20 had to be MPs) in at least 30 departments and 2,500 party members in at least 15 departments (art. 4.3 of the Primary Charter). For the candidates of other promoter parties, the conditions of candidacy were adopted by the legislative organs of each party. Overall, seven candidates from the LR met the candidacy requirements: François Fillon, Alain Juppé, Nicolas Sarkozy, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Bruno Le Maire, and Jean-François Copé. Among the other parties, four members also requested to become candidates, but three of them were rejected; only Jean-Frédéric Poisson PCD obtained the candidacy. Thus, the first open primary of the centre-right had a total of eight candidates.

Among the LR's candidates, former prime minister and mayor of Bordeaux Alain Juppé was leading in the polls for several months. However, the other two main candidates, namely the former president Nicolas Sarkozy and François Fillon, former prime minister under Sarkozy's presidency, earned percentage points close to the vote. Thus, the primaries have become a means to settle scores within the LR party. However, while at the beginning the principal aim was to be open to all centre-right parties, the pre-organisation failed to obtain the participation of all forces of that political wing. Firstly, the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) decided not to present their own candidate in the primary, instead supporting Alain Juppé. This party, after the primary, although supporting François Fillon for the 2017 French presidential election, had several members of the party leadership who supporting Emmanuel Macron. Secondly, the Democratic Movement,

(MoDem) led by François Bayrou also decided to endorse Alain Juppé. However, after his defeat, Bayrou announced his support for Macron in the presidential election.

*Participation in primary election.* - Regarding participation, the organisation of the primary included 10,219 polling stations, of which 9,918 were in Metropolitan France. This allowed 4,298,097 people to vote in the first round and 4,404,812 in the second. In general, the first presidential primary of the centre-right was characterised by a high participation rate when compared to the socialist primary. Table 6 shows the results of the participation in the first and second round in Metropolitan France. In this case, we can calculate the participation rate in the primary turnout as a proportion of the total votes cast for the UMP candidate in the first round of the 2012 presidential elections.

In general, the participation rate is very high compared to that of the PS. The average at the metropolitan level is 44.8 per cent. However, Table 6 shows a peak in participation in the most urbanised region of the country: Ile de France (63.7). In addition, there are high values in several key regions in the political history of the centre-right, such as in Nouvelle Aquitaine (47.3), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (46.9), Auvergne Rhône Alpes (44.3), Corse (43.7) and Pays de la Loire (41.8). The figures show a collapse in several other right-hand ramparts such as Bourgogne Franche Comté (36.3) and Grand-Est (33.4). As for the second round, there was a slight increase in the holdings, which recorded the largest variations in Nouvelle Aquitaine (+2.9), Bretagne (+2.8) and Pays de la Loire (+2.5).

#### **TABLE 6 - HERE**

*Results and primaries' aftermath.* - The results show that, in the first round of the republicans' primary on November 20, François Fillon won with 44.1 per cent of the vote, while Alain Juppé came second with 28.6. Nicolas Sarkozy, shown by all the polls as second behind the favourite Juppé, who was projected to come in second, was eliminated with 20.7 per cent of the vote. The other candidates reached smaller percentages: Kosciusko-Morizet (2.6), Le Maire (2.4), Poisson (1.4), and Copé (0.3). Table 7 shows the results of the first round in Metropolitan France only. Fillon won in almost all regions with a percentage of between 42,0 (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur) and 59.6 (Pay de la Loire), except in Corse where the winner was Sarkozy (43.6), and in Nouvelle Aquitaine which was assigned to Juppé (43.8). Kenig's index is lower than that of the Socialist primary. Indeed, it is 0.444 at the level of Metropolitan France, reaching higher values in Occitanie

(0.456) and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (0.450), and lower values in Pays de la Loire (0.339) and Bretagne (0.406).

#### **TABLE 7 - HERE**

In the runoff round, Fillon won with 66.5 per cent against Juppé. Table 8 shows the data of the two candidates in the second round and the closeness, which illustrate how in the regions where Fillon achieved a higher score in the first round, he also maximised the vote in the second round. In Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, the closeness between Fillon and Juppé was 50.6, and in Pay de la Loire it was 52.4. By contrast, the gap appears to be reduced in the regions where the challenger has a high level of competitiveness, such as in Ile de France (19.7) and Nouvelle Aquitaine (2.6).

#### **TABLE 8 - HERE**

In general, Fillon won by an even larger margin against Juppé. In Metropolitan France, of the two departments won by Sarkozy in the first round, all switched to Fillon in the runoff. Similarly, of the six departments of Nouvelle Aquitaine that originally voted for Juppé, only two remained loyal to Juppé. The other four switched to Fillon in the second round, allowing the acquisition of all regions (Fourquet 2017).

Thus, the race to become the candidate of the French right ended with the extraordinary participation of over four million voters and an unexpected result, namely the nomination of François Fillon. His victory can be attributed to several factors, such as the capacity to bring together different positions of the centre-right wing with particular attention given to «establishment» and «identitarian» (Buhr 2017), and his image at least until the primaries as an honest politician.

However, something changed for both the socialists and the republicans in view of the presidential elections. The next section will attempt to describe the impact of the presidential primaries and the possible consequences of a presidential low result.

#### *5. The impact of the primaries on the presidential elections: Socialists versus Republicans*

The runoff of the 2017 French presidential election was held between the top two candidates of the first round: Emmanuel Macron of En Marche! and Marine Le Pen of the FN. Macron became, with 66.1 per cent of the votes, the youngest president in French history<sup>5</sup>.

For the first time, none of the candidates of the two main parties entered the second round. François Fillon of the LR, after winning the primary elections, led the first round polls with Le Pen from November 2016 to January 2017. However, after the so-called Penelopegate, the publication of information for which Fillon employed his wife in a fictitious job as a parliamentary assistant, Macron overcame Fillon in all the polls becoming the favourite in the first round. Finally, Fillon reached third position with 20 per cent, remaining out of the second round. On the other hand, the socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, after winning the primary, proposed forming a governmental majority with Jean-Luc Mélenchon of la France Insoumise (FI) and Yannick Jadot of EELV. However, while with Jadot there was an accordance, the alliance with Melenchon failed and the latter went into fourth place in the first round of the presidential elections (19.6 per cent). Hamon only reached 6.7, becoming fifth in the first round.

The results of the first round show a geographical and political split within France. Macron gained more votes in the west of France, in Ile de France and Savoie, while Le Pen gained more in the north, east, and southeast. The two major party candidates obtained poor results. François Fillon came first in only five departments of Metropolitan France: Sarthe and Mayenne in Pays de la Loire, Orne in Normandie, Haute-Savoie in Auvergne Rhône Alpes, and Lozère in Occitanie. He obtained the top score in his constituency, the department of Sarthe, where he had been a member and chairman of the General Council for a long time. Similarly, he achieved a high score in most of the territories usually close to the right (west of Ile-de-France, around Savoie, Vendée, and the Côte d'Azur). He was heavily underrepresented, however, in respect of the national score in Seine-Saint-Denis (where the radical left won) and in Picardie. Benoît Hamon, on the other hand, obtained the worst score of a socialist candidate in the presidential elections after Gaston Defferre in 1969. He did not win any departments but instead exceeded only 10 per cent in his department of birth, Finisterre in the Brittany region. More generally, the socialist candidate recorded the best scores in the west and in the centre of France, for example in Île-de-France.

The main question now to understand, with due caution, is whether or not, in the regions where the two parties reached high participation rates and low levels of competitiveness in the primaries, the two candidates had better results in the 2017 presidential election. From the point of view of participation, Hamon scored the worst results in the regions where the participation rates in the primary election were lowest: Corse (3.7 per cent), Grand-Est (5.1) and Hauts de France (5.2).

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<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Macron E. [2016], *Révolution. C'est notre combat pour la France*, Paris, XO.



He recorded the highest percentages where the rates of participation in the primary were highest, such as in Bretagne (9), Ile de France (7.6) and Nouvelle Aquitaine (7.1). Regarding Fillon, he achieved better results, on average around (and over) 20 per cent, in all regions where the participation rate of the primary was more than 40. For example, in Auvergne Rhône Alpes, Center Val de Loire, Corse, Ile de France, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, and, Pays de la Loire. At first glance, it appears that candidates achieved better results in the territories where participation in the primaries was higher than the national average.

However, there are some exceptions that can be explained by looking at the dimension of competitiveness. Indeed, in some regions, the results reached lower percentages due to the large amount of internal divisiveness within primary candidates. This is the case in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, where Hamon reached 4.1 per cent and Kenig's index in the first round of the primary election was high (0.528), and closeness in the second round recorded a narrow margin. As for Fillon, the most interesting aspect is the result in Nouvelle Aquitaine, which despite one of the highest participation rates in the primary, reached one of the lowest performances (17.8). The most interesting element, in this case, is the high competitiveness of the two main contenders, bringing the closeness in the second round to 2.6.

#### **TABLE 9 - HERE**

Thus, although the analysis appear to link high participation and low competitiveness to greater levels of electoral performance in the 2017 presidential elections, the data taken into account – only 13 cases, aggregated through the analysis of the 95 departments of Metropolitan France – makes it difficult to understand the real impact of participation and competitiveness, and their effects on the general elections. For this reason, it will be useful for future studies to analyse the correlation at a more disaggregated level, for example at least at the departmental level. In this descriptive analysis, it is therefore important to highlight several features of the last open primaries that are summed up in the next section.

#### *6. Conclusion*

Several critical approaches describe the adoption of primaries into the French party system as a failure due to the different institutional and political contexts (Bonetti 2015; Mény 2015). The French primary is thus considered to be an insert from the North American model into a European system; this causes several problems. Firstly, while in North America the rules of primary elections are set by each state, in France the rules for candidate selection are decided by each party. Despite the fact that the reference model is that of the PS primaries, they do not have overall uniformity

among themselves (Levade 2015). Secondly, the timing of the primary is on average a few months before the general elections, so they are not able to respond to unexpected events. Thirdly, the multi-party system impedes a simplification of competition and the two-round electoral system is considered de facto as a type of primary (Mény 2017).

More specifically, failure in general elections by candidates who have used the primary is due to a set of factors both internal and external to the primary process. As for the PS, the first factor affecting the 2017 result was the failure of Hollande's presidency. Primaries were used to relaunch a party that was collapsing in all of the polls. Thus, the socialists moved from the 2011 primaries when they were an opposition party with high chances of winning the elections, to the 2017 primary as a government party in the middle of a crisis and with little chance of gaining a good result in subsequent elections.

The second reason concerns the victory of an unexpected candidate who caused the increase of internal divisions and the inability to find a solution. Indeed, as regards the PS, the performance of the party was influenced by the selection of a candidate considered as extreme, namely Hamon, who was unable to assemble the defeated candidates. Thus, after the PS primary, Valls and de Rugy supported Macron. On the other hand, in the LR party, after Sarkozy's elimination, Alain Juppé was attacked because he was considered as too moderate, causing internal conflict. In addition, Fillon made an impact on the general performance inability of the primary legitimation to contrast with the pitfalls of the presidential electoral campaign. Indeed, the Penelopegate became the main issue covered in the electoral campaign. Fillon, after a great deal of party pressure, refused to withdraw from the competition and the primary system did not provide any rules of deselection in order to preserve the parties' promoters. For this reason, many party members supported Macron and others supported Le Pen.

Finally, although the unfortunate 2017 open primary elections caused problems for the main French parties, the extraordinary result of the 2017 presidential election was characterised by the outsider candidate, Emmanuel Macron, and the high votes gained by right and left-wing populist candidates, Le Pen and Mélenchon respectively.

From this point of view, Macron managed to gain moderate consensus from Hamon's and Fillon's disappointed voters. In addition, the presence of two very extreme candidates further eroded the extreme consensus of Hamon and Fillon. Mélenchon's and Le Pen's most intransigent programmes allowed extreme supporters to choose programme proposals closer to their attitudes than to those of the two most moderate candidates.

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TAB. 1 - *The presidential primary elections, 1995-2017.*

Year	Promoter	Open / closed	Fee	Timing <sup>a</sup>	Participation		N. of candidates	Winner	Final result
					First round	Runoff			
1995	PS	Closed	-	2	79,345	-	2	Lionel Jospin	Defeat (T1)
2002	The Greens	Closed	-	10	6,182	6,593	5	Alain Lipietz	Replaced
2002	PCF	Closed	-	6	63,941	-	2	Robert Hue	Defeat (T1)
2007	PS	Closed	-	5	179,412	-	3	Ségolène Royal	Defeat (T2)
2007	The Greens	Closed	-	9	4,917	5,356	5	Dominique Voynet	Defeat (T1)
2007	PCF	Closed	-	4	52,274	-	1	Marie-George Buffet	Defeat (T1)
2007	UMP	Closed	-	3	233,779	-	1	Nicolas Sarkozy	Elected
2012	PCF	Closed	-	10	48,631	-	3	Jean-Luc Mélenchon	Defeat (T1)
2012	EELV	Open	10 €	9	25,437	22,896	4	Eva Joly	Defeat (T1)
2012	PS, PRG	Open	1 €	6	2,661,231	2,860,157	6	François Hollande	Elected
2017	EELV	Open	5 €	4	12,582	13,940	4	Yannick Jadot	Withdrawn
2017	LR, PCD, CNIP	Open	2 €	5	4,298,097	4,388,797	7	François Fillon	Defeat (T1)
2017	LaPrimaire.org	Open	-	4	10,676	32,685	12	Charlotte Marchandise-Franquet	Unqualified
2017	PS, PE, PRG, FD	Open	1 €	3	1,655,919	2,046,628	7	Benoît Hamon	Defeat (T1)

<sup>a</sup>: Months before the general elections.

Source: PS, The Greens, PCF, UMP, EELV, LR, LaPrimaire.org.

TAB. 2 - *The 2014 mayoral primary elections.*

Municipality	Promoters	Open / closed	Fee	Participation		N. of candidates	Winner	Result
				First round	Runoff			
Aix-en-Provence	PS	Open	1 €	2,821	2,433	6	Édouard Baldo	Defeat (T2)
Béziers	PS	Open	1€	1,119	-	4	Jean-Michel Du Plaa	Defeat (T1)
Boulogne-Billancourt	PS	Open	1€	679	-	3	Pierre Gaborit	Defeat (T1)
La Rochelle	PS	Open	1€	3,656	-	2	Anne-Laure Jaumouillié	Defeat (T2)
Le Havre	PS	Open	1€	1,472	-	3	Camille Galap	Defeat (T1)
Lyon	UMP	Open	1€	4,300	5,452	5	Michel Havard	Defeat (T2)
Marseille	PS	Open	1€	20,731	24,037	6	Patrick Mennucci	Defeat (T2)
Paris	UMP	Open	3€	23,300	-	4	Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet	Defeat (T2)
Paris	EELV	Closed	-	580	-	8	Christophe Najdovski	Defeat (T1)

Source: PS, UMP, EELV.

TAB. 3 - *Participation in the French Socialist Party presidential primary, 2017.*

Region	Polling station	Selectors T1 <sup>I</sup>	Participation rate T1 <sup>I</sup> (%)	Selectors T2 <sup>II</sup>	Participation rate T2 <sup>II</sup> (%)	Variation (%)
Auvergne Rhône Alpes	779	189,346	16.9	232,767	20.7	+3.9
Bourgogne Franche Comté	464	69,429	15.9	80,612	18.5	+2.6
Bretagne	357	120,995	19.3	150,519	24.0	+4.7
Centre Val de Loire	282	57,356	14.9	69,680	18.1	+3.2
Corse	49	4,413	11.3	6,008	15.4	+4.1
Grand-Est	479	81,885	11.7	103,717	14.8	+3.1
Hauts de France	530	87,771	9.6	111,849	12.2	+2.6
Ile de France	1,194	378,186	22.3	472,894	27.9	+5.6
Normandie	312	77,482	14.6	94,083	17.8	+3.1
Nouvelle Aquitaine	718	170,997	15.6	205,888	18.8	+3.2
Occitanie	891	183,953	19.1	226,428	23.5	+4.4
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	506	96,806	16.1	122,595	20.4	+4.3
Pays de la Loire	354	102,133	16.8	125,052	20.5	+3.8
<i>France (metropolitan)</i>	<i>6,915</i>	<i>1,620,752</i>	<i>16.7</i>	<i>2,002,092</i>	<i>20.6</i>	<i>+3.9</i>

Note: <sup>I</sup> first round; <sup>II</sup> runoff; the participation rate is calculated as the primary turnout as a proportion of the total votes cast for the socialist candidate in the first round of the previous presidential elections.

Source: PS.

TAB. 4 - *Competitiveness in the first round of the French Socialist Party presidential primary, 2017.*

Region	Valls	Pinel	Peillon	de Rugy	Montebourg	Hamon	Bennahmias	Kenig index
Auvergne Rhône Alpes	30.8	2.0	6.6	3.9	18.2	37.4	1.0	0.520
Bourgogne Franche Comté	26.3	1.8	5.6	3.0	34.1	28.1	1.0	0.531
Bretagne	31.4	1.7	5.3	4.2	13.8	42.7	0.9	0.469
Centre Val de Loire	32.3	2.0	6.3	3.6	19.6	35.1	1.0	0.526
Corse	52.0	3.6	4.7	1.9	12.3	24.0	1.4	0.411
Grand-Est	32.4	1.9	6.9	3.8	18.9	34.7	1.3	0.533
Hauts de France	31.6	1.9	6.9	3.0	18.1	37.4	1.0	0.512
Ile de France	30.6	1.8	8.4	4.2	16.1	37.9	1.0	0.525
Normandie	30.3	1.9	6.9	3.5	18.3	38.0	1.1	0.518
Nouvelle Aquitaine	33.3	1.9	6.6	3.4	17.0	36.9	1.0	0.507
Occitanie	34.8	3.0	6.3	3.1	16.7	35.0	1.0	0.514
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	33.0	2.0	7.0	3.6	18.4	34.8	1.2	0.528
Pays de la Loire	30.5	1.6	6.6	6.7	15.5	38.1	0.9	0.526
<i>France (metropolitan)</i>	<i>31.6</i>	<i>2.0</i>	<i>6.9</i>	<i>3.9</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>36.9</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0.521</i>

Note: Figures are percentages.

Source: PS.

TAB. 5 - *Competitiveness in the second round of the French Socialist Party presidential primary, 2017.*

Region	Valls	Hamon	Closeness
Auvergne Rhône Alpes	40.1	59.9	+19.9
Bourgogne Franche Comté	39.6	60.4	+20.7
Bretagne	38.4	61.6	+23.3
Centre Val de Loire	42.3	57.7	+15.4
Corse	61.8	38.2	-23.5
Grand-Est	42.2	57.8	+15.6
Hauts de France	39.1	60.9	+21.9
Ile de France	40.8	59.2	+18.5
Normandie	39.7	60.3	+20.6
Nouvelle Aquitaine	41.9	58.1	+16.2
Occitanie	44.2	55.8	+11.7
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	42.9	57.1	+14.3
Pays de la Loire	40.2	59.8	+19.6
<i>France (metropolitan)</i>	<i>41.1</i>	<i>58.9</i>	<i>+17.8</i>

Note: Figures are percentages.

Source: PS.

TAB. 6 - *Participation in the Republicans' presidential primary, 2016.*

Region	Polling station	Selectors T1 <sup>I</sup>	Participation rate T1 <sup>I</sup> (%)	Selectors T2 <sup>II</sup>	Participation rate T2 <sup>II</sup> (%)	Variation (%)
Auvergne Rhône Alpes	1,241	514,452	44.3	518,712	44.7	+0.4
Bourgogne Franche Comté	470	155,452	36.3	162,582	38.0	+1.7
Bretagne	484	219,279	43.2	233,527	46.0	+2.8
Centre Val de Loire	430	158,452	39.3	165,405	41.0	+1.7
Corse	66	22,054	43.7	21,025	41.6	-2.0
Grand-Est	950	288,263	33.4	290,731	33.7	+0.3
Hauts de France	838	266,931	33.7	264,050	33.4	-0.4
Ile de France	1,703	987,029	63.7	1,004,877	64.8	+1.2
Normandie	536	197,045	38.2	203,934	39.5	+1.3
Nouvelle Aquitaine	842	392,521	47.3	416,227	50.2	+2.9
Occitanie	833	327,806	41.9	339,225	43.4	+1.5
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	884	397,358	46.9	397,072	46.9	0.0
Pays de la Loire	641	256,871	41.8	271,979	44.3	+2.5
<i>France (metropolitan)</i>	<i>9,918</i>	<i>4,183,513</i>	<i>44.8</i>	<i>4,289,346</i>	<i>45.9</i>	<i>+1.1</i>

Note: <sup>I</sup> First Round; <sup>II</sup> Second Round; the participation rate is calculated as the primary turnout as a proportion of the total votes cast for the UMP candidate in the first round of the previous presidential elections.

Source: LR.



TAB. 7 - *Competitiveness in the First Round of the Republicans' presidential primary, 2016.*

Region	Fillon	Juppé	Sarkozy	Kosciusko-Morizet	LeMaire	Poisson	Copé	Kenig index
Auvergne Rhône Alpes	46.5	26.1	20.1	2.8	2.6	1.6	0.3	0.437
Bourgogne Franche Comté	46.3	23.4	22.7	2.0	3.9	1.4	0.3	0.442
Bretagne	49.1	29.5	14.9	2.4	2.3	1.6	0.2	0.406
Centre Val de Loire	47.7	25.4	20.0	2.1	2.8	1.7	0.2	0.428
Corse	25.1	26.7	43.6	1.1	2.2	0.9	0.3	0.439
Grand-Est	45.7	24.7	22.9	2.3	3.0	1.2	0.3	0.442
Hauts de France	45.7	23.7	24.4	2.2	2.4	1.2	0.3	0.438
Ile de France	43.2	32.0	17.3	3.6	1.8	1.8	0.4	0.446
Normandie	45.8	25.7	20.8	1.9	4.5	1.1	0.2	0.444
Nouvelle Aquitaine	34.3	43.8	16.9	1.7	1.9	1.1	0.2	0.421
Occitanie	42.4	26.8	24.7	2.4	2.3	1.2	0.2	0.456
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	42.0	20.8	31.0	2.2	2.3	1.2	0.5	0.450
Pays de la Loire	59.6	22.1	12.5	1.9	1.8	1.8	0.2	0.339
<i>France (metropolitan)</i>	<i>44.6</i>	<i>28.2</i>	<i>20.5</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>1.5</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.444</i>

Note: Figures are percentages.

Source: LR.

TAB. 8 - *Competitiveness in the second round of the Republicans' presidential primary, 2016.*

Region	Fillon	Juppé	Closeness
Auvergne Rhône Alpes	70.4	29.6	+40.8
Bourgogne Franche Comté	73.8	26.2	+47.5
Bretagne	66.5	33.5	+33.1
Centre Val de Loire	71.1	28.9	+42.2
Corse	71.0	29.0	+41.9
Grand-Est	71.5	28.5	+43.1
Hauts de France	70.0	30.0	+40.1
Ile de France	59.9	40.1	+19.7
Normandie	69.9	30.1	+39.8
Nouvelle Aquitaine	51.3	48.7	+2.6
Occitanie	68.8	31.2	+37.6
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	75.3	24.7	+50.6
Pays de la Loire	76.2	23.8	+52.4
<i>France (metropolitan)</i>	<i>66.7</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>+33.5</i>

Note: Figures are percentages.

Source: LR

TAB. 9 - *Nominees' results in the first round of the presidential election, 2017.*

Region	Hamon's result (PS)			Fillon's result (LR)		
	Voters	%	Variation 2012	Voters	%	Variation 2012
Auvergne Rhône Alpes	256,532	6.1	-20.4	845,905	20.2	-7.2
Bourgogne Franche Comté	87,386	5.7	-21.5	304,391	19.7	-6.9
Bretagne	180,827	9	-22.7	380,815	19	-6.6
Centre Val de Loire	83,552	5.9	-20.8	300,325	21	-6.9
Corse	5,780	3.7	-20.5	39,453	25.6	-5.9
Grand-Est	151,296	5.1	-18.2	586,390	19.7	-8.9
Hauts de France	166,630	5.2	-22.7	521,373	16.1	-8
Ile de France	430,324	7.6	-24.1	1,249,586	22.2	-6.8
Normandie	113,705	6	-21.7	370,105	19.6	-7.5
Nouvelle Aquitaine	240,157	7.1	-24.9	602,830	17.8	-6.5
Occitanie	216,349	6.5	-22.7	566,036	17.1	-6.7
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	113,365	4.1	-17.9	615,524	22.4	-8.7
Pays de la Loire	143,491	6.5	-21.9	516,428	23.6	-5.1
<i>France (metropolitan)</i>	<i>2,189,394</i>	<i>6.3</i>	<i>-21.8</i>	<i>6,899,161</i>	<i>19.9</i>	<i>-7.2</i>

*Source:* Ministry of Interior.