The end of the French primary? Measuring primary election impact on electoral performance in the 2017 French presidential election

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THE END OF THE FRENCH PRIMARY?
MEASURING PRIMARY ELECTION IMPACT ON ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE
IN THE 2017 FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Marino DE LUCA

Introduction

Over the last few decades, political parties have provided a series of responses to the legitimacy crisis that has affected the party system as a whole. From this perspective, on the one hand simple and more flexible organisational forms were developed (Scarrow 2014). On the other hand, a ‘thrust’ towards the implementation of *intraparty democracy* was experienced by means of including citizens/voters in decision-making processes (Cross and Blais 2012; Bille 2001; Kittilson and Scarrow 2003; Pilet and Cross 2014; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino 2015). This has been considered by several scholars to be a new attempt made by party leaders to control party members (Katz 2001), or a strategy to provide party members with incentives to participate (Pennings and Hazan 2001). However, it was thanks to these initiatives that citizens had the chance to increasingly influence several political environments, first of all the selection of leadership candidates, which had been an exclusive privilege of the ‘secret gardens’ of politics (Gallagher and Marsh 1988).

The selection of candidates is, thus, one of the main functions of political parties (Ranney 1981; Sartori 1976), and it is one of the most important consequences of the process of democracy (Hazan 2008; Hazan and Rahat 2010). Moreover, in recent years, several political parties have changed the selection of their candidates by means of greater involvement by the bottom and through enhancing the role of party members (Bille 2001; Hazan 2008; Mair 1997; Scarrow, Webb and Farrell 2000). The modification of intra-party procedures, sometimes also by means of several types of primary elections, is of great relevance for contemporary politics and has increasingly been studied by scholars. Despite the fact that it has been scarcely studied, the issue of the effects of the primaries and their impact on electoral performance, is of great relevance. This paper attempts to explain the impact of primary elections on the electoral performance of the Republican Party (LR) and the Socialist Party (PS) during the 2017 French presidential elections. From this perspective, the work is divided into several sections. The next section will deal with the literature on the effects of the primaries; section three will analyse the evolution of primary elections in France and their adoption by the LR and the PS; section four will describe the methodological approach to the primaries; section five will show the results of the analysis based on participation and competition; and finally,

the last section will focus on several conclusions on the perspective of the study, based on new demands and research hypotheses.

The effects of the primary elections and their impact on electoral performance

Over the last decade, several parties have changed their procedures of selecting their candidates by enhancing the role of party members and non-members. The general trend, therefore, appears to aim at greater inclusiveness (Aylott, Ikstens and Lilliefeldt 2014; Bille 2001; Pennings and Hazan 2001; Scarrow, Webb and Farrell 2000), although the real level of power transferred to party members and non-members is questionable.

Political parties, therefore, are interested in preserving a membership dimension, both because party members are a source of legitimacy in an era of an increasing lack of interest towards politics, and because they are a useful instrument of immediate mobilisation in electoral campaigns. From this perspective, a way to enhance membership without any other incentive is to give party members greater power in the decision-making process, such as in the case of the selection of candidates. However, parties have tried to keep their leadership autonomy unaltered in the new procedures of selecting candidates (Scarrow, Webb and Farrell 2000). In several cases, the greater inclusion of party members has been strategically used by party leaders to bypass party managers and reach a greater level of autonomy in the leadership itself (Katz 2001; Katz and Mair 1995; Mair 1997).

However, the most important issue is the effect of the primaries within the political and party system where they are organised. Greater inclusiveness in the procedure of candidate selection, in fact, could have an impact both on the representation and on the distribution of the power in a political party (Indriðason and Kristinsson 2015). However, it could also influence the electoral performance of political parties (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Mikulska and Scarrow 2010; Scarrow, Webb and Farrell 2000). The variability of this phenomenon depends both on the type of procedure adopted and on the profile of the selected candidate (Langstone 2006). The literature on this matter identifies and supports a dichotomous approach to the effects of the primary elections.

The negative approach allocates a series of 'responsibilities' to the primary elections. Firstly, the primary elections (above all the closed primaries) could favour less competitive candidates. Such a concern is based on two assumptions. First of all, there could be a lack of an electoral strategy by the selectorate, considered as being unable to develop a careful evaluation of the strategic aspects in the choice of the most widely acceptable candidate (Adams and Merrill 2008; Moon 2004). Secondly, there might exist a greater radicalism of the foundation of the party. The latter is based on the fear that inclusion could mobilise more extremist electors that would, in turn, select more

extremist candidates (Gerber and Morton 1998), who would divert from more moderate stances¹. Moreover, the primary elections could have an impact on the electoral results in cases of severe intra-party disputes, which would attract public attention and damage the image of the party. Supporters might also be lost (Hazan and Rahat 2000; Hazan and Rahat 2010). This explains why parties are distrustful of the primaries, fearing the risk of a negative impact on the electoral result. The second perspective comes from scholars who maintain that the primaries could, instead, have a positive impact insofar as they might improve the public image of the party and of its candidates, thus building more direct contact with public opinion and facilitating the mobilisation process². Several researchers, such as Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006), have analysed the Latin American experience, which appears to have negated some of the abovementioned negative effects³. In fact, the primary elections tend to reduce the main intra-party controversies, thus enhancing the image of candidates and their ability to attract and collect funds. Therefore, the primary elections are considered (at least in this section of the literature) to be an instrument of electoral success rather than a hindrance.

Moreover, several scholars have demonstrated that a higher level of inclusiveness tends to enhance the participation of selectors with a profile similar to that of electors, and therefore to reduce problems in the selection of candidates and in future perspectives (Mikulska and Scarrow 2010). Finally, parties can attract new participants who could be functional to mobilisation in future electoral campaigns.

Based on these perspectives, electoral performance appears to be subject to several conditions. For example, if in an open primary election conflicts emerge, negative results could emerge; if the positive image of the party prevails and greater inclusiveness occurs, supported by a large number of participants, positive results are to be expected.

By considering such theoretical expectations, the scarcity of empirical proofs and the mistrust of several parties towards the employment of the primary elections, this paper analyses whether or not the selection of candidates had any impact on the results of the LR and the PS in the presidential elections. To this end, the paper is organised based on the analytical framework proposed by Hazan and Rahat (2010), through which it is easier to organise and classify several empirical research areas that deal with candidate selection. In particular, the two authors highlight the concept that the procedures to select candidates are different in terms of the level of the inclusion of selectors based

¹ Another assumption is that – more simply – primary elections would develop competition among weak candidates (see Banks and Kiewiet 1989).

² Primary elections function as a source of legitimacy and popularity and their adoption is more probable as a consequence of an electoral defeat or when an intra-party change is necessary (see Mikulska and Scarrow 2010; Scarrow 2001).

³ Also in other countries, such as Mexico for example, researchers have highlighted the concept that candidates selected through the primaries are ideologically more moderate than those selected within the party (see Bruhn 2013).

on at least four dimensions: participation, representation, competition and responsiveness. Participation and competition are the two most basic notions of democracy, starting with Schumpeter. Representation and responsiveness are the central points of a democratic system where the elected representatives will be responsive to their electorates. From this perspective, the best candidate selection system is the one that maximises all four dimensions: the high rate of political participation, the representation of political and social groups and their opinions, true competition and a viable responsive connection (Rahat 2009). However, according to the authors, such dimensions are linked among themselves by a sort of trade-off. Therefore, it is not possible to maximise the effects of the primaries on all four dimensions simultaneously. In the best scenario, a party can decide to adopt a mixed system absorbing the best of all the four dimensions, thus reducing their most potentially harmful effects. More realistically, according to Hazan and Rahat, greater inclusion inevitably causes negative externalities so that any attempt towards intra-party democratisation is frustrated.

The Icelandic study by Indriðason and Kristinsson, who attempt to empirically assess the four dimensions proposed by Hazan and Rahat, is built on these assumptions. Despite being little known and not being quoted very often in the literature, Iceland is one of the European countries where primary elections have been held for a long time. Indriðason and Kristinsson collected data on the primaries of the four main national parties for the parliamentary elections from 1971 to 2009. The conclusions they draw are positive overall: the primary elections in Iceland have not reduced female representation or the cohesion of parliamentary groups. They promote the renovation of the parliamentary political class and increase party membership. To sum up, they are anything but damaging for political parties. From this perspective, another very important and recent study carried out in Europe is the Spanish case presented by Ramiro (2016). The study highlights several positive impacts of the primary elections on the electoral results of the party which promoted them. Ramiro's research lies within a debate that has little empirical relevance in Europe and contributes to clarifying several aspects of the primary elections. In particular, the research is focused on the analysis of the primaries based on the *One Member, One Vote* (OMOV) system and the electoral performance of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) in the municipalities with more than 10 thousand inhabitants from 1999 to 2011. The results obtained by Ramiro are in line with the data in the literature (Mikulska and Scarrow 2010; Scarrow 2001); they consider the hypothesis that the primary elections generate electoral advantages as being reliable. Essentially, there are also negative effects caused by the excessive closeness of the primaries to the election day; however, the data confirm that in the majority of cases, the PSOE obtained better results in competitions where candidates were selected via organised primary elections.

The following paragraphs will attempt to answer two questions: what occurred in France after the 2017 primary elections and the impact of the primaries on electoral performance.

The French presidential primary elections

In France, the first (closed) primary elections were organised by the PS in 1995⁴ (see Table 1). At the time, approximately 80,000 socialist members selected Lionel Jospin, with 66% of the votes against the then former leader Henri Emmanuelli. Jospin's ability to better manage the presidential campaign allowed his running against Jacques Chirac in the subsequent presidential election, but he obtained only 47% in the runoff (Elgie 1996). In the 2002 presidential elections, the PS did not hold a primary election due to Jospin, the outgoing prime minister, being the only candidate able to run against the incumbent president Chirac. However, the PS unexpectedly failed to pass the second round; they were overtaken by the leader of the National Front (FN), Jean-Marie Le Pen, and Chirac, who was then re-elected as president (Lewis-Beck 2004). Furthermore, in the same elections, two other parties used the primaries to choose their presidential candidates. On the one hand, the French Communist Party (PCF), through the participation of 63,941 voters, selected Robert Hue, the former communist candidate in 1995, with 77.4% of the votes, obtaining however just 3.4% in the presidential elections. On the other hand, the Greens organised a closed primary where approximately 6,000 members selected Alain Lipietz. However, after several months, Lipietz was deselected in an internal referendum and was replaced by Noël Mamère, runner-up in the closed primary, who obtained 5.5% of the votes in the first round of the 2002 presidential election. The 2007 presidential election represented a turn-around in the evolution of the French primaries (Dolez and Laurent 2007). Indeed, the PS used a closed primary to select Ségolène Royal with 60.6% of the votes against Dominique Strauss-Kahn (20.8%) and Laurent Fabius (18.6%). Royal, before being appointed by militants, was chosen by the media and public opinion as a potential presidential candidate, using simultaneously an image of political novelty, a political distance from the PS leadership, and her popularity in the polls (Lefebvre 2011). In the same year, the other three parties used closed primaries to select their presidential candidates: the Greens, with approximately 5,000 voters, chose Dominique Voynet (45.7%), who gained only 1.6% of the votes in the presidential elections; the PCF organised an uncontested primary to choose Marie-George Buffet, who obtained 1.9% of the votes in the next presidential elections; and the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) appointed Nicolas Sarkozy with the votes of approximately 230,000 voters.

⁴ In the 1980s, one of the first to introduce the concept of the primaries in France was Charles Pasqua, who proposed so-called "*primaires à la française*" within the then centre-right wing (cf. Charles Pasqua and Pierre Monzani, *Petit Manuel de survie pour la droite. Les primaires à la française*, Paris, Fayard, 2015). For a detailed analysis, see *Actualité des primaires. Revue du Droit Public*, Mai-Juin 2017, N° 3: 503-828.

Thus, in the 2007 presidential elections, Sarkozy became president with 53.1% of the votes against Ségolène Royal with 46.9% (Ivaldi 2007; Grunberg and Haegel 2007).

After the 2007 experience, the PS, with its National Secretary for Renewal Arnaud Montebourg, moved towards a more inclusive candidate selection. There were three main reasons for this change: the crisis of socialist leadership; the low legitimacy given by the selections by members only; and the need to increase the popularity of the candidates. Thanks also to the emphasis offered by the media, the PS and the Radical Party of the Left (PRG) organised the first open primary to select their candidates for the 2012 presidential elections (Audemard and Gouard 2014; Bergounioux 2011; De Luca 2014; De Luca and Venturino 2015). With a vote of approximately 3 million participants, Hollande was nominated as the socialist candidate, later becoming the French president. However, in the same presidential election, two other parties selected their candidates: the PCF organised an articulate process to choose Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Left Party (PG) as the candidate for the presidential elections, obtaining 11.1% of the vote in the 2012 presidential elections; and the Greens, with 25,000 members, chose Eva Joly, who gained only 2.3% of the votes in the presidential elections.

TABLE 1 - HERE

In the 2017 presidential elections, the open primaries became a key tool both for the centre-left and centre-right parties⁵. On that occasion, the Europe Ecology – The Greens (EELV) held a primary to select Yannick Jadot who, however, withdrew his candidacy for supporting the socialist candidate, Benoît Hamon, in the presidential elections. Another primary election was organised by the Association Democratech, the so-called LaPrimaire.org, which chose Charlotte Marchandise-Franquet. She, however, did not participate in the following presidential elections. Finally, the two primaries of the PS and the LR are analysed below.

The 2017 Socialist primary

The primaries became a key factor of the PS after the 2012 Toulouse Congress, where the PS included in the Statute several articles for an inclusive process in the candidate selection. Amongst these, the main requirements for participation were: being enrolled in the French electoral lists or being enrolled in the promoter parties; signing the statement of the principles; and paying one Euro to vote in the primaries. From this perspective and following the 2011 primary model won by

⁵ After the 2012 presidential elections, the open primaries were used also in the 2014 municipalities elections, by the two main French parties: the PS held primaries in five cities: Aix-en-Provence, Béziers, Boulogne-Billancourt, Le Havre and Marseille; the UMP organised primaries in Paris and Lyon.

Hollande, the PS and its allies organised on 22 and 29 January a two-round primary to select their candidate for the 2017 presidential elections. The decision by the PS to hold a primary was made in June 2016 and, at the time, was seen as a political vehicle to provide popular support to Hollande's future re-election bid. However, after his complicated incumbency (Gaffney 2015), Hollande decided not to run for a second term and the primaries were used as a solution to contain the socialist crisis. Besides the PS, the left coalition, the so-called *Belle Alliance populaire* (BAP), was composed of three others parties: the Ecologist Party (PE); the Democratic Front (FD); and the Radical Party of the Left (PRG). These parties proposed several candidates and seven of these were accepted to run for the open primary: Benoît Hamon, Arnaud Montebourg, the former prime minister Manuel Valls, and Vincent Peillon for the PS; François de Rugy for the PE; Jean-Luc Bennahmias for the FD; and Sylvia Pinel for the PRG.

As regards participation, in terms of the first indicator used to understand the importance of the primary elections, in the first round there were 1,655,919 voters, and in the second round this grew to 2,045,343 voters. Thus, this new primary was characterised by a decrease of participation compared to the 2011 experience. Indeed, the first round of the 2011 primary elections was characterised by the participation of 2,661,231 voters, whilst the second round was 2,860,157⁶. Regarding the results of the first round, Hamon won with 36% of the votes, followed by Valls (31.5%); Montebourg (17.5%); Peillon (6.8%); de Rugy (3.8%); Pinel (2%); and Bennahmias (1%). In the second round, Montebourg declared immediately to vote for Hamon, whilst Pinel and Bennahmias endorsed Valls. The other candidates declared different solutions: Peillon encouraged the mobilisation of voters without endorsing nobody candidates; and de Rugy did not endorse Hamon but also did not directly support Valls. Thus, in the second round, Hamon was nominated as the Socialist nominee for the presidential election, with 58.7% of the votes against Valls who gained 41.3% of the votes.

In general, Hamon gained the highest percentages in the most urbanised zones such as Ile de France, with areas like Seine-Saint-Denis and Paris, Hauts-de-France with Lille, Bretagne with Rennes, or Pays de la Loire with Nantes. The main competitor, Valls, was able to reduce the gap only in small areas, which are traditionally close to the right. In general, the whole of the north east revealed low participation rates, with Hamon seeming to have profited by voting in territories historically close to the left wing, whereas Valls failed to influence moderate voters who, subsequently, favoured Macron. In 2011, the gap between Hollande and Aubry was smaller than

⁶ Another problem compared with the 2011 primary was the number of polling stations. Indeed, only 7,208 polling stations were open during the primary, whilst in the 2011 primary there were 9,425.

that between Hamon and Valls, causing a conflict inside the party between the government's supporters and its opponents (Lefebvre 2015).

The 2017 Republican primary

The French right wing introduced primaries in the 2014 municipal elections in order to contrast the internal crisis after the Sarkozy era. Indeed, the LR primary was strongly advocated by Juppé and Fillon against Sarkozy's personal influence and popularity amongst party members based on the idea that a wider electorate would be more beneficial. Using a model similar to PS one, the centre-right parties organised an open primary for the 2017 presidential elections, where any citizen could sign a chart of values and pay two Euros to participate in a competitive and regulated process (Haegel 2015). Thus, in November 2016, the main centre-right parties – the LR, the Christian Democratic (PCD, centre), and the National Centre of Independents and Peasants (CNIP), nominated their candidates in a two-round primary. Thus, the first open primary of the centre-right parties had eight candidates: seven candidates from the LR, François Fillon, Alain Juppé, Nicolas Sarkozy, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Bruno Le Maire, and Jean-François Copé; and among the other parties, only Jean-Frédéric Poisson PCD.

The primary was organised at around 10,219 polling stations where 4,298,097 voters participated in the first round and 4,404,812 in the second. This high participation allowed François Fillon to win in the first round, with 44.1% of the votes against Alain Juppé with 28.6%, followed by Nicolas Sarkozy (20.7%), Kosciusko-Morizet (2.6%), Le Maire (2.4%), Poisson (1.4%), and Copé (0.3%). In the runoff round, Fillon won with 66.5% against Juppé at 33.5%.

The unexpected participation of over four million voters allowed them to select, with a wide margin, Fillon against Juppé. Indeed, in the first round, the two departments won by Sarkozy in Metropolitan France passed to Fillon in the second, and of the six departments of Nouvelle Aquitaine who in the first round voted for Juppé, four even switched to Fillon (Fourquet 2017). His nomination was due to the ability to synthesise the different positions of the party and his public image, at least until the presidential campaign, as an honest politician.

Hypothesis

In this paper we will try to empirically assess the political consequences of the primary elections in France based on the analytical approach proposed by Hazan and Rahat and by having recourse to the research methods employed by Ramiro, Indriðason and Kristinsson. The aim is to try to understand whether or not the primaries have an impact on electoral performance. However, it is worth underlining several elements of differentiation among the research methods. First of all,

while the three research studies are longitudinal and were carried out over a well-defined stretch of time, the case under investigation is exclusively focused on a single round of primaries: the one for the selection of the LR and PS candidates in the French presidential elections in 2017. Secondly, while Hazan and Rahat, as well as Indriðason and Kristinsson focus their analysis on all four dimensions, this paper only concentrates on the impact of participation and competition (the latter being a core element in Ramiro's research). Finally, while Hazan and Rahat, aggregate their data at a national level, Indriðason and Kristinsson at a district level and Ramiro at a municipality level, this paper is rather based on data collected at the department level. Such a choice is due to two factors: first of all, the organisers of the primaries employed departments as reference units to present electoral results, and secondly because this allowed us to analyse a large number of cases (N=96 for Metropolitan France), thus avoiding small-N problems.

The model employed in this paper introduces the result of the Socialist candidate Hamon and that of the candidate for the 2017 presidential elections, Fillon, as dependent variables, while the independent variables are the two key features of primary elections: levels of participation and competition. These two aspects are the main components of our analysis. In fact, the hypothesis is that the performance of parties organising the primaries are, somehow, positively linked to high levels of participation and low levels of competition. Why should such a combination be effective in electoral terms?

First of all, a higher level of participation in the primary elections is a practical validation of a party through its candidates, who are potentially able to intercept voters. Secondly, the emerging image of the party is that of an organisation committed to a dynamic of mobilisation within the framework of a post-modern highly centralised and substantially professionalised electoral campaign (Norris 2000). On the other hand, high levels of competition create the conditions for a potential electoral defeat of the promoters of the primary elections. Such a perspective makes reference to several theoretical models based on an individual dimension (Anderson et al. 2005), which are described according to several consequential steps. Firstly, a high level of intra-party competition requires a winner with a narrow margin of votes compared to the other candidates and, as a consequence, there is a large number of selectors that would experience the elimination of their favourite candidate. At this stage, the selectors of the defeated candidates can: 1. go beyond disappointment and collaborate for the victory of the candidate selected by their party, by loyally supporting him/her to the general elections; 2. abstain from voting, because they are unwilling to support a candidate other than the one voted for in the primaries; or 3. vote against their own party, above all if competing parties deploy candidates who for some reason are strongly desired. Several studies highlight the relationship between primary election divisiveness and general election outcomes that causes

candidates to do poorly in the general elections (Southwell 1986; Lengle, Owen and Sonner 1995). However, other studies (Lazarus 2005) show that primary divisiveness does not cause negative consequences in terms of the general election results. Rather, non-incumbent behaviour can cause the primaries to be divisive. Indeed, these candidates run thinking to win, when the incumbent is vulnerable. This attitude produces divisive primaries in which nominees are penalised in the general elections. Thus, divisiveness without a causal relationship is associated with the general election as an unintended consequence of candidates' behaviour directed to take advantage of a situation to win the general election. General elections are, thus, bound to these types of factors and the choice of a second-best candidate will depend on the voters' intense identification with the party, on the personal features of candidates, the degree of voters' involvement in the electoral campaign and so on. What specifically matters in this analysis is the relationship between high levels of competition and the possibility that this might generate higher abstention, thus causing a lower performance of the candidate promoted in the primary elections.

To this end, the choice to employ these two dimensions as main independent variables, assumes a further assessment. In the case of participation, a relevant issue is the lack of a list of people entitled to participate in the vote, which forms a universal point of reference. The most widely used solution is to have recourse to a valuation quantified as the ratio between the number of selectors who voted in the primaries and the number of electors who voted for the nominee in the general elections. However, this solution could somehow provide circular reasoning that could be overcome by means of the involvement of people entitled to vote in the previous general elections⁷.

As for competition, the literature proposes a series of methods and related variants. In this paper, we make reference to Kenig's index (2008), assuming theoretical values between a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1; it is calculated as the ratio between the effective number of candidates and their actual number. Indeed, the value is calculated by dividing Laakso-Taagepera's index (1979) for the number of real candidates. Despite not being flawless, starting from the excessive importance attributed to candidates who are likely to be insignificant, Kenig's approach remains the most reliable proposal vis-à-vis the employment of other indexes mainly focusing on the performance of the front runner or on the closeness, i.e. the difference of votes between the two at the top of the list. Moreover, by considering the presence of potential spurious effects, the variable related to the results of the 2012 presidential elections was included, where votes were obtained respectively by the PS candidate Hollande and the LR candidate Sarkozy. In addition, the proposed model also

⁷ For some years now, an attempt to standardize empirical studies on primaries has been made; this new approach should take into account the number of voters in the previous election in the ideological area of the promoters of the primaries. Indeed, to achieve this aim, the participation rate is calculated as the number of selectors as a proportion of the number of votes cast for the promoters' candidate at the previous presidential election.

features the performance of the runner-ups in the primaries of the two parties (Valls for the PS and Juppé for the LR). This allows us, as mentioned above, to understand the role of the main non-frontrunner candidates in order to examine whether or not their role had a causal relationship with the general election. We can thus evaluate the impact of the vote of the main competitors and its dispersal in the presidential elections. Finally, the model presents, following an economic voting approach (Powell and Whitten 1993), several socioeconomic variables that potentially influence electoral behaviour. Indeed, several studies, both theoretical and empirical, have highlighted the importance of education, income and occupation in terms of the propensity to participate in politics (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie, Kim 1978). For this reason, this paper tests the correlation between the (in)dependent variables on the one hand, and the unemployment rate and the wage rate on the other. All of these measures are based on differences from the national average. They allow us to measure the differences between individual departments compared to the national average and to obtain a percentage value that shows the higher or lower capacity of each department compared to the variables analysed.

For this purpose, before testing the model, Tables 2 and 3 identify the correlations that actually exist among the variables. As for the PS (Table 2), the vote for Hamon in the 2017 presidential elections is strongly related to the primary turnout and the vote for Holland in 2012, with the value of statistical significance being very high. As expected, the competition also has negative correlations. Instead, in the vote for the runner-up, a statistically significant negative value prevails. Among the economic variables, the matrices present a negative correlation for the unemployment rate and a positive value for the wage rate, although with a low value of statistical significance.

Thus, the 2017 presidential PS vote seems to be positively correlated to the primary participation and the previous presidential vote, with greater propensity in higher income territories. Instead, it would seem to impute a negative correlation with the competition, the vote for Valls, and areas with the highest unemployment rate.

TABLE 2 - HERE

Regarding the LR (Table 3), the vote for Fillon in the first round of the 2017 presidential elections is also strongly related to the vote for Sarkozy in 2012, but slightly less to the primary turnout, although both have significant values. In this case, the competition has a high negative correlation to the vote of the runner-up. As regards the economic variables, the vote to Fillon is correlated with all three, with a negative value associated with the unemployment rate and a positive value to the

wage rate. Thus, Fillon's performance seems to be positively correlated with primary participation and Sarkozy's vote in 2012, with a positive correlation with the wage rate, while his vote has a negative value for the competition, the vote for Juppé and the unemployment rate.

The matrices show how correlations between variables are appropriate to a regression model.

TABLE 3 - HERE

Finally, several elements of the methods should be further specified: first of all, the primaries developed based on a double round system. This has focused attention exclusively on the analysis of the first round and considers the ballot as a new election, which is subject to different criteria, far from the variables taken into account with minor consequences on the analysis. Moreover, the choice of the territorial level of reference (departments, N=96) is linked to the need to functionally overlap the unit of analysis selected by means of the collection and the communication of the results by the promoters of the election.

Results

The impact of turnout and competition on the presidential elections

For the first time, none of the candidates of the two main parties took part in the second round of the presidential elections, where Macron of En Marche! became, with 66.1% of the votes, the youngest president in French history against Marine Le Pen of the FN. Indeed, on the PS side, the main problem of the primaries was not the low turnout in comparison with the previous ones, but rather the internal conflict after the vote. Of all the candidates defeated by Hamon, only Montebourg strongly supported him, whilst the others expressed a timid endorsement. Instead, de Rugy announced his support for Macron, and Valls exclaimed his appreciation for Macron without a public engagement. Thus, Hamon only reached 6.7%, becoming fifth in the first round. On the LR side, after winning the primary, Fillon led the polls until Penelopegate, a political-financial scandal involving his wife, when Macron became the frontrunner for the first round. Thus, Fillon reached third position with 20%, remaining out of the runoff.

From this perspective, Table 4 displays a regression analysis of the vote for Hamon and Fillon in the presidential elections against the primary turnout, competition, and the five abovementioned control variables. The results reported in the table show that in both cases a control variable, namely the vote gained by Hollande and Sarkozy in the previous presidential elections, reached the higher score. As regards the independent variables, primary turnout in both cases is the second best key

predictor, which is higher in the PS case than in that of the LR. Regarding competition, as expected, a negative correlation exists in both models. Whilst the competition is not statistically significant in the PS case, it substantially contributes to the best fit of the model for the LR. Thus, primary turnout would seem to have improved the electoral performance of both parties, whilst primary competition played a damaging role in the LR case but not in that of the PS. Regarding the variables of control, the values obtained by the main challenger in both primary show several peculiarities. In fact, although the LR's vote for Juppé is not significant, the vote for the PS gained from Valls is significant with a negative value with respect to the dependent variable. The other socio-economic variables, however, are not significant in the PS case, although for the case of the right they are present but with a negative value of small significance.

TABLE 4 - HERE

Discussion

The results of the regression analysis can be summarised in several points. Firstly, the impact of the primaries on the 2017 presidential elections appears to be correlated, as in the previous studies (De Luca and Venturino 2017), with the citizens' participation which, in both cases, is confirmed as a good starting point for obtaining a strong performance in the general elections. Secondly, competition remains the more complicated variable to analyse, because it causes the conditions required for a possible decrease in support in the general election. Indeed, it is relevant only in the LR case; in the PS case, the main problem concerns the involvement of the runner-up voters defeated by the primary who seem to be relevant in the fit of the model.

Thus, the key element is the added value of the citizens' participation, which could improve the results of the candidates selected by the primary, and contain the negative effect of the competition. However, why should we then discuss the failure of the primary elections? The fact that the two main parties did not reach the second round could be one reason for not considering this tool in the selection of candidates.

In fact, the adoption of the primaries into the French party system reveals several problems. Firstly, several scholars describe the different institutional and political contexts in which the primaries take place (Bonetti 2015; Mény 2015). Indeed, while in North America, the home of primary, the rules of competition are institutionalised by each state, in France they are set by the party promoters without uniformity amongst themselves (Levade 2015). Moreover, the French two-round electoral system is evaluated as a type of primary (Mény 2017). Finally, the timing of the primary elections,

scheduled for a few months before the presidential elections, is not capable of responding to unexpected events during the electoral campaign.

In particular, defeat in the first round of the 2017 presidential elections by candidates selected through the primary was due to several factors. Regarding the PS, the first factor concerns the failure of the presidency of François Hollande. Indeed, the primaries were organised to contain the socialist collapse. For this reason, the PS passed from a role of opposition, such as in the 2011 primaries, to a government role with few chances of obtaining a good result in the presidential elections. The second factor regards the nomination of an unexpected candidate who caused the increase of internal conflict between the pro and cons of Hollande's government and the dispersion of the defeated candidates. As for the LR, after Sarkozy's defeat and the accusations of too much moderation by Juppé, Fillon's nomination was delegitimated by Penelopegate. In spite of that, he refused to withdraw from the competition, with the assertion that the rules did not provide any means of deselection. In this context, several party members supported other candidates, such as Macron and Le Pen.

Furthermore, on the one side, the outsider candidate Macron was able to obtain moderate support both in Hamon's and Fillon's disappointed electorates. On the other hand, the presence of Melenchon and Le Pen further decreased their extreme electorates, who were able to choose issues and proposals closer to their attitudes.

To conclude, the primaries are not a miraculous instrument capable of solving any problems of the contemporary parties. Indeed, the primaries have shown, on the one hand, the importance of the participation factor, which is one of the predictors of the next general election. On the other hand, they display a weakness related to the inability to heal internal fractures and events that undermine the public image of the parties.

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Table 1 – The French primary for the presidential elections

Year	Organizing parties	Open / closed	Timing ^a	Participation		Number of candidates	Winner	Result in the Presidential elections
				T1 ^I	T2 ^{II}			
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	9	25,437	22,896	4	Eva Joly	Defeat (T1)
2012	PS, PRG	Open	6	2,661,231	2,860,157	6	François Hollande	Elected
2017	EELV	Open	4	12,582	13,940	4	Yannick Jadot	Withdrawn
2017	LR, PCD, CNIP	Open	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	3	1,655,919	2,046,628	7	Benoît Hamon	Defeat (T1)

Note: ^a Months before the general elections; ^I First Round; ^{II} Second Round.

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

Acronyms: PS= Socialist Party; PCF= French Communist Party; UMP= Union for a Popular Movement; EELV= Europe Ecology – The Greens; PRG= Radical Party of the Left; LR= The Republicans; PCD= Christian Democratic; CNIP= National Centre of Independents and Peasants; PE= Ecologist Party; FD= Democratic Front .

Table 2 - Correlation matrix between variables (Socialist Party)

	Hamon 2017	Primary Participation Rate	Primary Competition	Vote to Primary Runner-up (Valls)	Hollande 2012	Unemployment Rate ^a	Wage Rate ^a
Hamon 2017	1	,609(.000)**	-,253(.013)*	-,234(.022)*	,756(.000)**	-,299(.003)**	,240(.019)*
Primary Participation Rate		1	-,107(.299)	-,221(.031)*	,220(.031)*	-,180(.079)	,566(.000)**
Primary Competition			1	-,266(.009)**	-,258(.011)*	-,030(.772)	,224(.029)*
Vote to Primary Runner-up (Valls)				1	-,017(.869)	,216(.034)*	-,257(.011)*
Hollande 2012					1	-,104(.313)	-,077(.455)
Unemployment Rate ^a						1	-,379(.000)**
Wage Rate ^a							1

Note: ^a Difference from the National average

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: French Socialist Party, The Republicans, Ministry of Interior, and Insee.

Table 3 - Correlation matrix between variables (The Republicans)

	Fillon 2017	Primary Participation Rate	Primary Competition	Vote to Primary Runner-up (Juppé)	Sarkozy 2012	Unemployment Rate ^a	Wage Rate ^a
Fillon 2017	1	,399(.000)**	-,484(.000)**	-,360(.000)**	,887(.000)**	-,430(.000)**	,508(.000)**
Primary Participation Rate		1	-,173(.092)	-,314(.002)**	,346(.001)**	-,198(.054)	,796(.000)**
Primary Competition			1	,599(.000)**	-,241(.018)*	,217(.034)*	-,088(.392)
Vote to Primary Runner-up (Juppé)				1	-,219(.032)*	,348(.001)**	-,310(.002)**
Sarkozy 2012					1	-,305(.003)**	,573(.000)**
Unemployment Rate ^a						1	-,379(.000)**
Wage Rate ^a							1

Note: ^a Difference from the National average

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: French Socialist Party, The Republicans, Ministry of Interior, and Insee.

Table 4 - Primary turnout and other predictors of voting in France

	Socialist Party ^a				The Republicans ^b			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	2,789	1,522		,070	5,643	2,649		,036
Primary Participation Rate	,136	,019	,406	,000	,080	,022	,222	,000
Primary Competition	-3,553	2,038	-,083	,085	-24,005	4,450	-,245	,000
Vote to Primary Runner-up ^c	-,060	,014	-,191	,000	,023	,035	,030	,515
Vote in the 2012 Presidential ^d	,198	,015	,611	,000	,782	,042	,834	,000
Unemployment Rate ^c	-,114	,038	-,143	,003	-,339	,077	-,175	,000
Wage Rate ^c	-,001	,006	-,011	,856	-,051	,016	-,226	,003
Adjusted R Square		,824				,889		
SE		,58206				1,13188		
F		75,340				128,082		

Note: ^a Dependent Variables: Votes for Hamon in the First Round of the 2017 Presidential elections; ^b Dependent Variables: Votes for Fillon in the 2017 Presidential Elections; ^c Valls in the Socialist primary and Juppé in the Republicans primary; ^d Vote for Hollande and Sarkozy in the First Round of the 2012 Presidential elections; ^e Difference from the National average.

Source: French Socialist Party, The Republicans, Ministry of Interior, and Insee.