The dynamics of populist mobilization in the 2017 French presidential election

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Populism and the 2017 French elections

• Widespread anti-establishment feelings and voter aspiration to political renewal
• The French populist ‘market’ has expanded, with L/R populist parties competing against the mainstream and against each other
• An ‘atypical’ presidential runoff featuring a strong populist candidate

• Our aim today:
  Examine the conditions underlying support for populist parties in the 2017 elections, notably the role of populist attitudes
Defining populism

• Populism as a ‘thin’ ideology attached to thicker sets of ideas (Mudde 2004), which has at its core:
  • Antagonism between the ‘virtuous’ people and the ‘corrupt’ elite
  • Politics should be an expression of the people’s will
  • Claim to represent the people against the elite

• Left (econ. inclusive) and right-wing (cult. exclusive) variants of populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013), found both in parties and voters (Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel 2017)

• Relationship between populism and Euroscepticism (Pirro and Van Kessel 2017)
### Populist actors in the 2017 elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Main ideological features</th>
<th>% 2017 vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marine Le Pen</td>
<td>Front National (FN)</td>
<td>Radical Right Eurosceptic</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Luc Mélenchon</td>
<td>La France Insoumise (LFI)</td>
<td>Radical Left Eurosceptic trajectory</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolas Dupont-Aignan</td>
<td>Debout la France (DLF)</td>
<td>Right-wing Sovereignism Eurosceptic</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-populist actors in the 2017 elections

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<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<th>% 2017 vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel Macron</td>
<td>En Marche! (EM!)</td>
<td>Centrist, liberal Pro-EU</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>François Fillon</td>
<td>Les Républicains (LR)</td>
<td>Conservative Free Market Right Eurocritic (cult.)</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benoît Hamon</td>
<td>Parti Socialiste (PS)</td>
<td>Green-Socialist Eurocritic (eco.)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exploring the 2017 vote

- Voter survey data (N=19,454), analytical samples (N=10,699/9,053)
- A model of French presidential voting (Lewis-Beck et al. 2012)
- DV: vote in the first (R1, multinominal) and second (R2, binominal) round (April / May 2017)
- IVs:
  - Standard socio-demographics (gender, age, education, occupation, religion, religiosity, patrimony)
  - ‘Root’ political affiliation (left right ideology)
  - Economic and cultural attitudes (e.g. state intervention, welfare chauvinism)
  - Attitudes towards the EU and economic globalization
  - Populist attitudes (Akkerman et al. 2014)
Populist attitudes and R1 vote

Populism and vote in the first round of the 2017 presidential election

Vote in 2017 presidential election

Hamon 3.8
Macron 3.9
Fillon 4.0
Mélenchon 4.1
Le Pen 4.2
Dupont-Aignan 4.3
Others 4.4
Ideological correlates of populism

Left-right 0.07
State Intervention -0.12
Economic Redistribution 0.31
Welfare Chauvinism 0.16
European Integration -0.22
Same Sex Marriage -0.05
Globalization Opportunity -0.20
Authoritarianism 0.27
Le Pen voter contrasts (R1, multinomial)

- Less educated, more working class
- More welfare chauvinist, anti-EU, authoritarian and anti-globalization
- More populist than mainstream, same as Mélenchon and Dupont-Aignan

- Less right-wing than Fillon (*ninistes*)
- More pro economic redistribution than Fillon
- Less socially conservative than Fillon (same sex marriage)
Mélenchon voter contrasts (R1, multinomial)

- More male, younger voters
- More pro economic redistribution
- More Eurosceptic and anti-globalization than mainstream
- More populist than mainstream and Dupont-Aignan

- Less left-wing than Hamon
- More welfare chauvinist than Hamon
Populist attitudes and R2 vote

Populism and vote in the second round of the 2017 presidential election

![Graph showing populism and vote in the second round of the 2017 presidential election]
Le Pen voter contrasts (R2, binomial)

- Older, less educated, more working class and fewer eco. assets
- All attitudinal predictors significant and in the expected direction...
- With the exception of economic redistribution (n.s.)
## Did populism matter?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>AIC first round (N=10,699)</th>
<th>AIC second round (N=9,053)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full model</td>
<td>25 573</td>
<td>5 675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model w/o Left-Right</td>
<td>28 461***</td>
<td>6 178***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model w/o EU sentiment</td>
<td>26 076***</td>
<td>6 192***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model w/o Populism</td>
<td>25 816***</td>
<td>5 788***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likelihood Ratio Tests
Conclusions

• Le Pen and Mélenchon voters are more populist than supporters of mainstream candidates

• Le Pen voters show the highest degree of populism

• Populism ‘matters’ in both R1 and R2, less so however than:
  • traditional left/right affiliation (R1) and
  • EU sentiment (R2)

• Mélenchon: radical left, econ. Inclusive populism yet less cosmopolitan

• Le Pen: radical right, cult. Exclusive populism yet more social protectionist