THE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF 2002
The French Presidential and Legislative Elections of 2002

Edited by

JOHN GAFFNEY
Aston University, UK

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK
Contents

List of Figures vii
List of Tables viii

1 The 2002 Elections in Institutional and Comparative Perspective
   John Gaffney 1

2 Presidential Competition: Prime Minister against President in
   ‘Cohabitation’
   David S. Bell 16

3 The Presidential and Legislative Election Campaigns of 2002:
   A Strange Play in Four Acts
   Alistair Cole 34

4 The Presidential and Legislative Elections of 2002: An Analysis
   of the Results
   Colette Ysmal 57

5 The Media and the Elections
   Raymond Kuhn 83

6 The Television Campaigns for the French Elections of 2002
   Irène Hill 117

7 Jacques Chirac’s Campaign: President in Spite of Himself?
   Steven Griggs 132

8 Lionel Jospin’s Campaign and the Socialist Left: The ‘Earthquake’
   and its Aftershocks
   Ben Clift 149

9 Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Front National: Crisis and Recovery
   Catherine Fieschi 169
| 10 | The Greens 2002: Coming Down to Earth | Florence Faucher | 185 |
| 12 | In Search of Lost Women: Alternative Political Maps in the Presidential Election of 2002 | Hilary Footitt | 222 |
| 13 | The Effects of Gender Parity in Elections: The French Case | Karen Bird | 238 |
| 14 | 'Europe' in the 2002 French Elections | Helen Drake | 260 |
| 15 | Election Dynamics, Party System Change and Regime Evolution in the 2002 Elections | Joseph Szarka | 276 |
| 16 | A Crisis of Democracy? | Nick Hewlett | 293 |
| 17 | Chronology of Events, January–June 2002 | Nathalie Collomb-Robert | 312 |

Index 337
List of Figures

12.1 Decision-making time axis 227
12.2 TV participation 1–22 March 227
12.3 Public perception of press treatment: per cent saying candidate well-treated 228
13.1 Female mayors in French municipalities, 1995 to 2001 246
List of Tables

3.1 The French presidential election of 21 April and 5 May 2002  41
3.2 Abstentions in French presidential elections (first round only)  50
4.1 Results of the first round of the presidential elections  61
4.2 The structure of the electorate (in %)  63
4.3 Presidential election, second-round results  71
4.4 Transfer of votes between rounds one and two  71
4.5 The results of the first round of the legislative elections  74
4.6 Transfer of votes between the first round of the presidential elections and the first round of the legislative elections (in %)  75
4.7 Changes in vote in first round of legislative elections, 1997 and 2002  76
6.1 Cumulative audiences for the presidential election  118
6.2 Presidential election of 2002  118
6.3 Exposure in the pre-campaign period, 1995–2002  120
6.4 Television broadcasting time (in minutes) given to candidate  122
6.5 General elections of 2002  129
10.1 Legislative elections  191
12.1 Internet users in France  234
13.1 Women within French municipal government following 2001 elections  246
13.2 Women candidates in French legislative elections 2002  250
13.3 Financial penalties imposed by parity law in French legislative elections 2002  254
15.1 French presidential elections of 1995 and 2002: first round results for repeat candidates  284
15.2 Votes for the mainstream presidential candidates in 2002  284
15.3 Total votes cast as percentage of registered voters  284
16.1 Abstentions in parliamentary and presidential elections since 1945 (% of registered voters)  303
16.2 The far left vote since 1981 (% of all votes, first round)  304
16.3 The image of politicians amongst voters in France, 1978–2002  307
If there has been one constant factor, one certainty, in French politics since the beginning of the Fifth Republic in 1958, it is that the unpredictable will happen, almost without fail.

From de Gaulle’s political triumph in May–June 1958, to the military coup against him in 1961 and its outcome; from his unexpected approach to Algeria, to his own surprise at having to go to a run-off with François Mitterrand in the 1965 presidential elections; from the explosion of 1968 to the – temporary – defeat of Gaullism in 1974 at the hands of a Gaullist conspirator, Jacques Chirac; from 1970s neo-Gaullism to the triumph of the left in 1981; from the PS’ defeat in 1986 to Mitterrand’s triumphant re-election to the presidency two years later; from Chirac’s near-eclipse in 1988 to his victory in 1995; from the left’s successful government, 1997–2002 to its humiliating defeat/s of 2002 – if there is one thing that is certain in French politics, it is that nothing is.

On 21 April 2002 in France, the world’s most passionate democracy, one of its oldest ones too, and one of the world’s richest and largest economies, and politically, socially, and culturally, one of if not the most sophisticated civilisations on the planet; on 21 April the rest of the world’s startled attention turned suddenly and dramatically to France, the country that would have itself an exemplary republic, as it elected to the ‘run off’ round for the presidency – the heroic Charles de Gaulle’s old job – Jean-Marie Le Pen, a political leader of the hard right, a man believed by many to be a fascist, a racist, and a political thug. We say suddenly and dramatically because until 21 April no one outside France was really paying any attention at all. In fact, this was, if it is possible, equally true of the attention being paid inside France. It is difficult in the post-2002 period to recapitulate quite how dull the run up to the 2002 election was, how foregone was the assumed 21 April conclusion, how uninterested the French were in its outcome: Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin through to the equally dull second round, which of them would win was itself
The French Presidential and Legislative Elections of 2002

uncertain, although it did not really seem to matter which of the two would eventually win on 5 May. Of course, the dullness, the foregone conclusions, the perceived interchangeability of the main candidates, in terms of policy if not in terms of personality, are themselves of great significance, both in terms of what they tell us about the nature of contemporary French politics, but also, of course, formatively: in terms of their influence upon the outcome of the first round, the latter's own dramatic influence upon the second round, the ensuing legislative elections and the effects upon the political parties and political developments generally over the longer term. In fact, there were 'winners' to these events, but there were many more losers; the effects upon, for example, the political left, have been of historic import – because Le Pen beat Jospin by 0.68 per cent of the votes. Such chance, however, is what French politics is built upon, almost made out of.

Whatever the true causes and character of Le Pen's candidacy and importance in contemporary French politics; some interpretations were held by many as self-evident: he reflected a hardening, crueler France, he was fascist and the French sympathised, he was and they did not but they were fed up, he was not really a fascist, but they sometimes almost are, he is not and they are not either, he was an 'accident', or a product of a serendipitous or dysfunctional system, simply the beneficiary of a left 'la plus bête du monde' whose squabbling let him through, or else, more prosaically, that the significance of a mere 16.86 per cent should not be exaggerated. Whichever of these or however much of each of these is true, the startling phenomenon of the Front National candidate going through to the run-off constituted no less than a political earthquake, heard, as we have said, around the world. Earthquake ('séisme') was the term used by everyone at the time. Such clichés conjure up the ground cracking and people disappearing down the cracks like in a Hollywood movie. And some did go down like that. Lionel Jospin especially, but others too. It cracked and split the landscape and threw up a new one, new contours, shattered political parties; some things disappeared, new relationships formed, new perspectives developed, and so on. As regards the metaphor, however, we can say several things. As well as being momentous and having aftershocks, earthquakes are usually unforeseen, usually even by the most sophisticated instruments of measurement, and they are, what amounts to almost though not quite the same thing, sudden; that is to say they are not only unforeseen, but unforeseeable. We mentioned above the certainty of the uncertain happening, and in its configuration of institutions or in its bizarre presidentialism, France has structurally and systemically its own San Andreas Fault. California may go into the sea, but when we cannot be sure. The Fifth
Republic may be thrown into a period of rapid change, even crisis, given its unresolved institutional ambiguities, but when we cannot be sure. Against this, we can say that elements of unpredictability do seem, paradoxically, constant, certainly in electoral terms, even if we put their longer term or deeper consequences to one side for a moment. Many elections are correctly predicted, and their outcomes unsurprising (e.g. the legislatives of 2002 themselves). But if we take simply the presidential elections; de Gaulle was not expected to have to go through to a run-off in 1965, the non-communist left was not expected to be quite so humiliated (5 per cent) by the 1969 presidential election, nor the communists so successful (21.5 per cent). The 1974 election was a knife-edge victory (354,000 votes); the 1981 election was assumed to be Giscard’s victory until only months before the ballot. 1988 saw Mitterrand treated like a new de Gaulle, although only two years before he was seen as doomed and humiliated. In 1995, Chirac was seen as a political has-been less than six months before the election (and Jospin too not only that but was relatively unheard of outside the political and professional classes). And then, of course, there is Le Pen in 2002.

Even, however, if we allow for this predictable unpredictability — although one would have thought by now that observers would have begun to anticipate such upset apple carts — we can still question the validity of the ‘earthquake’ as metaphor, in as much as the unpredictability at another level of seismic activity may or should have been more predictable than was the case. The answers to this lie of course in the analysis of Le Pen’s vote, but also in that of all the other candidates, those of Jospin and his (many) rivals on the left, in Mégret’s rather hopeless showing against Le Pen, in Chirac’s extraordinarily weak first round vote (the weakest of any winner in the Fifth Republic), in fact in the overall topography or ‘archaeology’ of all of the vote, and of course all of the non-vote, this election being characterised by its very high, by French standards, abstention rate (28.4 per cent), a factor which probably determined the outcomes more than anything else. The relationship of these phenomena to their shifting pre-first round social context, their relation to the institutional context of France (cohabitation, direct election to the presidency, the role of the prime minister and relationship of government to the presidency), and finally the cultural relation of the presidency to French leadership in general, and to the tradition of the hard right in France (and arguably its own cultural relation or affinities with the Gaullist republic); all these factors point us to an understanding of France at the beginning of the new millennium which takes us beyond the political naivety of the earthquake metaphor, at least as regards its unforeseeable nature, even though not perhaps as regards its thunderous effects.
In 2001–2002, the left-coalition government headed by prime minister Lionel Jospin was not as popular nor quite as successful as it had been over the previous three or so years. But even here, and certainly in the three to five years before, by any yardstick: the economy, unemployment, social reform, legislative programme, growth, governmental stability, even duration, the ‘plural left’ coalition government had been one of, if not the most successful left governments ever, perhaps even of any government. The left, the socialists, the ‘breakaway’ socialists of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the communists, left radicals, and the Greens, constituted a rainbow coalition that had been, surprisingly, elected to the National Assembly in unanticipated (unscheduled and unnecessary) legislative elections called in 1997 by president Chirac after he had been only two years in office as president. He wanted renewed legitimacy for his massive 1993 right-wing majority, essentially in order to push through his ‘European’ programme – preparing France for the Euro, a procedure the left itself in fact subsequently accomplished. Jospin, therefore, became a sudden prime minister of a coalition government. He nevertheless governed France successfully for a full five-year term. In a range of respects, and irrespective of the policy/programme aspects we have mentioned, respects relating to his personal image and standing: managerial effectiveness, probity, team-working leadership, he stood for a long time in contrast to his rival Chirac, an almost discredited president, and one immersed in scandals, an ineffective leader (whose own troops, the RPR, were staggering from dissidence to crisis throughout much of the 1997–2002 period). In many ways, the presidency really ‘should have’ fallen to Jospin. It was almost politically logical: a good prime minister who reflected the new European type of leadership, progressive but not too left wing, who brought the Greens, and other coalition partners, into government, quietly reformist, avoiding of Gaullist grand gestures (such as Chirac’s diplomatically disastrous Gaullist posturing by insisting upon a series of nuclear tests in the South Pacific in 1995). But in fact, not only did the presidency not fall to Jospin, when the earthquake happened he fell ignominiously down the first crack, and Le Pen stepped over him to go through to the run off with Chirac, thus, in fact, ensuring the latter’s re-election while reconfiguring the political map of France. Was it Jospin’s own ‘fault’ in some way? Did his lacklustre and unfocused 2002 campaign lose him the prize? Or was he simply five years at the top and past his sell-by date? In some ways each of these points is true, although in exactly what ways, i.e. to what extent one can understand political phenomena from such ‘superstructural’ anecdotes, begs the full range of questions in political analysis. We do therefore need to ask, although with perhaps an equally inadequate explanatory result, what deeper tectonic and other shifts had taken or were taking place by 2002 to cause such
a political disaster for Jospin and the left. What had been happening in terms of
the social groups who might have supported the left but did not, and in fact, in
sufficient numbers supported the far right? What had the effects of ‘preparing
France for the Euro’ been upon these groups? And in fact upon those whole
areas of France (cf. the geographical distribution of Le Pen’s vote) exposed to
France’s developing integration into Europe and Europe’s markets?

From this social if not tectonic perspective, the view from the run-down
council estates, with all their ‘insecurity’, a sense of having been both
forgotten and left behind, and their daily lived experience of vandalism and
hopelessness, we do have a sense of social changes, negative ones, occurring
and accumulating – or not occurring, and frustration accumulating and all
in a relation to the electoral and often superstructural political procedures
and processes. We would need, however, to appraise a further development
of, primarily, neither ‘institutional’ nor ‘social’, but cultural and historical
significance, namely, not just the – relative although crucial – dissociation of
the left from social deprivation, but the relationship of the far right; populist,
nationalist, arguably racist, and perhaps more arguably, fascist, to these council
estates. Do these latter have a ‘memory’ that would link them up to France’s
long and textured hard right nationalist tradition? If they do not, are there other
groups, lower middle class, other than the council estates, ‘sinking’ or even not
sinking, but socially stagnating, or even not this at all, but simply culturally
and maddeningly ‘excluded’ from contemporary France? Catholic, family-
orientated, ‘decent’, and insecure, and who do have some kind of affective link
to an imagined France led by Joan of Arc? In a word, how is it that the hard
right in France can find such manifestly, startlingly widespread support? This
brings us back via the socioeconomic and the cultural to the institutional, and
to what we have called, wrongly no doubt, the superstructural, the anecdotal:
i.e. the Front National and Jean-Marie Le Pen’s relationship to the presidential
system and its functioning. And, of course, by the same token, Jospin’s own
relationship, and the political effects of the leadership rivalry that existed
between Chirac and Jospin over a five-year ‘cohabitation’ period. And of course
Chirac’s relationship too, a politician considered politically finished, and yet
the overwhelming victor of this (semi-)presidential system. We need, in fact,
to understand three perspectives, and these equally: the socioeconomic, i.e. the
aspects normally considered largely exhaustive of an understanding of political
events such as elections, as well as the two areas often considered marginal
or minor: the cultural, e.g. the relationship of Jospin to what he represented
and what he aspired to, the advantage Chirac enjoyed as sitting president
and what this meant within French political culture, and the place, or places
The French Presidential and Legislative Elections of 2002

- geographical, social, discursive, symbolic, doctrinal, etc. - of the hard right in France; and finally, the institutional and the immediate: in the context of the political-institutional framework (president, prime minister, cohabitation, the state of the right, of the left, the media, the campaign), what happened in the campaign itself and ‘on the night’? The interrelationship of these – the social, the cultural, and the institutional – to one another, and their overall dynamic effect will offer to us a deeper understanding of the astonishing political events of 2002 and their aftermath, for, what happened to have happened, the Fifth Republic is clearly no straightforward democracy, but a highly complex and interactive republican regime, with a host of characteristics and character ‘traits’, normally unfamiliar to republicanism, and even simply to contemporary regimes, particularly as the regards the kind of phenomena we have been describing: the influence of a highly personalised regime with a particular institutional structure, itself embedded within a textured tradition of political ideologies, operating at the beginning of the new millennium.

We can develop our argument – that the key to understanding is the very specific interactions of institutions and culture – by raising another question or enigma, or rather, perhaps it is the same enigma, that of whether the Fifth Republic has within it reservoirs of the unexpected, always capable of flooding to the surface of political activity. Developments within the Fifth Republic: the eclipse of the great heroic figures such as de Gaulle and Mitterrand and their replacement with the more ‘ordinary’ figures such as Chirac and Jospin; a healthy and workable cohabitation element within the republic; moves to synchronise the presidential and legislative terms in order to ‘domesticate’ the drama of Fifth Republican politics; a convergence of styles, again away from drama and the grand gesture towards a European managerial norm, and so on. All this led many journalists, scholars and conference organisers to posit in the late 1990s and early 2000s the notion that the Republic was quietly transforming itself, perhaps had already done so, into a Sixth Republic. We said at the start of this essay that the one certain thing about the Fifth Republic was that unpredictability seemed built in. In a range of respects, the 2002 elections were an example of this. They, like many events before them, wiped away all the certainties, and momentarily at least saw the resurgence of all the drama of that explosive cocktail of personalisation, institutions, culture, discourse, memory, and drama that the Fifth Republic seemed, from its inception in 1958, to have folded into itself, waiting for the day the pundits decided France was now just a normal democracy.

It is clear, therefore, that the Fifth Republic as a polity needs to be seen in a certain way, from a certain angle, or through a particular set of lenses that singles
France out from other polities. If we can say that 2002 saw the ‘Fifth Republic’ reassert itself, we need to know what the continuities are that seem to preclude predictability. What is it that reasserts itself (and unexpectedly)? It lies outside the scope of this discussion to go into great detail about the historical, cultural, and institutional frameworks of the French polity, but we can state them here; in fact we already have: that the configuration of institutions, which allows for a bizarre and changing, depending upon other factors, duality of the executive, adds both a dynamism and a dysfunctionality to the regime. To name but three expressions of this: power flowing backwards and forwards between Matignon (the PM) and the Elysée (the president) depending upon circumstances; power and (symbolic) authority being constantly separated from one another, allowing the latter to take on, again in particular circumstances, e.g. Mitterrand 1986–88, Chirac 1994–95, the political influence and causative qualities of power itself; the fragile but irresistible opportunities offered to political parties to act as highly personalised rallies with all the success (e.g. the Gaullists in 1958 (and 1968), the socialists in 1981, the Front National in a range of elections since the 1980s), but also the dangers of elimination (e.g. the RPR (and PCF) in 1981, the PS 1993–95, the UDF in 2002) that these provide.

The configuration of institutions and the dramatic way in which the presidency was first placed within this configuration in 1958 meant that the Fifth Republic has always been a regime in which personalisation plays a very significant role. This too means that political performance (i.e. the projection of the political persona of a political actor) will also take on an inordinately significant role within this polity. Let us cite two examples. De Gaulle is the obvious example of the ‘performer’, in the sense that we are using it here. He is, of course, the exemplary example. His ‘style’, a recognised comportment, tone, register, a set of gestures; his view/s of France, the state and the nation; his idea of the role of individuals in terms of their own/the nation’s destiny. All these aspects informed his public performance as president, at press conferences, public ceremonies, and major speeches. The public performances themselves were also informed, given ‘added value,’ by all his previous performances and received knowledge of him (the man of 1940, and so on), as well, ironically, by a public awareness of his ‘private’ self (austere, Catholic, personally rather awkward, devoted to his sick daughter, highly intelligent, and both caustic and witty in his private conversations, and so on). In a very unusual way, this ‘character’ informing an institutional configuration becomes important to a regime.

The legacy therefore is a heavy one for those whose leadership performance comes after him. It is perhaps an unfair ‘opposite’ example to choose Lionel
Jospin, as prime minister and presidential candidate in 2002, but it is apt given the context of our study. Jospin was, will be, judged as one of France's best prime ministers, and would doubtless have made a perfectly adequate president, possibly a 'good' one. Much of his (mis)fortune, however, rested ultimately upon, not his good premiership, and the sound achievements of his government, nor his presidential proposals, nor upon scandals surrounding his persona (there was only one, relatively harmless, that he had been a Trotskyist in the 1960s/70s, and had been reluctant to admit to it), but upon his 'character'. These character traits or this perceived persona, as with all politicians and public figures, may or may not have corresponded to the real person, but if they were not decisive in 2002, they were no doubt significant: rather cold, irritable, cut off from 'ordinary' people, too intellectual, a technocrat, and so on.\(^5\) These factors mattered, and affected attitudes towards him.

Having mentioned de Gaulle and Jospin in this way, by taking circumstance, 'character', media coverage and performance, and a range of other factors, because of the nature and conditions of leadership competition created by the Fifth Republic, it is possible to analyse all political actors in the Fifth Republic from this perspective, even though we should not claim that such a perspective would be analytically exhaustive of an understanding of the nature of the presidency or of political leadership. A range of political performance criteria and a scale of success or failure in these terms could fruitfully be applied to a range of actors: François Mitterrand, Jacques Chirac, Édouard Balladur, Michel Rocard, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Dominique Voynet, Martine Aubry, Arlette Laguiller, Jean-Marie Le Pen, and so on.

These illustrations show in part how these institutions are to be understood. A further feature will be the way in which circumstances, personalities, and institutions in the Fifth Republic's inception, but also subsequently,\(^6\) were folded into the procedures and practices of the regime; not only, as we have seen, personalisation and drama, but also accompanying qualities which took on inordinate significance: history, memory, myth, and the extraordinary role of political discourse.

Briefly, we can say that it was clearly de Gaulle who 'started' all this: the role and weight of history, the memory of French greatness, the myth of the hero, and the deployment of all this in a kind of generic presidential discourse. But it does not end with de Gaulle. In fact, he 'let in' a great deal more than Gaullism, however we might define that. Mitterrand's blend of leftist millenarianism (revolutionary language used by the PS in the 1970s, alongside a kind of 'migratory', 'changer la vie' register) and the developing personalisation of discourse to the point where, by the 1990s, only he spoke
for socialism, with all the consequences this had upon the party’s own ability to ‘speak for itself’; all of this can only be understood in terms of what was encompassed potentially by the Fifth Republic itself. Similarly, in terms of our study here, 1958 also ‘let in’, ultimately, a brand of leadership, discourse, and contestatory politics that we can ‘recognise’ in the millions of votes cast for Jean-Marie Le Pen on 21 April 2002.

The 2002 presidential election really began in 1997, with the election of the plural left headed by the socialist leader, Lionel Jospin, after a calamitous miscalculation by the president, and the dissolution of the National Assembly. In order that the president avoid forced resignation, and the left demonstrate fitness for power, a long, the longest, period of cohabitation began between the two heads of the executive. The overall analysis of the Jospin government, 1997–2002, has been dealt with elsewhere. Here let us highlight several points relevant to our analysis of 2002.

As regards Jospin and the left, the crucial question was whether his leadership ‘qualified’ him for presidential success in 2002. In many ways, he was perfectly qualified. He had ‘returned’ as the left’s hero in 1995 to a party in search of a candidate, and leader. And he took Chirac to a creditable run-off in the 1995 election, as Mitterrand had done with Giscard d’Estaing in 1974. By 1997, he was the accepted leader, of course, of the PS, but like Mitterrand in 1974 and 1981, the accepted de facto leader of the whole of the plural left. He was accommodating to the other parties, had real left credentials (in fact it was later discovered how very left these were when his Trotskyist past was revealed), managed his relations with the media and the PS’ with the other parties. In 1997, the ‘surprise’ election catapulted him from leader of the opposition into the premiership. For five years, he governed France as a competent, one of the most competent ever, prime ministers. Although, because of the institutional set up, this was not the ship of state, but as the captain of the ship of government, it is probably true to say, even in the hostile press, that he was never seen as, even once, less than up to the job, less than all a head of government should be. His government oversaw a period of sustained economic expansion and a dramatic fall in unemployment. His five-party coalition government remained relatively harmonious. Jospin had demonstrated the Fifth Republican exigency of how to manage the bipolar imperative in a still, although diminishing, multi-party system. His Achilles’ Heel – and, by definition, only one is needed – was his standing vis-à-vis Chirac and the presidency. Here, he never quite managed to establish a decisive lead or even symbolic authority over Chirac. And as we have argued, this ‘personal’ aspect of Fifth Republic leadership is absolutely crucial. It is true
that Chirac was never a hugely popular political figure, he ‘won’ (e.g. 1995) when he represented a political movement or alternative to his adversary; and as president he enjoyed the popularity of office. But his ‘own’ support (in every poll, every European election, and every first round presidential election he stood in) was always a relatively derisory 20 per cent at best. He also began Jospin’s legislature with a very poor rating, having just, buffoon-like, handed all power to the left through an impetuous miscalculation. Having said this, however, Jospin’s failure really to capitalise on this tells us a great deal about Jospin himself, and about the nature of the presidential and prime ministerial offices. How undramatic, in fact, was his own personal rating, how austere and grey his image, how unprepossessing his stature in the hearts and minds of the French. He was always seen as competent, always effective, but his image was never, for want of a better expression, charismatic, in any degree that might outstrip his humiliated and later near-disgraced (because of emerging financial scandals) rival. The office itself contributed greatly – no prime minister has ever had the symbolic leeway to really challenge a president, not Chirac of Giscard, not Rocard of Mitterrand, and so on (to name those who potentially opposed their own president). One can speculate in fact whether in some senses success as prime minister was in a proportionately negative relation to its holder’s potential popularity as a presidential type. In fact, to favour the premier over the president, and endow him or her with the heroic mantle, is to deny the rationale of the Fifth Republic itself. And when Chirac, first through silence, then through a shift to international and European discourse (higher rhetorical ground), began to re-engage with public opinion from 1998–99 onwards, Jospin was unable either institutionally or personally to counter his re-emergence. And in other areas of PR, the hand shaking and backslapping camaraderie Chirac was renowned for, made the Protestant-seeming Jospin almost physically unable to respond. When these factors, over time, ‘rehabilitated’ Chirac (along with a clever close-knit team of ‘image’ advisors which included his extremely competent daughter, Claude), he was able to win back his lost image, and go on to appear a more credible presidential type than his austere rival.

Jospin had put the PS back on the map in 1995–97, and in a sense had put it, after the near-oblivion of the 1991–94 years back into the political opportunity structure of the Fifth Republic. But by so doing, he raised the stakes of the significance of the leadership factor, and himself took, for a five-year period, the position of disadvantage in this domain.

Parties or groupings of parties, e.g. the Gaullist and Independent Republicans in the 1960s, the Socialists and PCF in the 1970s, go through phases where
they are like similar or opposite images of one another (of both their rivals and their allies), or are as if placed at different points on the Wheel of Fortune. After 1997, it was the left in the ascendancy while the right appeared to be in dire straits, after the fiasco of the 1997 elections, having, in fact, appeared invincible after 1993. The right was somewhere around 6 o’clock on Fortune’s Wheel. After the right’s defeat in 1997, Chirac’s own authority over his own camp was virtually nil for a period (save for the praetorian guard organised by former prime minister (1995–97), Alain Juppé, although he too was extremely unpopular). Chirac’s all too human error did seem to mark the end of the passable, let alone the ‘great,’ leaders of the Fifth Republic. Organisationally, there seemed to be no, even conflictual, dynamic maps for the RPR and UDF and DL to follow, each of these parties lacking decisive, strong leaders of any standing. All the elements of the mainstream right seemed stagnant. The RPR itself began to develop internal factions that were highly conflictual – normal on the left, but much less common on the rally-style right. The RPR, after the dark defeat of 1997, went through a series of doomed leaders, and would-be leaders, and even saw breakaways by long-standing Gaullist barons such as Charles Pasqua. All this undermined the party: Juppé, Séguin, Sarkozy, Alliot-Marie, all passed through the leadership of the party, none creating a real rally of opinion around themselves, or around the president. Elections such as the Euro elections in 1999 saw failure and internal chaos, and all this without the then partner right-wing UDF profiting either. Criticism of the RPR’s maker, Chirac, began to emerge as the party started to search, somewhat blindly, through second-rank leadership in-fighting for Chirac’s possible successor/s. The irony, therefore, of this period was that in the five years from Chirac’s 1997 humiliation to his 2002 victory, the dynamic for his own survival, until quite shortly before the decisive contest of 2002, was absent. And the left had lain down all the conditions for carrying itself to further victories, the right stumbling from failure to failure, and from division to decline. Apart from Jospin, however, and he not markedly as we have seen, did a single alternative leader to Chirac emerge. This is probably one of the least analysed but significant developments, or non-developments, of the five-year legislature. What an irony too that all of this should be halted and reversed by one first-round election, itself almost passing by unnoticed, and the stunning re-emergence of the one figure capable of rallying support outside the formal, ENA-dominated elites of the Fifth Republic, and its apparent moves towards ‘normalisation’ and the domestication of its own dramatic heritage, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Having said this, 2002 should first be seen in the context of very low first round scores all round, abstentionism, and a fractured right/hard right, and
left/hard left in round one. Having said that, nevertheless, the Le Pen success in round one was of historic significance, and this in terms not just of its effects, but of its provenance. In a sense, irrespective of whether Chirac would have won round two against Jospin, its effects were to alter French politics. It demonstrated how mainstream many of Le Pen’s ideas had become, and what an ‘outsider’ can do within a political opportunity structure such as the Fifth Republic. It shattered the re-arisen left, it provoked a ‘republican’ backlash of astonishing proportions, it brought the mainstream right unequivocally back into effective governance, and so on. And we can say without too much exaggeration that this paradigm shift was caused by one election, in fact by a few thousand votes.

Round one of the presidential elections of 2002 electrified the world and changed the course of French politics. The mainstream left fell apart. The right fell into line, the extreme right reasserted its presence, the extreme left likewise, though to a lesser extent. A lot of this was reversed, as it were, by the legislatives, but nevertheless, the traces of these phenomena and their longer-term influence remained. Chirac, known by many as ‘the crook’ (as opposed to the ‘fascist’ Le Pen)\textsuperscript{15} sailed forward to re-election on a tide of new-found republicanism. In fact, it was all jolly good fun, all the 1968-style rallies and marches. A ‘Front populaire’ atmosphere swept through France for the two weeks of round two. Young people joined political parties in their thousands. Round two of the presidential elections was a foregone conclusion, although not perhaps the near soviet-style scale of Chirac’s re-election. But the real ‘second round’ was not Chirac’s thumping 82 per cent re-election but the legislative elections that followed five weeks later on 9 June. The right was now fused or corralled into a near-totally encompassing single party of the mainstream right, the UMP, thus realising the dream of right-wing union, a development that had been sought throughout the Fifth Republic, particularly since de Gaulle’s resignation in 1969. In so doing, and on the presidential coat-tails in true Fifth Republic manner, it, the right, sailed into harbour behind Chirac. While Chirac remained in control, and the delights of office were enjoyed, the UMP – an RPR-dominated organisation, it must be said – would remain together, perhaps long enough to truly become a single force. And it was clear that in the aftermath of the legislative elections, Chirac was in control like he had never been in his whole political career. Two small problems remained almost unnoticed in the overwhelming series of victories, and both related to the areas we have been examining. First, Chirac was the champion of virtually all of France (80+ per cent, round two). Second, Le Pen’s presence was a resounding reminder that the drama of the Fifth Republic
and, in this case, its difficult social origins, remained. For the right as a whole, moreover, its problem, if it arose, would also be the Fifth Republic's own dilemma, that of leadership. And in the manoeuvrings of the new Minister of the Interior, Nicholas Sarkozy, could be seen the first stirrings of a post-Chirac power struggle. On the left, the bitter, institutional logic of the Fifth Republic and its culture also unfolded.

In the immediate aftermath of his defeat, Jospin's sudden and silent exit from the political stage was almost Gaullian in its sense of personal hurt endured, and of a feeling of having been betrayed by the people. In terms of the whole symbolic structure of leadership, however, it meant that the socialist party itself was orphaned and almost pointless, aimless. The actual party leader was, and this by design, akin to the true leader's PA, a Sancho Panza, or minder of the store, François Hollande. Overnight, he became the real and only, although incongruous, leader of the left (the other 'barons' such as Fabius had to try to stay well in the shadows at this point of near mourning for the PS defeat). The logic of symbolic party politics in the Fifth Republic is to pretend, especially when there is nothing else to win, that its true purpose is not the presidential elections but the National Assembly. In fact, it did manage to avoid a rout in the legislatives, and it remained the only viable large political force on the left for the future. Nevertheless, this was political disaster of historic proportions. And, we can add, a truly Fifth Republican disaster in its origins, modalities, and lived experience. Without its own 'special' leader and arguably now without even a credible political ideology, given the desertion of much of its support, loss of policy/orientation, and electoral desertion in both presidential and legislative elections, the PS entered the post-2002 period in a state of near-trauma, its plans and projects scattered to the wind. Its allies: the troublesome MDC, the PCF, the Greens, and the left radicals, all did badly enough for the PS to wonder whether, even with its allies, it had even the prospect of political victory in the future. Perhaps for the PS, retreating into itself was not only inevitable but also desirable, for its commitment to the paradigmatic exigencies of the Fifth Republic had brought it much success, equally devastating setbacks, upon which it would need to reflect.

On the morning after the second round of the presidentials, the republic was back in the hands of the inheritors and the allies of that part of the French right that had set up the Fifth Republic with de Gaulle. And it looked after the second round of the legislative elections (which really simply confirmed Chirac's interim choices), as if it would enjoy its fruits for years and years to come. Mercifully, for the scholar of French politics and the liveliness of...
his or her subject, the one thing that is certain in the Fifth Republic is, as we have said, that nothing is. The stirrings of dissent within the UMP as it tried to come to terms with its internal Gaullist dominance, the possibility of the heritage of the extreme right falling to Le Pen’s daughter, Marine (possibly a stroke of political genius), and the FN’s relationship to those parts of the new and old French political culture that gave Le Pen his huge vote, the left’s search for leadership, and the impacting upon French domestic politics of France’s relations with the expanding European Union, and, after the war in Iraq in 2003, with the United States; each of these, as their consequences unfolded, began to alter the landscape after what was perhaps, after all, the most interesting presidential contest the Fifth Republic has seen.

Notes and References

1 ‘La droite la plus bête du monde’: this often-quoted expression had originally been applied to the right.
2 It is not an exaggeration that the 21 April result was the lead article in the majority of international magazines, etc.
6 The way in which the left ‘adapted’ to this regime is perhaps the clearest illustration.
7 See Cole, Modern and Contemporary France.
8 This does not alter the fact that his relations with the media could, in fact, have been handled much better.
9 He never, for example, had to face the media hostility that his predecessor, prime minister Edith Cresson, had had to face.
10 See Gaffney, in Cole, Modern and Contemporary France.
11 He tried by appearing on more ‘personal’ or sports-related TV programmes, but the ‘character’ remained always brittle compared to his rival.
13 There was also a very damaging ongoing financial scandal concerning the current Mayor of Paris, Jean Tiberi, and his relationship to his immediate predecessor at the Hotel de Ville, Jacques Chirac.
14 The right’s relatively good showing in the municipal elections (although they lost Paris) in 2001 marked a decisive upturn in its fortunes.
15 A common slogan on demonstrations between rounds one and two of the presidential elections was ‘plutot l’escroc que le facho’.
An enduring image of the elections was the despair captured on the faces of young PS supporters in the party’s HQ when the 21 April results came through.

Chirac of course formed his government immediately after his own election and before the legislatives.