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What Leads to the Rise of Populist and Anti-establishment

Political Parties in France?

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On his first post-reelection outing in Paris, Emmanuel Macron was greeted with a fanfare of cherry tomatoes¹. Although only a handful were thrown his way (and missed their target), this occurrence shows the deep-seated unpopularity of France's president. How did this unpopularity translate into his presidential victory in both 2017 and 2022? Macron's *La République en Marche!* initially ran on an anti-establishment campaign that marketed his newly founded party as the solution to all of France's long-held woes. He was not alone; his political opponents in 2017 also promised this while representing populist and anti-establishment parties such as Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise*. Thus, the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties within France was made clear during the 2017 elections.

This paper will begin by reviewing the general understanding of anti-establishment and populist parties within the literature. It will continue by delving into the parties spanning the political spectrum that identify as populist or anti-establishment, as well as their specific ideologies and respective voter demographics. The framework found within Norris and Inglehart's 2016 piece will subsequently be used to assess the distinct factors leading to the overall rise of populist and anti-establishment parties. France will then be presented as a case study to examine the rise of these parties within a particular country, with the 2017 presidential elections being used as a focal point to confirm the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties in France. The three parties that ran under populist and anti-establishment campaigns (RN, FI, LREM) will also be analyzed under Norris and Inglehart's framework to determine the specific causes leading to their individual rise. Finally, a discussion of France's penchant towards political personalization will explain their inclination towards charismatic leadership and party

¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-tomato-attack-france-election-visit/>

fluidity. This serves to answer the overall question: that the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties within France can best be explained by the supply and institutional factors of the framework because it brings France's personalized politics to the fore. This paper concludes by encouraging further studies to analyze France's political personalization and its implications for Macron's longevity along with that of his opponents, as well as what this will entail for the 2027 presidential election.

Anti-establishment and Populist parties: a conceptual review

In order to effectively conceptualize anti-establishment and populist parties, it is necessary to first discuss their opponents. Mainstream parties are categorically different from the aforementioned parties: they are not at the fringe of their nation's politics, rather they are well established political entities conveying a standard and recognizable platform to their electorate (Hartleb 2015). These platforms represent varying ideological leanings that each party identifies with, consisting of usually "socialist, conservative, or liberal" principles (Bayerlein 2020, 412). Due to their differing beliefs, mainstream parties are not exempt from criticizing each other, however, they tend not to criticize the overall political system in which they function (Rooduijn et al. 2012). On the contrary, an intrinsic factor of populist and anti-establishment parties involves criticizing mainstream parties for their role in tainting the political establishment. More specifically, populist parties spanning the left-right spectrum focus on anti-elitism, as they believe there is an innate divide between the people and the elite that should be remedied (Mudde 2004; Adler and Ansell 2019; Staykova et al. 2015; Barr 2009). Some scholars pose interchangeable definitions for both anti-establishment and populist parties. Hartleb identifies them as self-proclaimed novel parties with a mission to defend those snubbed by mainstream

politics (2015). Mudde (2004) also states that an aspect of populist parties themselves is the expression of “anti-party sentiments,” and echoes Hartleb’s definition by classifying populists as distrustful of the government and its ability to enact favorable policy decisions (546).

When it comes to anti-establishment parties alone, however, the scholarly definition becomes more nebulous. Several scholars do not categorize anti-establishment parties as inherently different from populist parties. Rather, anti-establishment itself is discussed as simply a form of rhetoric or sentiment specific to populist parties that fuels their campaign and their appeal to voters (Rooduijn et al. 2012; Barr 2009; Melendez and Kaltwasser 2017; Luengo et al. 2016; Vachudova 2021; Ucen 2004). These scholars posit that populist parties (coupled with anti-establishment appeals) pride themselves on originality and promise to bring fresh perspectives towards policies that have been ignored by corrupt mainstream actors (Kaltwasser and Melendez 2017; Bakker et al. 2020, 2). The leaders of these parties market their novel entrance into politics as a way to demonstrate their superiority to mainstream parties and underscore their willingness to fight for the people (Jost and Vasilopoulos 2020, 2; Hartleb 2015, 44). They do so by claiming to protect the “*volonté générale*” or general will of the people, which Mudde (2004, 543) and other scholars identify as a key factor of populism’s people-centric aspect (Bakker et al. 2020; Luengo et al. 2016, 254; Staykova et al. 2015).

Tarchi in Bordignon (2017) goes further by highlighting the populist appeal of “democratizing democracy,” or having the people take back the reins of government and acquire a direct say in policy issues. According to populist parties, the “people” form part of a “nostalgic past” (Hartleb 2015, 43) that has been severely disregarded by current political parties, and blame “dishonest” mainstream actors for the nations’ problems (Kaltwasser and Melendez 2017, 522). These parties also espouse a dual worldview that ultimately culminates into an “us/them”

factor, with the amoral elites on one side and the average citizen on the other (Luengo et al. 2016, 256). The discerning factor between different kinds of populist parties is their categorization of who they believe belongs in the “elite” or general public strata (Vachudova 2021, 474). It is in adherence to these specifications that the literature determines whether a populist party is left-wing, right-wing, or centrist.

Right-wing populist parties: go local or go home

The populist and anti-establishment parties that have gained notoriety throughout the years are radical, right-wing populist parties. They are mostly associated with the conservative or traditional, as well as neo-liberal, arena of politics (Mayer and Perrineau 1992, 131; Zulianello 2019, 329). However, certain radical right-wing parties do adopt some left-leaning views, particularly towards the economy, as seen in Sweden's SD (Sweden Democrats) and Finland's PS (Finns Party) (Pappas and Kriesi 2015, 305). A key determinant of radical, right-wing parties is their nativist and authoritarian rhetoric (Mudde 2013, 8). Rooduijn et al. go further by pointing out that these parties also exhibit isolationist and xenophobic tactics in order to villainize their opposition (2014). These tactics and rhetoric give right-wing populist parties an “exclusionist appeal,” as they champion racial superiority while condemning other races for impeding the nation’s progress (Jost and Pavlos 2020, 2; Rooduijn et al. 2014, 564). The groups that are targeted, and pitted against the “common man,” include racial or ethnic minorities who have immigrated to the country, as well as mainstream parties in support of these groups (Mudde in Adler and Ansell 2019, 344). According to right-wing populist parties, any politician or elite who champions for open borders is colluding to ruin the nation and destabilize its preserved national identity. Thus, the “othering” of minority groups seeks to denigrate the elite by claiming that their rights are more protected by established parties than those of the “native people,” and

that mainstream politicians show greater partiality towards external issues rather than domestic interests (Staykova 2015, 116; Noury and Roland 2020, 423).

Left-wing populist parties: increased spending for all (or some)

Despite the extensive coverage given to right-wing populist parties, left-wing populist parties are also prominent throughout various societies (Hartleb 2015; Mudde 2004; Postill 2018). Mudde (2004) characterizes them as promoting populism alongside a “democratic socialist ideology” (549). Due to this, they are against capitalist and neo-liberal tendencies that subvert social welfare (March and Mudde in Hanley and Sikk 2016). Instead, these parties are avid advocates of governmental interference as well as the promotion of “social rights” (Mayer and Perrineau 1992, 131). Whereas the *raison d’être* for right-wing populist parties is their defamation of minority groups and the construction of a national identity, left-wing populist parties usually arise due to rampant economic problems within their countries. Luengo et al. (2016) provide examples of left-wing populist parties that gained popularity in response to the economic downturn in countries such as Spain (260), Greece, and Italy (262). As their adversaries, radical left-wing parties blame “financial elites” who have prompted these economic downturns through their participation in international markets and “globalized trade” (Vachudova 2021, 475).

Another facet distinguishing left-wing from right-wing populist parties is their “inclusionary” aspect (Golder in Jost and Pavlos 2020, 2). Rather than exclude or vilify minority groups, left-wing populist parties usually include them in their struggle for equality and economic well-being. There are, unfortunately, cases of radical left-wing parties that are exclusionary. In conceptualizing the differences between left-wing and right-wing populist parties, Norris and Inglehart (2016) divide them alongside economic views: left-wing radical

parties tend to prefer more government spending on welfare, whereas radical-right wing parties usually opt for less, especially on multilateral organizations (19). Both, however, can espouse ethnocentric and anti-immigrant rhetoric, such as the radical left-wing parties of Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary (Norris and Inglehart 2016, 20).

Centrist populist parties: neither here nor there

Before discussing centrist parties, it is necessary to emphasize that anti-establishment and populist parties do diverge in certain areas. Some anti-establishment parties are merely “anti-establishment” by principle; however, they are mainstream in their behavior. They do criticize and campaign against the “establishment,” but they do not seek to resolve policy issues by isolating a certain ethnic group or advancing social welfare demands. Rather, they argue for more pragmatic solutions, declaring that they will be more successful than their mainstream counterparts (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Ucen 2007). They are against issues such as corruption, and claim to fight for “increased transparency, democratic reform, and moral integrity” (Zulianello 2019, 329). Hanley and Sikk (2016) go further by labeling them as “anti-establishment reform parties,” and refuse to include radical right-wing parties, as well as those led by people with a political background, within their description (523). The scholarly definition of these modern anti-establishment parties coincides with that of centrist populist parties, as both bypass the left-right divide. Whereas Mudde (2004) claims that the populist *zeitgeist* is marked by the rise of ethnocentric right-wing populism, Ucen (2007, 50) argues in favor of a centrist “new populism,” consisting of parties who are simply against the establishment without aligning to a specific ideology or position (Vachudova 2021).

One aspect of centrist populist parties is their adoption of a “third way” approach to politics, as they seek to find a balance between their proclaimed adversaries: the “corrupt”

establishment and “radical populists” (Postill 2018, 757; Ucen 2004, 47). This “third way” approach, however, leads to several centrist populist parties with convincing but insubstantial positions. In studying anti-establishment parties within Central and Eastern Europe, Ucen includes two centrist populist parties, Lithuania’s LDP (Liberal Democrat Party) and Slovakia’s SMER (Slovak Social Democracy), whose ideals roused voters without actually proposing tangible solutions (2004, 56; 2007, 58). This, in turn, poses a threat to their eventual longevity, as seen with Slovakian parties SMER and SOP (Party of Civic Understanding). According to Ucen (2004 and 2007, respectively), SOP’s undoing resulted from the party’s failed attempt to flesh out its exact ideology, while SMER lost its momentum upon entering government, as it dropped its anti-establishment appeal and became more mainstream (52; 57).

Centrist populist and anti-establishment parties do not rely on exclusionist tactics elevating a specific nationality or inclusionary tactics demanding economic equality to define the “people” they represent. As exemplified by the Czech ANO (“yes”) party, these parties are in defense of the “ordinary people” who are prized simply for their hard work and intelligence (Havlik 2019, 8). This departure from characterizing their supporters based on ideology also translates into how they perceive their opponents. Centrist populist parties such as ANO argue that differing party beliefs within a polity cause more harm than good, proposing instead to enact apolitical solutions that will bypass any left-right divisions sown by the mainstream (Havlik 2019, 10). This, in turn, highlights another distinctive aspect of centrist populist parties, which is their focus on technocratic legitimacy. They claim that, rather than sustained by ideological leanings, their leaders are validated through their expertise in leading the nation in a practical manner, untainted by the corruption or extremism belonging to either mainstream or radical parties (Guasti and Bustikova 2020; Perrotino and Guasti 2020; Havlik 2019; Hartleb 2015).

Scholars dub this technocratic group of centrist populist parties as “technocratic populists,” who are defined as “output-orient[ed]” as they promise to provide immediate responses to public complaints and attempt to do so through pragmatic and skilled means (Guasti and Bustikova 2020, 468-9).

At first glance, the nature of centrist and technocratic populist parties seems contradictory to populism itself, and their nature as populists may be “contested” (Vachudova 2021, 475). Are technocrats not elites themselves? Does giving them a political platform not threaten the popular sovereignty that is inherent to populism? Mudde (2004) however, gives an example of a socialist party in Canada wherein experts are consulted and valued if they help implement the policy decisions desired by the people (547). In doing so, he explains how technocratic measures may actually be beneficial in furthering the populist cause, and that populists don’t reject being represented by “outsider elites,” as long as they aren’t subverting the people’s will and imposing their own elitist tendencies onto political matters (Mudde 2004, 560). Should a tendency towards technocratic means, however, instantly determine if a party is technocratic populist? Snegovaya (2020) argues against this, stating that scholars should be wary of categorizing technocratic populists as a “distinct theoretical type,” due to their unpredictable party outlines, diverse array of supporters, and limited number of concrete examples within the literature (557). For the purpose of this paper, however, “technocratic populist” parties have been included to elucidate an offshoot of centrist populist parties. Their inclusion also sheds light into an assessment of Macron’s likelihood as either a technocratic populist (Perrotino and Guasti 2020), or a politician simply espousing technocratic rhetoric; that will be discussed further on in this paper.

The general causes of populist and anti-establishment parties

Separating the characteristics surrounding both populist and anti-establishment parties from the factors influencing their rise is an arduous task. Is the denigration of the elite, and the public's subsequent disdain for them, enough to explain the rise of these parties? Can their qualms be fixed with a rise in social welfare policies, or immigration reforms? Choosing to focus on just one of these factors, and isolating the rest, does a disservice to the varying elements that cause populist and anti-establishment parties to grow in popularity. Building on other scholars, Norris and Inglehart (2016) present a clear framework that separates these factors into three categories: demand side, supply side, and institutional structure (3). The demand side includes the opinions and desires of the electorate, driven by factors such as the economy, cultural values, and globalization (Norris and Inglehart 2016, 10; also seen in Tavits and Potter 2015). The supply side involves the rhetoric of charismatic leaders and parties themselves, with the media being an important aspect in facilitating their popularity (Norris and Inglehart 2016, 9). Lastly, Norris and Inglehart (2016) include the institutional side of party activity, which consists of "effective vote thresholds [and] types of electoral systems" (9). The framework will be used throughout this paper because it efficiently demonstrates how the factors leading to the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties are a combination of public opinion, party rhetoric, and internal structure, rather than stemming from one single cause.

Before diving into the electorate's wants and needs, as well as what causes them, it is important to note the demographics of those who make up the "demand side of this framework. Scholars agree that, particularly in Western Europe, the majority of populist and anti-establishment voters lack an extensive education, and are more religious, older males (Spruyt et al. 2016, 342; Norris and Inglehart 2016, 10, 26). Those without high education are usually

disinterested in politics but are also discouraged by the social changes that they feel are being ushered in by the (usually more educated) elite (Spruyt et al. 2016, 338). Meanwhile, the older population tends to espouse more traditionalist views, and are fearful of the possible encroachment of progressivist ideals touting acceptance of all cultural, sexual, or religious minorities (Norris and Inglehart 2016, 3). These voter demographics are mostly found within right-wing populist parties, whereas left-wing populist parties usually consist of younger voters living in urban areas who work in the public sector (Lazar 2021). This is likely because they have a more cosmopolitan mindset that coincides with the inclusionary features of left-wing populist parties, while also holding socialist economic views due to their public sector background. As for centrist populist voters, it is harder to determine their demographics due to the emphasis that these parties place on a third way, non-ideological approach to politics. They are merely characterized by the negative feelings they have towards mainstream parties, which is an aspect shared by all voters of populist and anti-establishment parties.

Demand-side factors

In discussing the “demand side” of Norris and Inglehart’s framework, it is important to indicate the driving forces behind voter affinity towards anti-establishment and populist parties. There is a consensus amongst the literature that gravitation towards these political parties primarily stems from voters’ feelings of neglect, or the belief that mainstream parties are not effective representatives of their beliefs. Apart from embodying their collective worries, these parties assure them that the misfortunes befalling them are not their fault; rather, they are caused by external issues that will be solved altogether (Spruyt et al. 2016, 336). Bakker et al. (2020) use the term “political disaffection” to embody voters’ pessimistic sentiments, as well as their overall disagreement with a party’s stance. They claim that the higher the political disaffection is

among voters, the more likely they will vote for anti-establishment or populist parties (302). It is incorrect to assume, however, that this disdain is an overnight phenomenon. Instead, it is a snowball effect caused by issues such as “rising inequality, corruption, immigration, the threat of unemployment, and Europeanization” that have affected European voters throughout the years (Vachudova 2021, 476). Kriesi and Cloos (2020) go further by arguing that political dissatisfaction coupled with concerns regarding the aforementioned societal issues influence voter choice for radical parties (1, 5).

An important factor driving this disaffection (and situated in the demand side) are voters’ economic anxieties. A disdain for the establishment as a whole was evident after the Great Recession in 2008, with mainstream parties (particularly in Western and Southern Europe) being blamed for their nations’ inability to recover and restore financial stability (Cramme 2013, 5; Luengo et al. 2016, 258; Pappas and Kriesi 2015, 303). So too, issues such as deindustrialization, increasing unemployment, and economic vulnerability played a hand in isolating a certain group of voters from the mainstream while painting populist and anti-establishment parties in a positive light (Algan [2017] in Noury and Roland 2020, 432; Margalit 2019, 154; Spruyt et al. 2016, 342). Classified as the “economic insecurity thesis” by Norris and Inglehart (2016), it demonstrates the influence of the “demands” expressed by the public, positing that voters’ anxieties regarding their economic situation make them more “susceptible” to the divisive and incendiary rhetoric emitted by populist and anti-establishment political parties, no matter their position on the left right spectrum (2, 12).

It is impractical to assume that economic insecurity issues are the only factors that make up the demand side of Norris and Inglehart’s framework (Margalit 2019, 159). Scholars argue that, over time, voters have relied more so on cultural, rather than economic, issues to influence

their decisions (Norris and Inglehart 2016, 25, 30; Noury and Roland 2020, 423). In line with the demand side of their framework, Norris and Inglehart (2016) label this phenomenon the “cultural backlash thesis,” in which voters supporting populist and anti-establishment parties do so out of a fear that their traditional values are being infringed upon by progressivist ideals such as “multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism” (3). For the most part, these cultural concerns resonate amongst voters from countries with a high level of ethnic and religious diversity, and are more manipulated by right-wing populist parties (Tavits and Potter 2015, 754; Bertoa and Rama 2020, 513).

Despite this, there is an inextricable link between economic and cultural concerns driving the demand side of the framework (Norris and Inglehart 2016; Noury and Roland 2020). Certain studies posit that marginalized social groups who tend to vote for populist and anti-establishment parties feel that they have fallen between the cracks of economic security, while also harboring feelings of “cultural distance and estrangement” (Margalit 2019, 166). Margalit (2019) also assesses the relationship between economic and cultural anxieties by stating how those uneasy with cultural changes may criticize their country’s economic issues, while those undergoing economic insecurity may, in turn, blame certain ethnicities (166). This link between economic and cultural concerns causes both the demand and supply sides of the framework to overlap as well, seeing as party behavior itself has contributed to the electorate’s growing emphasis on cultural values. For example, right-wing parties have emphasized “values-based political issues” in order to compete with left-wing parties and their rhetoric concerning economic issues; and their efforts have succeeded at the ballot box (Tavits and Potter 2015, 755). In addition, right-wing populist parties (particularly in Europe) use their country’s current economic issues to champion their own nativist cultural ideals, claiming that rising immigration and multilateral

trade are to blame (Noury and Roland 2020, 435). Due to this, scholars have assessed that part of the demand side characterizing the rise of anti-establishment and populist parties comes from voters driven by economic concerns and cultural cleavages, with the majority focusing on the latter (Norris and Inglehart 2016; Bertoa and Rama 2020).

Another factor on the demand side driving the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties is globalization. Scholars agree that the most Eurosceptic parties are found on both the extreme left and extreme right, as they claim to fight in support of the “losers of globalization” (Hooghe et al. 2002, 985, Hartleb 2015, 43). According to Kriesi (2006), these “losers” consist of employees who have borne the brunt of economic and cultural competition and have thus been faced with job closures and unemployment (922). Globalization is characterized by its “internationalization,” or the increased permeability of physical borders that has brought forth economic integration, immigration, and multilateral cooperation; all a source of concern for many voters (Swank and Betz 2002, 218-219). For example, multilateral efforts to remedy the debt burden facing the European Union, such as “neo-liberal austerity policies” championed by the World Trade Organization and the Economic and Monetary Union, may “restrict institutional power” and thus fuel the populist fervor against any elites supporting foreign intervention (Cramme 2015, 8, 10; Norris and Inglehart 2016, 11). Trade openness has also heightened feelings of instability and neglect amongst voters, as it has outsourced jobs in favor of imports from “low-wage countries,” leading to unemployment in certain sectors of the economy (Norris and Inglehart 2016, 11; Zakaria 2016, 12; Spruyt et al. 2016, 337; Margalit 2019, 154; Noury and Roland 2020, 429). Subsequently, the anti-elitist rhetoric criticizing the domestic, established elite has now included intergovernmental actors (such as the EU), that have fueled an

overall Euroscepticism common throughout radical parties and their supporters (Hartleb 2015, 42; Pappas and Kriesi 2015, 307; Staykova 2015, 113).

An important aspect of globalization pertaining to Norris and Inglehart's "cultural backlash thesis" that explains votes towards anti-establishment and populist parties in Europe has been immigration. Instead of actual empirical studies linking increased immigration with a higher voter affinity for populist parties, scholars argue that it has more to do with perception: the more voters perceive immigration as poorly managed by their countries, the more likely they will vote for populist and anti-establishment parties (Golder 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2016, 11). The subject of immigration fuels both economic and cultural concerns, as voters are wary of immigrants competing with them for jobs, and fear that their cultural values are being threatened by their presence (Noury and Roland 2020, 429). Once again, there is evidence of an overlap within the demand and supply side of Norris and Inglehart's framework, as voters' fears are heightened by the rhetoric expressed by these radical parties. For example, radical right-wing parties tout a nation's "nostalgic past" to marginalize immigrant communities and create xenophobic sympathizers (Norris and Inglehart 2016, 16). In addition, Golder (2003) analyzed how high numbers of immigrants (more than 6.3% of the population) and high unemployment translated into an increase in votes only if right-wing populist parties linked the former as causing the latter, a phenomenon more pertinent to Northern and Western Europe (454; Noury and Roland 2020, 427). With regard to left-wing populist parties (particularly in Southern Europe, which has been more affected by the economic crisis than its Northern counterparts), their rhetoric is mostly centered on the failure of "global capitalist" efforts, such as the euro and WTO, in promoting full economic stability (DeVries and Edwards 2009, 22; Luengo et al. 2016, 254; Rooduijn and Van Kessel 2019, 22; Noury and Roland 2020, 427).

In addition to economic anxieties, cultural cleavages, and globalization, corruption also plays a role within the demand side. Although not all parties that incorporate anti-corruption rhetoric are automatically deemed anti-establishment, it is mainly anti-establishment parties who criticize corruption levels in order to further their agenda (Engler 2020, 4). Anti-establishment parties in Central and Eastern Europe, unlike populist parties in Western and Southern Europe, have risen more so due to perceived corruption within the mainstream than periods of economic instability (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 3). Perceived corruption is also interrelated with political disaffection (an important indicator of voter choice), as demonstrated by voters who already hold a pessimistic view of their nations' political system due to its high levels of corruption (Anderson and Tverdova 2003, 99). Much like an increase in perceived immigration led to a higher affinity towards populist parties in Western Europe, so too a perceived increase in corruption matters more than an actual spike in corruption levels themselves (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 3). In this instance, Norris and Ingleharts' supply side is also evident, as corruption itself is used as a gimmick by populist and anti-establishment parties to garner additional support. Rather than used as a stand-alone argument, these parties denounce corruption while also fighting in favor of other issues, such as pro-market reforms, claiming that by fighting corruption they will also ameliorate the economy (Engler 2020, 3). Such was evident in the 2011 cases of Hungary, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic, whose mainstream parties not only underwent corruption, but were deemed ineligible in solving economic instability, thus setting the stage for anti-establishment parties (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 2). Nevertheless, there are also occasions wherein actual corruption scandals linked to the establishment are a source of additional fodder to anti-establishment parties that claim to defend the people against the 'corrupt' elite (Hartleb 2015, 43;

Engler 2020, 5). These scandals polarize the electorate and affect voter decision, examples of which will be explored further on in this paper when discussing France's 2017 election season.

Supply-side Factors

Whether it be inflammatory remarks against the corruption of the post-communist elite in Central and Eastern Europe, or the failures of the mainstream elite in Western Europe, it is clear that party rhetoric used by anti-establishment and populist parties heightens their appeal (Ucen 2007, 60; Staykova 2015, 112). Party rhetoric is a key factor within the "supply" side of Norris and Inglehart's framework, as it emphasizes the "populist language" used by these parties to sow seeds of discontent amongst voters, as well as further stirring anti-establishment attitudes amongst voters already exhibiting high levels of political disaffection (Barr 2009, 30; Melendez and Kaltwasser 2017, 522). None of this can be achieved, however, without the presence of a charismatic leader at the forefront of each anti-establishment and populist party. It is they who mobilize supporters by embodying their collective struggles and personalizing the "political resentments" they hold towards the mainstream elite (Mudde 2004, 547). Their words are used to rally supporters either against a particular ethnicity, distaste towards an economic policy, or in favor of "pragmatic expertise" in policy decision making (Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 547). As the face of their own party, charismatic leaders emphasize the need for "direct communication" with their voters; in turn, proving to them that they are fighting the same battle against the establishment (Mudde 2004, 545).

Direct communication between charismatic leaders and their supporters is facilitated by the formers' use of the media. The media includes means of communication such as news outlets, television channels, and the Internet; all which have allowed populists and anti-establishment parties to gain increased recognition and have more direct contact with their

supporters (Staykova 2015, 110). As stated by Luengo et al. (2016; 252), this “medialization of politics,” satisfies one of populism’s core tenets: an abhorrence of any mediators between politicians and the public that prevent voters from having a more direct say in policymaking (Heisbourg (2007) in Stayokova 2015, 110). Mudde (2004) traces this phenomenon back to the media’s independence from political parties in the 1960s, as well as increased media competition which, in turn, created a penchant for a “more extreme and scandalous” coverage of politics (553). This further lessened the divide between politicians and the electorate, as it resulted in a “demystification of the political office,” with voters feeling more authorized to criticize political elites for their shortcomings (Mudde 2004, 554, 556).

Although a propensity towards anti-elitism within the media (Hartleb 2015, 42) has facilitated the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties, the media may also be an antagonist to such parties. According to Delsol (2019), this antagonism stems from a classist divide between the media and populist movements. Whereas the media is cosmopolitan and defends globalist ideals, populist supporters are less politically tolerant and more “close minded” which, in turn, limits their representation within the media (Delsol 2019, 353-4). Nevertheless, there exists a divide between media camps defending either cosmopolitan or populist ideals. According to Mazzoleni (2008), one camp comprises the established media that deviates from populist language, acting instead as a “mouthpiece of the ruling classes” by mostly covering mainstream politics (51). The other camp, marked by their preference for ratings over quality media coverage, consists of tabloid and popular media who report on topics widely attributed to populist and anti-establishment rhetoric, such as personal anecdotes and emotions (Mazzoleni 2008, 52).

Institutional Factors

In switching over to a discussion of the institutional side of Norris and Inglehart's framework, it is necessary to reiterate that it involves the impact electoral systems have in promoting the rise of anti-establishment and populist parties (2016, 9). Before delving into the impact of electoral systems, however, it is important to note that a key institutional aspect within the literature that leads to the rise of anti-establishment and populist parties has also been the convergence of mainstream parties towards the center of the ideological scale, characterized by their overlapping support of similar policies (Bertoa and Rama 2020, 509). This, in turn, generated a space for populist and anti-establishment parties to abound due to their proposal of radical policies that resonated with those who felt forgotten by this ideological merging (Zakaria 2016, 9; Noury and Roland 2020, 429).

In discussing the relationship between electoral systems and populist and anti-establishment parties, it is known that plurality electoral systems, rather than proportional representation systems, typically hinder their rise (Bertoa and Rama 2020, 511). Also known as "first past the post," plurality systems encourage a "winner-takes-all" mentality; with the candidate holding an absolute majority declared as an automatic winner (Harewood 2016, 1). Due to this aspect of plurality systems, as well as their tendency to produce a bipolar party system, it is difficult for parties on the fringe of the political system to break through (Kriesi 2015, 3). Contrarily, proportional representation systems tend to give rise to multiparty systems, as each party is given a certain number of seats according to the percentage of votes they obtain (Kriesi 2015, 3; Harewood 2016, 4). This allows smaller parties to be elected and also gives them a chance to form coalitions with larger parties, thus increasing the influence of populist and anti-establishment parties who are just breaking through (Harewood 2016, 8). So too, the

presence of two round (or alternative vote) systems also breed more anti-establishment and populist parties within government (Harewood 2016, 3). This is due to their inclusion of a second-round runoff, in which voters use the first round to express discontent or preference towards a party candidate who might not win while using the second round to vote more “strategically” (“Two Round System” 2017). It is this first round that strengthens the influence of extremist parties by giving them a chance at voter recognition or the possibility of a near victory (Linz 1990, 57; Bertoa and Rama 2020, 511). Boix (1999), however, argued that electoral systems could be manipulated by parties themselves in order to stay in power or obtain more votes (609). For example, if new parties are seeking to enter the party system, old parties keep plurality systems in place in order to prevent their success. The reverse is true if new parties are enjoying electoral breakthroughs at the expense of established parties; proportional representation is thus sought after in order to increase the former’s popularity (Boix 1999, 609).

The 2017 presidential election

In order to understand the significance of the 2017 election season, it is necessary to discuss the circumstances leading up to it. From the start of France’s Fifth Republic in 1958 up until the late 1980s, France witnessed a bipolar modality within its presidential elections that consisted of a clear runoff between parties of the center right (UDF/RPR²) and center left (PS/PCF³) (Drake et al. 2020, 54). After the breakthrough of the *Rassemblement National*⁴ during the late 1980s, the French political system became tripolar as it was divided into three distinct political camps: center-left, center-right, and populist far-right (Kriesi et al. 2006, 947;

² Union for French Democracy/Rally for the Republic

³ Socialist Party/French Communist Party

⁴ Despite running as the *Front National* from its inception up until 2018, this paper will use the newly adopted name of *Rassemblement National* to refer to Le Pen’s populist right-wing party.

Drake et al. 2020, 47). Although a third of the ballots during the 2002 presidential primaries consisted of parties from the far-left and far-right, mainstream parties continued to dominate by encompassing two-thirds of the votes (Cole 2004b, 174). Nevertheless, a clear affinity towards non-mainstream parties was evident in 2002 and continued during the 2007 and 2012 presidential elections (Lemennicier 2005, 1082-1083; Drake et al. 2020, 47). Although mainstream parties continued to lead the polls, the ensuing unpopularity of the Sarkozy (2007-2012) and Hollande (2012-2017) presidencies due to their failed attempts to remedy the economy heightened the vulnerability of France's established parties (Hoyo and Chandler 2017a).

The 2017 presidential election, in turn, sent shock waves throughout the country and abroad. It was the first time that a mainstream party did not make it to the final round of elections ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief" 2017, 1). Seeing as both Sarkozy and Hollande led mainstream parties (the center-right Union for a Popular Movement and the center-left Socialist Party, respectively), it was no surprise that these two parties did not rank high in the first round of the 2017 presidential elections. According to a 2017 report from the Congressional Research Service, Emmanuel Macron of the newly formed centrist *La République en Marche!* party was at the fore with 24% of votes, while Marine Le Pen of the radical right-wing *Rassemblement National* party was a close runner up with 21% of votes. Those who did not make it to the second round consisted of: François Fillon of the center right *Les Républicains* party (formerly, Sarkozy's UMP) with 20% of the votes, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the radical left-wing *France Insoumise* following suit with 19.6% of votes, and Benoit Hamon of the ill-fated Socialist Party trailing behind with 6.4% of votes ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief" 2017, 1). The final round declared Macron as the winner, with 66.1% of the votes, and Le

Pen as the runner up with 33.9% of the votes (Hoyo and Chandler 2017a; Drake et al. 2020, 39). To some, these results were not at all surprising. Rather, they represented a deep dissatisfaction towards mainstream politics that had been accumulating for years (Hoyo and Chandler 2017a).

As expressed previously, voter disdain towards mainstream parties is an integral part in explaining the rise of anti-establishment and populist parties (Bakker et al. 2020, 302; Vachudova 2021, 476). In France, the electorate is notorious for its distrustful attitude towards politicians and political parties. A poll conducted by the *Centre d'Étude de la Vie Politique Française* (CEVIPOF) in 2017 reveals the level of animosity that has remained since the establishment of the French republic itself, with less than 10% of respondents expressing trust in their parties (Cole 2004a, 137; Drake et al. 2020, 42). More negative sentiments against the French establishment can be seen in the French Electoral Study of 2017 below (**Figure 1**). According to the poll, more than half agreed with the statement that politicians did not care about citizens, while only 22% of respondents believed politicians were “trustworthy” (Drake et al. 2020, 43).

Figure 1: “French Opinions about Politicians in 2017” (Drake et al. 2020, 43).

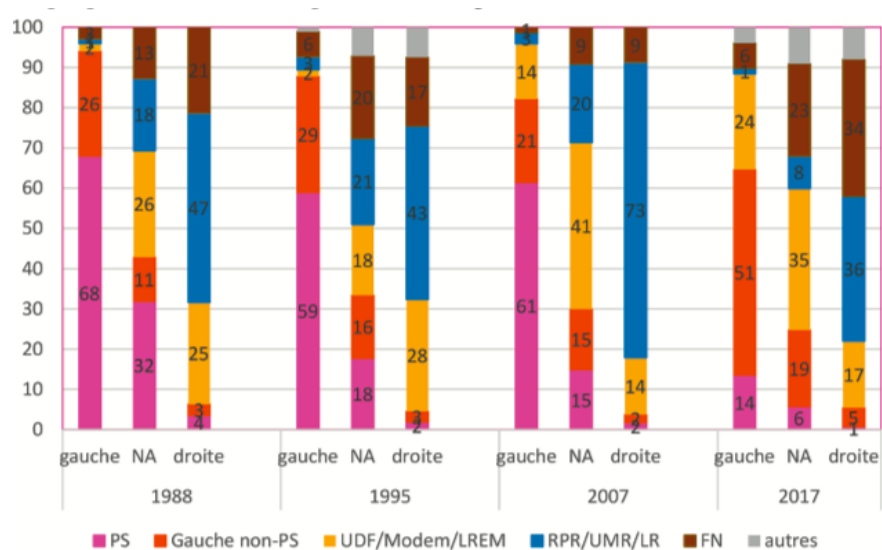
	Agree
The majority of politicians do not care about people like us	69%
The majority of politicians are trustworthy	22%
The politicians are the main problem in France	47%
The majority of politicians are only interested in the rich and the powerful	62%
Corruption such as bribe-taking is widespread/quite widespread among politicians	85%

Source: French Electoral Study 2017

It is no wonder, then, that the 2017 presidential elections witnessed a quarter of the electorate abstaining from voting, as well as a high number of voters who “cast blank or spoiled

ballots” (“France’s 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief” 2017, 2; Hoyo and Chandler 2017a). The French electorate’s overall political disaffection also ties into their disdain with the left-right political divide. According to an IPSOS survey conducted in June of 2017, 71% of respondents agreed that the concept of a left and right wing separation was “outdated” (Tiberj 2017, 1089). This has produced a surge of self-professed non-aligned voters, comprising both centrists and those dubbed by Tiberj (2017) as “ninistes.⁵” According to him, voters forming part of this moniker renounce both the left and right, casting votes that span the ideological spectrum and may also support extremist parties (1097). Their impact can be seen in the chart below (**Figure 2**) as some non-aligned voters (NA) who previously voted for center-right parties such as UDF/Modem (in yellow) in 2007, cast some of their votes for the FN/RN (in brown) during the 2017 elections. These statistics concur with Ucen’s (2004) assessment that, in the midst of voter indifference and “non-participation,” populism is seen as a preferred alternative (68).

Figure 2: “Votes According to Left-Right Positioning” (Tiberj 2017, 1105).



⁵ *Ni gauche ni droite* = neither left nor right

What Led to the Rise of Each Party?

For the purpose of this paper, only three political parties within the first round of the 2017 presidential elections will be analyzed: Le Pen's *Rassemblement National*, Mélenchon's *France Insoumise*, and Macron's *La République en Marche!* All three parties attracted voters through their anti-establishment appeals, whereas both Fillon's and Hamon's parties were situated within the establishment. In addition, both Le Pen's and Mélenchon's parties show a clear affinity towards populism (either on the radical left or radical right) while LREM is clearly anti-establishment. In order to explain their rise in popularity, each party will be assessed through Norris and Inglehart's demand and supply factors: voters' economic anxieties and cultural concerns stemming largely from globalization (demand) as well as the rhetoric of charismatic leaders and their use of the media in swaying voter opinion (supply). A separate assessment of France's electoral system and its personalization of politics during presidential elections (institutional factors) will be explored as well. Altogether, an analysis of these parties under Norris and Inglehart's framework serves to answer the question: what explains the overall rise of populist and anti-establishment political parties in France?

Before delving into an assessment of each political party, it is important to point out that one of the main causes of high political disaffection amongst French voters in 2017 was their anxieties regarding the economy. Similar to other Western European countries, France's economy was impacted by the Great Recession, leaving it with a stagnant GDP growth of less than 1% per year ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief" 5). Coupled with a "growing national debt" and an increase in socio-economic inequality, a feeling of "economic malaise" abounded throughout France (Pappas and Kriesi 2015, 310). It was in response to this "malaise"

that Francois Hollande, running on a campaign replete with promises to restore the economy, became president in 2012 (Grossman and Sauger 2014). However, his dismal approval ratings (14%) hurt his chances of running for reelection and confirmed French voters' disapproval of his handling of the economy (Drake et al. 2020, 41). This ultimately made economic anxiety a pertinent issue amongst French voters.

It is also important to note that the 2017 presidential elections were rocked by a corruption scandal. The 2017 French Electoral Study (**Figure 1**) demonstrates that corruption was already a contending factor influencing the electorate's political disaffection, as 85% of respondents believed corruption was "widespread among politicians" (Drake et al. 2020, 43). Nevertheless, this scandal heavily swayed the final results. Leading up to the overall election season, François Fillon was on a steady path to the presidency. As the center-right candidate, he was popular amongst conservative voters, supporting a limit on immigration while also advocating for free-market reforms and a reduction in public spending (Le Corre 2017). Due to the overlapping rhetoric with that of the *Rassemblement National*, Fillon was set to beat Le Pen in the secondary run-off elections ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief" 2017, 3). Nevertheless, scandal clouded his candidacy, as a satirical newspaper revealed that he had his wife on payroll as a "parliamentary assistant" without her conducting actual work (Drake et al. 2020, 51). Owing to this scandal, as well as Benoit Hamon's precarious standing, neither of their parties made it to the second round ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief" 2017, 1). On the other hand, both LREM and RN gained traction leading up to the run-offs, as several leaders from France's main political parties urged their followers to vote for Macron and prevent a populist victory, while Le Pen was supported by a solid base of voters who had been encouraging her candidacy during previous election periods ("France's 2017 Presidential

Election: In Brief" 2017, 4). This resulted in the final elections declaring Le Pen as the runner up and Macron as the ultimate winner of the presidency.

Le Rassemblement National

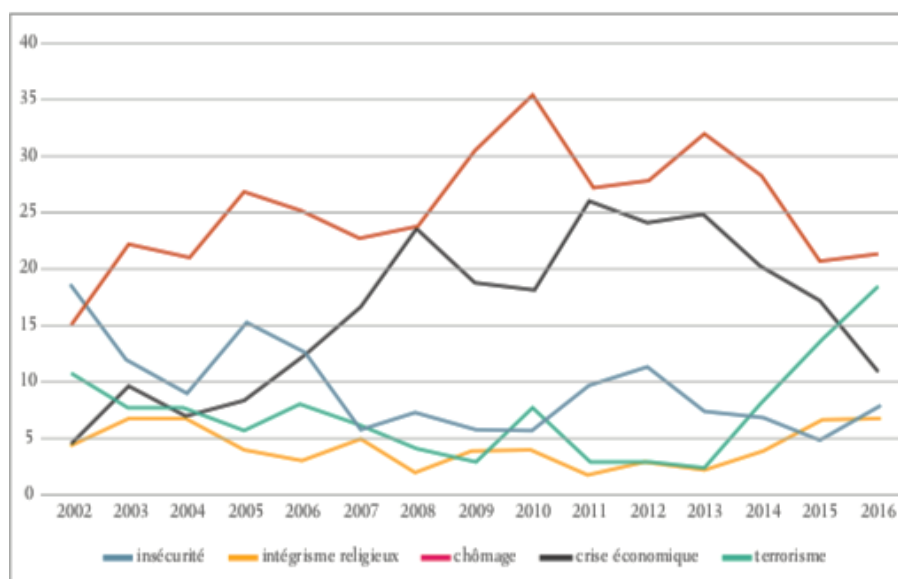
Founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen as the *Front National* in 1972, the RN's early years were marked by futile entryways into French politics (Mayer and Perrineau 1992, 124). Relying on a growing fear of immigration, crime, and discontent toward mainstream parties, the RN managed to breakthrough during the first round of the 1988 presidential elections and obtained around 14% of the votes: the highest since its birth (Mayer and Perrineau 1992, 124). Since 2011, the party has been led by Jean-Marie's daughter, Marine Le Pen, who has centered party rhetoric around two themes: economic globalization and a fear of Islamic fundamentalism ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief " 2017, 3). Although these themes are similar to the ones espoused under Jean-Marie (mainly anti-immigration and a return to law and order), they are more focused on globalization's economic and cultural ramifications within France (Mayer and Perrineau 1992, 131).

Demand: economic anxieties, cultural insecurities, and Europeanization

Economically, the RN is against free trade agreements and foreign-owned companies, arguing that French workers should get first priority for jobs (Swardson et al. 2017; "France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief " 2017, 5). Culturally, the RN possesses exclusionary characteristics that are rampant throughout right-wing populist parties. It supports a curb on immigration, as well as a preservation of French culture by limiting Islamic influence and arguing for more "aggressive counterterrorism and counter-radicalization policies" ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief " 2017, 7). The party's focus on anti-terrorism efforts resonates with the anxieties that several French voters feel towards the integration of other

cultures into French society. According to a 2017 IFOP survey assessing French prejudices towards immigrants, 84% of the respondents who voted for Le Pen in the presidential first round agreed with the statement that France has welcomed many immigrants, therefore, welcoming additional ones is not possible.⁶ It is also clear that the RN taps into voters' economic anxieties through a cultural ploy that inextricably links unemployment to immigration. This is a shrewd political tactic, as unemployment remains one of France's most pervasive issues⁷. A survey conducted by France's National Consultative Commission on Human Rights in 2015 ranking the main concerns of the French electorate (**Figure 3**), showed both unemployment (*chomage*-red) and the overall economic crisis (*crise économique*-black) as surpassing all other issues up to 2014. This serves to explain the RN's popularity amongst those facing unemployment. In analyzing votes from the first round of the 2015 regional elections (which determine the future national elections), 52% of workers vulnerable to unemployment voted for the RN (Mayer 2017, 72).

Figure 3: “The Main Concerns of the French from 2002-2016” (Tiberj 2017, 16)



Source : Baromètre annuel de la Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme (CNCDH).

⁶Fourquet, Jérôme and Dubrulle, Jean-Philippe. “Image et préjugés sur les migrants en France” (Paris: IFOP, 2017)

⁷ France's unemployment rate in March of 2017 was 10%; only 5 EU member states had higher rates (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8002525/3-02052017-AP-EN.pdf/94b69232-83a9-4011-8c85-1d4311215619>)

In addition to its anti-immigration stance, the RN's considerable emphasis on a preserved national identity leaves no doubt about its position on the Eurosceptic scale in 2017. Marine Le Pen was highly critical of France's membership in multilateral organizations such as the European Union and NATO. She was in favor of reinstating the Franc as the use of currency over the euro and claimed that she would remove France from NATO and hold a referendum on EU membership upon entering office (Swardson et al. 2017; "France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief" 2017, 3). The RN's spike in popularity was (and continues to be) largely influenced by voters' fears of the economic and social ramifications that a "globalized economy" might have on France ("France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief" 5). Drake et al (2020) cites the 2017 French Electoral Study to demonstrate how 90% of RN's supporters were skeptical towards the EU and globalization in general, opting towards more protectionist ideals compared to supporters of the other presidential candidates (46). In regards to cultural fears surrounding globalization, a post-electoral Eurobarometer survey conducted after the 2015 regional elections showed that a whopping 85% of respondents projected to vote for the RN agreed that they feared a loss of national culture and identity by belonging to the EU (Belot 2017, 132). So too, 89% of these same respondents also feared EU membership due to the high levels of perceived immigration (Belot 2017, 132).

Supply: Le Pen's rhetoric, restructuring of the RN, and her relationship with the media

Marine Le Pen is notorious for her incendiary rhetoric. In comparing the varying rhetorical elements of the 2017 presidential candidates, Gerstlé and Nai (2019) ranked Le Pen's rhetoric as containing the most "personal attacks, fear messages, informal language, and anti-elitism" (428). Although this divisive verbiage likely hindered her chances in 2017, the media nevertheless latched onto Le Pen's rhetoric. This is supported by Gerstlé and Nai's (2019)

findings, stating that campaigns involving fear appeals and personal attacks equate to higher media coverage, a phenomenon most favorable to Marine Le Pen (419, 432). Undoubtedly, Le Pen's rhetoric is facilitated by the hold that she has on the RN itself. In analyzing the posts and comments on the RN's Facebook page from 2009 up to 2018, Stockemer argues that the party is defined by its cult of personality surrounding Le Pen (2019). It is this charismatic leadership that has allowed Le Pen to embark on a restructuring of her party and its rhetoric. The party itself faced a shift in leadership in 2011, when Marine Le Pen's father stepped down and handed her the reins (Pappas 2015, 308). Since then, she has attempted to modify the RN's approach by steering away from her father's overtly racist rhetoric that used to arouse a "halo of moral indignation and social reprobation" surrounding its voters (Mayer and Perrineau 1992, 2; Shields 2016, 9). Known as "de-demonization," Le Pen has strived to further alienate the party from its dark legacy by changing its name from *Front* to *Rassemblement National* in 2018. Although her party aims to portray a more inclusive front, many believe that the name change is simply a red herring concealing the party's unchanged nature (Mcnicoll 2018). Others have called it a "campaign strategy" as it is argued that her populism is more "toned down" in the media during election seasons, compared to the higher levels of populist rhetoric on the party's Facebook page (Baloge and Hubé 2021, 24). Her efforts, however, have not been entirely in vain. Certain articles have referred to the RN as an "almost mainstream party," citing its position within the European Parliament since 2004, and its high voter rankings, as proof that it is not a complete 'outsider' party (Le Corre 2017; Hoyo and Chandler 2017a).

La France Insoumise

Founded a year before the 2017 presidential elections, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's FI is an expression of the populist and anti-establishment French left. Mélenchon originally served as a

member of the Socialist Party, and then led a failed presidential campaign in 2012 as the head of the newly formed *Front de Gauche* (Left Front) party, before creating the FI to run in 2017 (Hamburger 2018, 103).

Demand: economic anxieties, cultural insecurities, and Europeanization

The FI is characterized by its progressivist values: it calls for wealth redistribution as well as increased public spending on the economy to remedy issues such as unemployment (“France’s 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief” 2017, 3; Hamburger 2018, 102). Seeing as a quarter of French youth under the age of 25 are unemployed, it is no surprise that the majority of Mélenchon’s voters are young, lower to middle class, and supportive of a state-led economy (Atkinson 2017; Marlière 2018, 21). Although only 36% of Mélenchon’s voters agreed with the statement that “customs barriers and economic protectionism should be restored in France”, the idea of trade protectionism remains an important part of the FI, as Mélenchon has supported taking France out of NATO and other trade agreements (Drake et al. 2020, 45; Marlière 2018, 17). Mélenchon is also critical of the European Union; however, unlike his radical right wing opponent, Mélenchon does not see the EU as a threat to France’s cultural integrity. Rather, he urges France to leave the union only if its membership poses a threat to a more progressive France (Swardson et al. 2017). This includes any harsh austerity measures (such as those imposed in Greece) and other neo-liberal infringements on France’s financial sovereignty (Belot 2017, 134). This ambivalence towards the EU is expressed in the 2017 French Electoral Survey, as 62% of Mélenchon’s voters agree that belonging to the union was a “good thing” while 37% disagreed (Drake et al. 2020, 45). It is thus clear that what brings Mélenchon and the FI’s voters together are economic anxieties instead of cultural concerns. This is evident in the same 2017 IFOP survey assessing French prejudices towards immigrants, in which only 36% of the

respondents who voted for Mélenchon in the presidential first round agreed with the statement that France should not welcome any additional immigrants.⁸

Supply: Mélenchons rhetoric and his relationship with the media

It is no surprise that Mélenchon's centrality as a leader is an essential component of the FI (Marliere 2018, 22). Inspired by other populist left-wing leaders such as Bernie Sanders and *Podemos'* Pablo Iglesias, it was Mélenchon who created the FI and radicalized its discourse after leaving his *Front de Gauche* party (Baloge and Hubé 2021, 27). Ranked as containing the most "informal language and anti-elitism" amongst the 2017 presidential candidates, Mélenchon's rhetoric has alienated several left-wing parties, who view the FI as too radical and populist for their liking (Hamburger 2018, 102; Gerstlé and Nai 432, 2019). From his part, Mélenchon encourages this alienation, as he believes the left-wing parties of the past have made false promises and adopted neo-liberal tendencies (Delsol 2019, 355). Some ways in which he has distanced himself is by separating his party's ideologies from those of the Socialist and Communist parties, choosing instead to declare the FI as the "sole champion of the left in France" (Hamburger 2018, 107, 109). This shows that, rather than driving the fragmented left to unite together, Mélenchon seeks to foment an uprising of defiance and overall institutional distrust amongst the entire population, no matter their ideological leanings (Hamburger 2018, 106; Marlière 2018, 9). He does so by claiming that political parties (across the left and right) are no longer adequate enough to espouse party demands, and that "movements" such as the FI are the new future (Marlière 2018, 7, 10). Much like his other populist left-wing counterparts, Mélenchon does espouse some inclusionary ideals. For example, he tapped into peoples' disaffection with mainstream parties (and their penchant to abstain from voting), by promising to

⁸Fourquet, Jérôme and Jean-Philippe Dubrulle. "Image et préjugés sur les migrants en France" (Paris: IFOP, 2017)

better engage his voters in the political process and include “ordinary people” in governmental positions (Hamburger 2018, 104).

Concerning his relationship with the media, Mélenchon has sought to make himself more approachable by increasing his social media presence, whether it be through YouTube or other networking sites (such as Twitch and Discord) to directly communicate with his followers (Gerstlé and Nai 2019, 430; Baloge and Hubé 2021, 25). Despite this, he received “less media attention” compared to his political opponents (Gerstlé and Nai 2019, 430). Similar to Mazzoleni’s (2008) assessment of two distinct media camps that cover either mainstream or fringe politics, there also exists a divide between traditional news and social media within France. This is important to note, because although news readership on social media has gained traction in France, it is more so traditional news that has influenced the overall “media ecosystem” (“Media Polarization a la Francaise?: Comparing the French and American Ecosystems,” 12; Zuckerman 2019). These traditional news outlets comprise publications that have become part of the mainstream or “core” media due to their faithful coverage of established political parties, such as *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* (Zuckerman 2019). On the other side lie the “peripheral” media, consisting of (regional or online-only) news outlets that are more anti-elitist in nature, as their reports center on the shortcomings of the French political mainstream (Zuckerman 2019). This, in turn, explains Mélenchon’s interaction with “alternative” media sources throughout his campaign, as it emphasized his distaste towards traditional, elitist media (Baloge and Hubé 2021, 32). Nevertheless, whereas Le Pen’s attempts at “de-demonization” are seen through her interaction with more traditional news outlets, Mélenchon’s efforts to present his party as more radical during election seasons (compared to standard periods) explain his preference in citing media outlets belonging to the periphery (Baloge and Hubé 2021, 24-5).

La République en Marche!

Another relatively new political party, LREM was founded in early 2016 by Emmanuel Macron. Despite a brief stint as an economic minister under former President Hollande, Macron stands out from his opponents by having virtually no background in politics (Gillet 2017). Despite this, he managed to breakthrough and gain victory over the two aforementioned parties in 2017.

Demand: economic anxieties, cultural insecurities, and Europeanization

LREM is characterized by its more conservative, pro-market policies, with Macron in favor of a laissez-faire market approach that includes a reduction in public spending and an increase in business investment (“France’s 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief” 2017, 5; Gillet 2017). These ideals resonate with the party’s supporters, as seen in the 2017 French Electoral Study in which less than a third of respondents who voted for Macron preferred state-controlled efforts to remedy the economy (Drake et al. 2020, 45). So too, LREM is marked by its “left wing social policies” such as championing for shared economic benefits transcending all levels of society as well as advancing social mobility (“France’s 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief” 2017, 5; Gillet 2017). This, in turn, has set LREM apart as a centrist party adopting both left and right-wing policies (Hoyo and Chandler 2017a; Gillet 2017).

In terms of globalization, LREM is the sole party amongst the three to support free trade and EU membership, claiming that it will strengthen France’s geopolitical power (“France’s 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief” 2017, 8). His voters seem to agree too, as 86% of those surveyed in the 2017 French Electoral Study were in agreement with France’s membership in the EU (Drake et al. 2020, 45). Nevertheless, Macron’s projections are for France to have a less complacent and more active role within the EU. As part of his “European project,” for example,

Macron calls for the creation of a “common budget” overseen by a finance minister (Belot 2017, 137; Atkinson 2017). Despite this, Macron does not present himself as an adversary of immigration, and neither do his supporters. According to the same 2017 Electoral Study, more than two thirds of Macron’s voters believed “immigrants were a source of cultural enrichment” (Drake et al. 2020, 44). In addition, more than half of Macron’s voters within the 2017 IFOP survey assessing French prejudices towards immigrants disagreed that immigrants made it harder for French citizens to find jobs.⁹ Thus, Macron’s popularity differs from Le Pen’s (and likens to Mélenchon’s) in that it seeks to appease economic anxieties rather than stemming from cultural concerns. This also explains why Macron’s voter demographics consist of those with high education levels from urban areas, as they tend to have a more cosmopolitan mindset that make them more accepting of immigration and globalization (“The Maps that Show How France Voted and Why” 2017).

Supply: Macron’s rhetoric and his relationship with the media

One key element that likens Macron’s rhetoric to that of his opponents is its hostility towards political parties of the mainstream, citing their defective promises that have stagnated French society (Bordignon 2017, 1). Nevertheless, Macron’s anti-establishment appeals do not take the form of inflammatory rhetoric. In assessing Macron’s discourse alongside other 2017 presidential candidates, Gerstlé and Nai (2019) found that Macron scored the highest in his use of “enthusiasm appeals and civil language,” while scoring the lowest in “personal attacks, fear messages, informal language and anti-elitism” (428). Although campaigns involving fear appeals and personal attacks equate to higher media coverage, they also noted that more positive appeals promoting hope and enthusiasm were the primary indicators of high media coverage (Gerstlé and

⁹Fourquet, Jérôme and Jean-Philippe Dubrulle. “Image et préjugés sur les migrants en France” (Paris: IFOP, 2017)

Nai 2019, 431). Gerstlé and Nai (2019) ultimately concluded that Macron's positive campaign rhetoric influenced his electoral victory (419).

According to the literature, another key aspect of Macron's political discourse has been its technocratic elements. Certain scholars have categorized LREM as similar to other "technocratic populist" parties, such as Beppe Grillo's Movimento 5 Stelle in Italy and Babiš' ANO in the Czech Republic, due to their emphasis on "effective solutions" that will answer the people's demands, rather than the "ideological discourses" touted by mainstream parties (Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 548; Snegovaya 2020; Zappettini and Maccaferri 2021). Their legitimacy is mainly grounded on skill and expertise, which benefited Macron with his impressive background as a student in renowned schools such as Sciences Po and ENA¹⁰ (Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 548). His previous involvement in the banking sector also set him apart from other Socialist ministers (tainted from Hollande's ill-fated presidency) as a logical politician willing to get things done (Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 550). However, Snegovaya's (2020) cautionary urging against categorizing technocratic populist parties as a separate category demonstrates that Macron cannot automatically be classified as a technocratic populist. Rather, his rhetoric is similar to that of other technocratic leaders in that it argues against ideological leanings and focuses on practical solutions. For example, Macron's appeal to his voters is that anyone with any ideological leaning is welcome to join the party, thus further minimizing the left-right divide characterizing previous election seasons (Chwalisz 2018).

Much like its political opponents (and other technocratic leaders), Macron is defined by his charismatic leadership within LREM as he founded the party and used it to run for the presidency. It is, however, important to note that the party shares more commonalities with the

¹⁰ *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*; one of the "grandes-ecoles" or prestigious universities in France

FI than with the RN. For example, Macron’s party structure was marketed as having a strong leader at the top coupled with grassroots-like mobilization strategies (Chwalisz 2018). This structure allowed LREM to conduct a mass interview project¹¹ upon its inception, as it mobilized volunteers to head out into three large cities within France to talk to people about their most pressing political concerns (Chwalisz 2018). Macron has also echoed Mélenchon’s anti-party discourse by arguing against the feasibility of political parties in general, claiming that they will be replaced by movements such as LREM (Bordignon 2017, 1; Chwalisz 2018; Marliere 2018, 5).

Seeing as Macron’s LREM is currently in power, his political efficacy can be measured differently from that of Le Pens and Mélenchon. Has he made inroads in establishing a truly centrist government without mainstream tendencies, or was this simply a part of his rhetoric? In keeping with his technocratic leanings, Macron instituted members of the National Assembly who, like him, had no political background upon entering government. However, this move has been criticized as an “elitist renewal,” on account of the majority of members being highly educated and having backgrounds in corporate administration (Chwalisz 2018). Macron’s perceived penchant towards elitism has also not made him fare better in the polls. According to a 2018 survey conducted by CEVIPOF and IPSOS, 76% of respondents agreed that Macron’s policies “benefit the more privileged” (Drake et al. 2020, 54). Furthermore, Macron’s overall approval ratings have faltered, with 54% of voters disapproving of him while 44% support him (Vachudova 2021, 485; Busquets 2022).¹²

¹¹ Known as *Le Diagnostique du Pays*: <https://en-marche.fr/articles/actualites/le-diagnostic>

¹² The gap between those who approve and disapprove of Macron, however, has somewhat lessened compared to April 2021, which showed a 60% disapproval rate and a 30% approval rate towards Macron (<https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/france/>)

Institutional Side: France's Unique Electoral System

France's double-ballot and semi-presidential system produces its own set of factors influencing the rise of anti-establishment and populist parties. Due to its semi-presidential system, France is governed by both a president and prime minister. The former is elected by the people to be their head of state, while the latter is appointed by the president to be the head of government (Bernard 2022). Within this system, regional and national elections alike undergo a double ballot (two-round) voting system. In order to run in the first round, a prospective candidate needs signatures from 500 elected officials sponsoring their bid to run (Mcnicoll 2022). If no candidate receives the majority of votes after the first round, then the two candidates with the highest percentage of votes move onto the second round of elections two weeks after the first (Mcnicoll 2022). The victor of this second round of elections is declared the winner and becomes the next president. This type of electoral system does pose a danger, however, as voters use the first round to choose a candidate out of spite or to express certain sentiments, whereas they vote more prudently in the second round. This can, in turn, lead to the election of extremist candidates (Cole 2004a, 145).

A month later, however, French voters prepare for the 'third round' or parliamentary elections. These elections determine the *députés*¹³ of the National Assembly's lower level which, in turn, dictate the parties that are going to help govern the president by forming coalitions throughout their term in office ("French Parliamentary Elections" 2022). These *députés* are also elected by a two-round voting system: candidates move onto the next round only if no candidate has obtained 50% (majority) of the votes. However, what is different about parliamentary

¹³ Delegates within France's legislative branch

elections is that any candidate who has received more than 12.5% of the votes can also be part of the second round, thus allowing more than two candidates to be on the second-round ballot (Crepaz 2017, 70; “French Parliamentary Elections” 2022). Seeing as France has both a semi-presidential system and two-round elections for the president and the *députés*, it is clear that parties on the fringe of mainstream politics have a chance to be on the electoral ballot.

Nevertheless, the rise of France’s RN within the National Assembly was, in fact, due to a slight change within the parliamentary elections. In 1985, then-president Francois Mitterand of the Socialist Party oversaw the change from a two-round to a proportional voting system for parliament (Crepaz 2017, 71). In order to explain the reason for this change, it is necessary to expound upon the coalitionary groups of parties within the National Assembly at that time. After the founding of the Fifth Republic, and before the 2017 parliamentary elections (which will be touched upon later), French parliamentary elections used to be dominated by a “bipolar quadrille” consisting of two left-wing parties against two right-wing parties (Cole 2004a, 146). The first round of the parliamentary elections pitted both parties within the left or the right against each other, whereas the second round pitted the parties (from either the left or right) who obtained the most electoral votes against each other (Crepaz 2017, 70). In 1985, this “quadrille” was made up of the Communist and Socialist parties on the left, and the UDF and RPR parties on the right (Crepaz 2017, 70). Both parties on the left, however, were projected to have a dismal number of votes compared to the parties on the right. Due to this, Mitterrand pushed for the switch to proportional voting in order to weaken the right’s influence and strengthen the left’s, which corroborates with Boix’s (1999; 609) assertion that electoral systems could be manipulated by parties themselves in order to stay in power or obtain more votes (Crepaz 2017, 71). In turn, proportional representation allowed other right-wing “splinter parties” (such as the

RN) to take away seats from the UDF/RPR within the National Assembly (Crepaz 2017, 72). This concerned the mainstream right-wing parties, and a return to two-round voting was thus reinstated by them a year later (Crepaz 2017, 72). This coalitionary nature within the National Assembly was integral for Macron to remain in power after the 2017 presidential elections. The parliamentary elections in 2017 were marked by the “shattering” of the long-established quadrille, as LREM formed a coalition with the centrist/center-right MoDem party¹⁴ and obtained 350 of the 577 National Assembly seats (Hoyo and Chandler 2017b). The rest of the seats were split between Les Républicains (113 seats), the Socialist Party (29), Mélenchon’s FI (15), and Le Pen’s RN (8) (Hoyo and Chandler 2017b).

The ability for Mitterrand to enact the switch from two-round to proportional voting emphasizes the high personalization of politics that exists within France. Dating back to Charles de Gaulle’s founding of the nation’s Fifth Republic¹⁵, the political culture of France has always prioritized the charisma of a leader over its party’s policies. Coupled with its semi-presidential system and double ballot electoral system, it is consequently more feasible to “build a movement around one leader” in France than in other parts of Europe (Chwalisz 2018). This explains the fluid nature of political parties themselves: over the years, new parties have risen while others have been sidelined into extinction for the sole purpose of aiding an individual’s campaign (Bélanger et al. 2006).

Such was the case of the UDF party, which was founded in 1978 to support Giscard d’Estaing’s presidency, but was later dissolved to fulfill Francois Bayrou’s aims of running for president under a newly formed centrist party (MoDem) in the late 1990s (Cole 2004b, 155-7). This is also evident amongst the three parties that have been analyzed within this paper. Le Pen’s

¹⁴ *Mouvement Démocrate*; formerly, the UDF party

¹⁵ It was de Gaulle who also instituted France’s current semi-presidential and double ballot electoral system

recent change of party name from the *Front* to *Rassemblement National* shows her attempt to de-radicalize her party and make it more appealing to voters. Mélenchon's abandonment of his *Front de Gauche* party and subsequent founding of *La France Insoumise* demonstrate his willingness to structure a party that will fit his own campaign needs (Marliere 2018, 20). Macron's creation of *La République en Marche!* also emphasizes the frailty of political parties themselves compared with charismatic leaders. Thus, the personalization of politics influences France's institutional aspects, as it makes political parties indistinguishable from their founders.

Discussion

The factors explaining the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties within France in 2017 both coincide with and differ from the general factors expressed within the literature. There is no doubt that a culture of political disaffection has severely disillusioned French voters from electing mainstream parties, with many choosing to either become *ninistes* or abstain from voting overall (Hoyo and Chandler 2017a, Tiberj 2017). This confirms Bakker et al.'s assessment that higher levels of political disaffection within the electorate indicate a higher propensity to vote for anti-establishment and populist parties (2020). In delving more into the demand side factors present in 2017, certain aspects of France conformed with Norris and Inglehart's framework. Economic anxieties were clearly an issue, with unemployment serving as the common concern amongst voters of the RN, FI, and LREM. LREM's pro-market, conservative economic approach seemed promising to those recovering from Hollande's ill-fated Socialist party, while the FI's focus on high public expenditure mobilized support from those fearing neo-liberal policies. Only the RN, however, upholds scholars' claims that an intersection of cultural concerns and economic anxieties drives the demand side (while still placing greater emphasis on the former).

This is because the crux of the RN's agenda is its fervent anti-immigration stance, as it blames virtually all of France's difficulties on increased immigration flows.

The other demand side factor that does unite these parties is their focus on globalization, specifically, their support concerning membership within the European Union or lack thereof. The RN's view on globalization pertains more to Norris and Inglehart's "cultural backlash" thesis, as it believes EU membership has posed a threat to France's cultural integrity. By contrast, the FI's view on globalization touches more upon Norris and Inglehart's "economic insecurity" thesis, as it believes EU membership jeopardizes France's movement towards progressivism. Meanwhile, LREM conforms with none of these by positioning itself as France's only saving grace in the geo-political arena, promising to not only stay in the EU but increase France's influence within it. In regard to corruption, the 2017 elections showed that it was an actual corruption scandal, rather than high levels of perceived corruption, that denigrated the final mainstream candidate in the eyes of the electorate and made way for both Le Pen and Macron. Although the last statistic in **Figure 1** does support Anderson and Tverdova's (2003) correlation between perceived corruption and political disaffection, the supporters of these three parties were not drawn by anti-corruption appeals as heavily as they were drawn by other factors. Thus, it was more so Francois Fillon's corruption scandal (alongside other factors including economic anxieties, cultural concerns, and Europeanization) that influenced voter demand during the 2017 elections, rather than an overall social malaise concerning increased perceived corruption levels.

Despite being influenced by some factors on the demand side, the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties within France can ultimately be explained by an amalgamation of supply side and institutional factors. This is due to the heavy personalization of politics that

exists in France. Charismatic leadership, an important element within the supply side, is consequently prized because it drives parties (and their supporters) to identify with the leader more so than the party's policies. This allows for party discourse in France to be highly influential and indistinguishable from its leaders' own ideologies. For example, it was Le Pen's rhetoric towards immigration that resonated with many of her supporters and framed the RN's overall stance on immigration. So too, it was both Mélenchon's and Macron's rhetoric emphasizing a deviation from mainstream parties of the past that increased their popularity and also structured the basis of their party's agenda. Media coverage was also influential, particularly as it was the leaders themselves who gained more recognition than their party platforms. This was especially evident within Le Pen's and Macron's campaigns, as the former did obtain some media coverage due to her "extreme and scandalous" rhetoric that is usually popular amongst media outlets, whereas the latter's media coverage also grew due to his positive and hopeful promises (Mudde 2004, 553; Gerstlé and Nai 2019). Institutional factors also facilitated this personalization of politics because France's semi-presidential system and double ballot voting prioritize the political persona over party objectives (Chwalisz 2018). France's institutional factors have also enabled the fluidity of parties themselves as new parties have been assembled on the backs of former parties with the aim of supporting a candidate's run for office. The three parties analyzed within this paper are characterized by this phenomenon: both Mélenchon and Macron's parties were set in motion to make their candidacy for president more viable, while Le Pen has recently changed her party's longstanding name as an effort to "de-radicalize" her rhetoric and increase her appeal to voters.

France's personalization of politics also coincides with the general understanding of populist and anti-establishment parties. Populist parties obtain support through their people-

centric and anti-elitist “us/them” discourse, while anti-establishment parties particularly criticize mainstream parties (Mudde 2004, Ucen 2007). Nonetheless, both types of parties use their novel entrance into politics to further stress their superiority over established parties and appeal to the people (Hartleb 2015). These tenets are found within France’s personalization of politics, as the action of building a new party (or constantly renaming them) before every election season confirms a distaste with mainstream political parties in France. French politicians, in turn, exploit this anti-establishment sentiment by using it as a tactic to further their own campaign. Their penchant towards charismatic leadership (another aspect of populist and anti-establishment parties) makes it so that they embody the parties they’ve created. This in turn, allows them to run on a platform wherein their own beliefs are emphasized rather than a tangible party blueprint. As a result, Le Pen, Mélenchon, and Macron prevailed in 2017 because they fused their respective party’s platforms with their own ideologies, while also promising to fight for the people’s best interests by staving off unwanted factors; be it cultural integration, neoliberalism, or radical populism itself. However, political personalization can pose a problem as it leads to parties garnering only surface-level support that has largely been brought about by their leaders. Due to this, French parties typically run on a campaign filled with emotional “dynamics” but with little to no substance to its policies which could, in turn, jeopardize their eventual political longevity (Ucen 2004, Perrotino and Guasti 2020, 549).

Conclusion

Five years later, France has once again undergone a presidential election season. Rather than send shockwaves like the 2017 election, the 2022 presidential election results merely confirmed the rising trend of anti-establishment and populist parties within France. The

candidates with the highest polling percentages in the first round consisted of Macron with 27.9% of votes, Le Pen with 23.2% of votes, and Mélenchon with 22% of the votes. Those trailing behind included Eric Zémour of the newly founded radical-right party *Reconquête!* with 7.1% of the votes, and Valerie Pécresse of the center-right *Les Républicains* with 4.8% of the votes (Voce and Clarke 2022). These statistics sealed the fate of France's mainstream parties, as the center-left Socialist party did not even make it to the first round, while the center-right party lagged behind a radical-right party. Nevertheless, both Zemmour and Pécresse fared well in the polls around late 2021, as there were predictions that either candidate would bypass Le Pen and go head-to-head with Macron. Although this did not occur, both candidates did garner some popularity, with Zemmour's highly inflammatory rhetoric appealing to those disappointed with the RN while Pécresse's tough stance on immigration stood out because it resembled the RN's (Duguet and Parrot 2022; Onishi 2021). Their popularity, coupled with the 2022 voter statistics, uphold the findings of this paper because they show the integral role that personalized politics played within this recent election. For example, Zemmour founded his party four months prior to the election and managed to be the fourth candidate in the first round without having a background in politics. So too, Mélenchon's progressivist appeals managed to increase his voter ratings compared to 2017.

At the outset, the final round of the 2022 presidential elections does not seem entirely different from that of the 2017 electoral results: both Macron and Le Pen were pitted against each other, with Macron re-elected as president. Upon closer inspection, however, it is evident that Macron's voter percentages took a minor dive, as he obtained a total of 55.8% of the votes compared to 66.1% in 2017, while Le Pen had a slight uptick in support, with a total of 41.5% of the votes compared to 33.9% in 2017 (Busquets 2022). During their concession speeches,

Zemmour urged his supporters to vote for Le Pen, Pécresse called on her supporters to vote for Macron, and Mélenchon simply pleaded with his followers not to vote for Le Pen (“Rhétorique de la défaite: on a analysé les discours de Mélenchon, Pécresse et Zemmour”). Thus, a slight increase in Le Pen’s votes can be surmised by Zemmour’s wielding of certain votes that translated towards Le Pen, while Macron’s percentages may indicate the support of several Pécresse voters, but can also be attributed to Mélenchon’s refusal to outrightly support Macron. However, could Le Pen’s and Macron’s percentages also indicate their inroads into the mainstream? Le Pen’s inroads have had more positive undertones, as they’ve included toning down past anti-semitic and homophobic rhetoric, focusing more on the economy than cultural concerns and, more recently, dropping her anti-EU stance and foregoing criticism of the euro (Walt 2022; Duguet and Parrot 2022). On the contrary, Macron’s inroads into the mainstream have generated negative undertones. According to Drake et al. (2020), the pro-market policies implemented under Macron have made him lean more towards the right than left in the eyes of French voters (54). This has generated widespread unpopularity towards Macron¹⁶, starting with the Yellow Vests protests in 2018 and culminating in a set distaste for his elitist tendencies in 2022. Thus, this past election was categorized as both “anti-Macron and anti-Le Pen” with a vote for Macron being a vote against right-wing populism, while a vote for Le Pen was a vote against Macron’s “out of touch” policies and detached governance (Onishi and Méheut 2022).

Seeing as none of France’s usual mainstream parties made it onto the final ballot in 2022, LREM’s and RN’s apparent deviation from their populist and anti-establishment roots entails a possible restructuring of the French political system. LREM’s current stance as a centrist to

¹⁶ As of March 31, 2022 Macron’s ratings are 43% approval, 54% disapproval (<https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/france/>)

center-right party and the RN's position as an established radical right party leaves a left-wing space that, according to the 2022 electoral results, may be led by Mélenchon's FI. Will France thus be home to a renewed tripolar party system? Drake et al. (2020) warns against making such hasty conclusions based on presidential elections, as party coalitions within local municipal elections can also determine the structure of France's political system (54). Likewise, the restructuring of the French political structure is also contingent on the parliamentary elections that will take place next month, and the coalitions that will thus be created to govern France.

Certain limitations exist within this project, particularly, the fact that the Macron and Le Pen divide does not represent the entire French electorate. Both the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections were marred by high voter abstention, with the rate being 25% for the former and 28% for the latter (Walt 2022). According to Harewood (2016), this is a major drawback of the alternative vote or double ballot system, as the final votes do not accurately represent "the wishes of the electorate" (3). Nonetheless, the French electorate is highly susceptible to the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties. France's penchant for personalized politics is the root cause of this rise, because it prioritizes charismatic leaders that are willing to create a new party and tap into populist and anti-establishment rhetoric in order to further their own agendas. France's personalization of politics does, however, carry certain implications. If Macron continues to be unpopular, then how will this personalization of politics affect LREM's longevity? Will the party disintegrate if Macron chooses to do what previous candidates have done, which is abandon his party and create a new one? Will another candidate, eyeing the space that has been left by Le Pen's and Macron's inroads into the mainstream, run on another populist and anti-establishment campaign in the 2027 presidential elections? Or will they be thwarted by a Le Penian presidency with Mélenchon as a runner up? Further studies analyzing these

implications would greatly enhance the overall literature on populist and anti-establishment parties, as well as emphasize the distinctiveness of the French case and its personalized politics.

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