Forecasting the 2022 French Presidential Election

Introduction to Forecasting the 2022 French Presidential Election

Richard Nadeau, *University of Montreal, Canada*
Bruno Jérôme, *University of Paris II, France*
Michael S. Lewis-Beck, *University of Iowa, USA*

The French presidential election of 2022 formed a domestic and international pivot in the world of established democracies. It is not coincidental that, for the first time, *PS: Political Science & Politics* offered a symposium on forecasting these contests, bringing together the work of nine researchers (or research teams). The French presidential election was key because of its economic and political weight, especially within the European Council, in which France exercises a leading governance role—and more so in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and its long-term internal and external consequences. This presidential race also raised serious concerns about the structuring of a nation's political life around the Left–Right divide in France as well as in several other contemporary democracies. Would the Centrist "shock" observed in the 2017 French presidential and legislative elections (although not in the local elections held thereafter) reassert itself in 2022, ushering in a durable change in the traditional Left–Right French political equilibrium?

More specifically, would the moderate forces gathered around the incumbent, President Emmanuel Macron, either from a divided Left or the Classical Right by Valérie Pécresse, be able to recover from their 2017 debacle and reach the second round of the contest? Would Marine Le Pen create history by lifting the Extreme Right to the second round for a second consecutive election? Would Eric Zemmour and his new party *Reconquête!* upset the old game of the installed rival parties? Or would Macron again take advantage of his enfeebled moderate opponents, winning by default against a candidate that most voters considered too radical? These were among the many questions that this symposium, dedicated to the forecasting of the French presidential election, could help to answer.

Academically, an extensive literature has emerged around election forecasting in leading democracies during the past three decades. Perhaps oddly, however, the French case remains understudied. The use of forecasting models to predict the results of French presidential elections especially dates back to Lewis-Beck's 1995 article. A few years later, Jérôme and Jérôme-Speziari (2001) described another model that uses regionalized data to address the small-N problem (see also Foucault and Nadeau 2012). Fauvelle-Aymar and Lewis-Beck (2002) presented the Iowa model to predict the French presidential elections. Appropriately, in this symposium, Stegmaier and Adou (2022) review 27 years of French presidential election forecasting, with modelers adapting to the complexities of a two-round balloting system impacted by new issues and changes in the party system. Looking toward the future, they herald the new challenges that forecasters had to face in the Spring 2022 contests.

To meet the 2022 challenge directly, this symposium presents six different forecasting methodologies as applied to the French presidential election. Revisiting the classic Iowa model, Bélanger, Feitosa, and Turgeon (2022) propose a modified specification and a new definition of the dependent variable. The article by Jérôme-Speziari and Bélanger (2022) follows the tradition of disaggregated-voting analysis on a regional basis but also offers a seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR) model. Innovating on two levels, the efforts of Jérôme, Mongrain, and Nadeau (2022) develop a "synthetic" model to predict the outcomes of French presidential elections (combining it with the SUR approach). In a pioneering turn, Dufresne, Jérôme, Lewis-Beck, Murr, and Savoie (2022) test the utility of citizen forecasting whereby respondents provide voter expectations rather than voter intentions. Graefe's (2022) contribution represents the first attempt to use the PollyVote approach to forecast national elections in France, including the combination of forecasts and the addition of a panel of French experts. Facchini (2022) tests an innovative approach that involves the use of political-party popularity scores to predict the results of the next French presidential election.

In addition to forecasting models per se, the symposium invited two articles that focused more on electoral process and institutions. Since the reform of the five-year term, the legislative elections immediately follow the presidential elections, which means that the majority that will govern France actually arises from a "four-round election," as characterized by Parodi (2007). Dolez and Laurent (2022) used forecasting results of

the French legislative contests to foretell whether the new president-elect could rely on a majority in the French National Assembly. Berg, Gruca, and Rietz (2022) discuss something never before tried in the French presidential-election context:

his closest opponent. Indeed, the average forecast for a sitting president in the first round is 25.5% of the votes, which gave him a significant lead (according to the models) of 5.9 percentage points over his most serious competitor. All of the

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How and under what conditions can the Iowa Electronic Market approach be applied to forecasting 2022?

LOOKING AT THE RESULTS: A SHIFT TOWARD THE RIGHT?

Table 1 is a systematic review of the projections provided by the different forecasting models (as of the time of writing in February 2022) to highlight points of convergence and

models also predicted a clear victory for the incumbent in the second round, regardless of who his opponent was. Given the forecasts presented in table 1, it therefore would seem surprising if the Centrist candidate Macron were not only excluded from the second round of the 2022 presidential election but also suffered defeat in it.

The model forecasts also converged on several other points. All of the models predicted that the Left would underperform

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divergence. The first important finding is that the models agreed, concluding that incumbent President Emmanuel Macron should finish first in the first round with a significant lead over

in the presidential election. None of the models predicted a duel including a left-wing candidate in the second round. The Left therefore would be excluded from the decisive round of

Table 1

Summary of the 2022 French Presidential Vote Forecasts

| Forecasters | Model | First Round | | | | Second Round | |
| | | First Place | | Second Place | | | |
		Candidate	Vote Share	Candidate	Vote Share	Most Likely Winner	Vote Share
Bélanger, Feitosa, and Turgeon	Historical Forecast Model	Right-Wing Candidates	52.7	Left-Wing Candidates	47.3	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	51.6
Bélanger and Jérôme-Speziari	SUR Regionalized Model	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	25.5	Marine Le Pen (RN)	18.6	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	58.6
Dufresne, Jérôme, Lewis-Beck, Murr, and Savoie	Citizen Model	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	25.3	Marine Le Pen (RN)	18.7	NA	NA
Facchini	Party Ratings	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	29.0	Valérie Pécresse (LR)	24.2	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	53.8
Graefe	PollyVote	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	24.6	Marine Le Pen (RN)	17.0	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	59.1
Jérôme, Mongrain, and Nadeau	Multi-Bloc Popularity–Economy Model	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	22.2	Valérie Pécresse (LR)	18.6	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	53.2
Unweighted Average 1		Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	25.6	Valérie Pécresse (LR)	21.4	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	53.5
Unweighted Average 2		Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	25.1	Marine Le Pen (RN)	18.1	Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	58.8

Notes: Results for Unweighted Average 1 are calculated from models predicting a Macron–Pécresse contest in the second round; results for Unweighted Average 2 are calculated from models forecasting a Macron–Le Pen duel. Results from the first model (Bélanger, Feitosa, and Turgeon 2022) are not included in the calculations because its methodology is somewhat different from the other models.

the French presidential election for a second consecutive election—another first in the history of the Fifth French Republic. Thus, it appears that the French Left had not recovered from its 2012 collapse, following the presidency of François Hollande. The "desert crossing" for the French Left was not yet over. The political dynamic in this country would

presidents running for reelection tend to lose support between their official declaration of candidacy and the first round in April. For example, Giscard d'Estaing (1981) lost, on average, 1.5 points; Mitterrand (1988) and Chirac (2002) lost, on average, 4 points. Only Sarkozy (2012), on average, neither gained nor lost points. Given that the threshold of

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continue to be dominated in 2022 by the opposition between candidates of the Center or of the Right on the political spectrum.

Another point of convergence in the forecasts also was notable. None of the models predicted that Zemmour would reach the second round. Thus, the support that this candidate garnered seemed insufficient to allow him to further shake the French party system, which apparently has evolved from a traditional Left–Right divide to a quadripolarization of the political game: Left, Center, Classical Right, and Extreme Right. That said, the presence of this polemical candidate could have weighed heavily on the identity of Macron's opponent in the second round, depending on whether he drew more support from the Classical Right candidate, Pécresse, or the Far Right candidate, Le Pen. This element of uncertainty is reflected in the forecasts presented in this symposium: three models predicted that Le Pen would make it to the second round, whereas two models concluded that the Classical Right candidate, Pécresse, would advance to the second round.

In any case, the forecasting models discussed in this symposium predicted a significant shift of the French electorate to the Right. This was reflected in two ways: (1) as noted previously, by the exclusion of a left-wing candidate from the second round for a second consecutive election; and (2) this shift could manifest in a possibly "historic" performance by Le Pen, if she reached the second round. Admittedly, the models predicted a clearer victory for Macron in the second round against Le Pen (58.9%) than against Pécresse (53.5%). However, Macron's victory over Le Pen might not be as decisive as in 2017 insofar as the models allowed for the possibility that the Far Right candidate could cross the 40% threshold of support in the second round.

Only the results of the presidential election could confirm the validity of the conclusions that emerged from the forecasts presented. However, it seemed that their richness demonstrated that electoral forecasting in France has matured and, after being inspired largely by the work of other democracies, the French case now could enrich the electoral forecasting work in those other democracies. It is from this perspective that this unique symposium was conceived.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Emmanuel Macron was not yet an official candidate. Furthermore, according to scattered public-opinion results, incumbent

qualification to the second round now appears low—approximately 17% to 18%—it was possible that Macron could lose his first-place status on the first and even the second round, leaving the French political landscape Balkanized. However, on the basis of this collection of scientific forecasting models, we predicted that Macron almost certainly would retain the presidency. ■

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SYMPOSIUM CONTRIBUTORS

Kouakou Donatien Adou ⓘ *is a Political Science PhD Candidate in the Truman School of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Missouri, and a World Bank Group African fellow. His research interests include the political economy of corruption, development, and democratization. You can find more about his work on his website www.donatienadou.com and reach him at dka3k7@mail.missouri.edu.*

Éric Bélanger ⓘ *is Professor of Political Science at McGill University. His interests include political parties, public opinion, and voting behaviour. He may be reached at eric.belanger3@mcgill.ca.*

Joyce E. Berg *Professor of Accounting, Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa, has worked with the IEM since 1992 and is currently an IEM steering committee member. Her recent research appears in the International Journal of Forecasting, PS: Political Science & Politics, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization and Neuropsychologia. E-mail: Joyce-Berg@uiowa.edu.*

Bernard Dolez ⓘ *is Professor of Political Science at the University Panthéon-Sorbonne (Paris 1) and researcher at the European Centre for Sociology and Political Science (CESSP). His research focuses on national and local political institutions, electoral rules and their effects, and electoral behavior. He may be reached at bernard.dolez@univ-paris1.fr.*

Yannick Dufresne *is Associate professor and Chair holder in The Teaching of Digital Social Science (CLESSN) at Université Laval. His areas of expertise are the study of public opinion, electoral studies, political psychology, and political communication. His research focuses primarily on democratic processes and political strategies in the era of Big Data. He can be reached at yannick.dufresne@pol.ulaval.ca.*

François Facchini ⓘ *is Full Professor in the Department of Economic Science of University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. His research interest is in Public Finance (tax public debt and public spending), public choice and entrepreneurship. He may be reached at francois.facchini@univ-paris1.fr.*

Fernando Feitosa *is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Political Science at McGill University. His interests are political behavior and participation,*

and public opinion. He can be reached at fernandofeitosaribeiro@gmail.com.

Andreas Graefe ⓘ *is a full professor in the Faculty of Business at Macromedia University of Applied Sciences, Munich, Germany. His research interests are forecasting and decision-making, with a particular focus on political forecasting. He currently serves as vice-chair of APSA's Political Forecasting Group. He may be reached at graefe.andreas@gmail.com.*

Thomas S. Gruca *George Daly Professor of Marketing, Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa, has worked with the IEM since 1995 and is currently the IEM director. His research on prediction markets appears in the Journal of Prediction Markets, Electronic Markets, Information Systems Frontiers and PS: Political Science & Politics. E-mail: Thomas-Gruca@uiowa.edu.*

Bruno Jérôme *is an assistant professor in the department of economics at the Université Paris 2 Panthéon-Assas and a member of the Paris 2 Law and Economics Center. His interests are political economy, public economics, election forecasting, and European economics and institutions. He can be reached at bruno.jerome@gmail.com.*

Véronique Jérôme-Speziari *is an assistant professor in the department of management at the University of Paris Sud Saclay. Her interests are political economy, public economics, election forecasting, and political marketing. She can be reached at veronique.jerome@gmail.com.*

Annie Laurent ⓘ *is a CNRS Research Director Emerita at the Centre d'études et de recherches administratives politiques et sociales (CERAPS) of the University of Lille. Her areas of specialization are electoral behavior, electoral rules and their effects, and strategic voting in particular in two round electoral systems. She may be reached at annie.laurent@univ-lille.fr.*

Michael S. Lewis-Beck *is F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor in the Department of Political Science of the University of Iowa. His research interests are in comparative politics, methodology and political economy. He may be reached at michael-lewis-beck@uiowa.edu.*

Philippe Mongrain ⓘ *is a PhD candidate in political science at the Université de Montréal and a member of the Canada Research Chair in Electoral Democracy. His interests are voting behavior, election forecasting, and Canadian politics. He can be reached at philippe.mongrain.1@umontreal.ca.*

Andreas E. Murr ⓘ *is associate professor of quantitative political science at the University of Warwick. His research interests are in election forecasting, party leadership elections, and political methodology. He can be reached at a.murr@warwick.ac.uk.*

Richard Nadeau ⓘ *is full professor of political science at the Université de Montréal. His interests are voting behavior, public opinion, political communication, and quantitative methodology. He can be reached at richard.nadeau@umontreal.ca.*

Thomas A. Rietz ⓘ *is Soumyo Sarkar Professor of Finance at the Tippie College of Business at the University of Iowa. He has worked with the IEM since 1993 and is currently a steering committee member. His recent research appears in Economic Inquiry, International Journal of Forecasting, PS: Political Science & Politics, and Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization. He can be reached at Thomas-Riez@uiowa.edu.*

Justin Savoie ⓘ *is a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Toronto. His areas of interest include public opinion, political behaviour, citizen forecasting, computational social science, and Canadian politics. He can be reached at justin.savoie@mail.utoronto.ca.*

Mary Stegmaier ⓘ *is Vice Provost for International Programs and Associate Professor in the Truman School of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Missouri. Her research interests include international elections, voting behavior, and forecasting. Follow her on twitter @Mary Stegmaier. She can be reached at stegmaierm@missouri.edu.*

Mathieu Turgeon *is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Western Ontario. His interests center on political behavior, including voting and elections, public opinion, political psychology, political participation, and on statistical, experimental, and survey methodology. He can be reached at mturgeo4@uwo.ca.*