

List of abbreviations

FN (Front National, party of Jean-Marie Le Pen)

TNS Sofres (leading French company in marketing and opinion studies)

UDF (Union pour la Démocratie Française, party of François Bayrou)

CSA (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel, main regulating body of the television and the radio in France)

CEVIPOF (Centre d'études de la vie politique Française, now known as Centre de recherches politique de Sciences Po., though both names are still used)

UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, party of Nicolas Sarkozy)

PS (Parti Socialiste, party of Ségolène Royal)

HLM (Habitations à loyer modéré, meaning council housing)

ORTF (Office de radio-diffusion television Française, body created in 1964 by de Gaulle in order to group together all means of information in one main public body)

To what extent did the media have an influence on the outcome of 2002 French presidential elections?

By Emma Brooks

Introduction

In the heat of the 2007 French presidential elections, those of 2002 will be remembered by many, for the simple and striking fact that the leader of the extreme right party, the Front National's Jean-Marie Le Pen gained enough votes to take him through to the second round. Since then there have been many studies undertaken in order to try and explain this phenomenon and explore what the different causes were for this outcome. This piece will examine the attempts to explain this phenomenon with an emphasis on the role of the media, and particularly its influence on the outcome of both rounds of this presidential election. However, the primary focus will be on the first round, since it created the most controversy. Was it the main factor of this result, or was it combined with other factors?

The first section will examine in detail the French electoral system and voting trends. The second section will examine the theme of "insecurity" widely exploited during the presidential campaigning period, and will also look at the impact of cohabitation and other institutional factors. Finally the section on media will attempt to bring all these factors together in order to prove the influence of the media on the outcome of both rounds.

In the literature reviewed for the purpose of this essay, a constant theme reoccurs which is that of the media as being responsible for Jean-Marie Le Pen's election to the second round of the 2002 presidential elections. *Le vote de tous les refus* [The rejectionists' vote] , as well as articles found in *L'état de l'opinion 2003* [Opinion Survey 2003] and in various journals, seem to confer on this idea. They illustrate their argument, especially in the case of *L'état de l'opinion 2003* by looking closely at the figures and opinions expressed in opinion polls and the use the media made of those, finally tying them in to the end results of both

rounds. On the other hand in *Parties and the party system in France*, the explanation tends towards that of a Left that was unprepared for the presidential elections and did not foresee the potential threat of Le Pen. This produced a weak and unconvincing image which contributed to the loss of votes for the Left and a gain for other extremist parties including the Front National. All sources also agree on the fact that the political atmosphere of the time was conducive to Le Pen's success and should be taken into account when looking at the part that the media played in this.

I) Institutional Factors

a) Voting behaviour

This section will explore the institutional factors in France that could have had an influence on the success of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the 2002 presidential elections, or that in any rate set the political atmosphere in which the French people felt the need to vote the way they did.

First, it is important to consider how voters make their decisions and according to which factors. There are two main theories that explain this and that can be applied to most modern democracies. The "old politics" theory suggests that people organise their votes according to their ideologies and social positions, therefore aligning themselves on one side or the other of the four main cleavages: the centre-periphery cleavage, the church-state one, the land-industry one, and finally the owner-worker cleavage. These were seen as the traditional cleavages along which people would align themselves. For example, if one uses the owner-worker cleavage one would expect the workers to be voting for the labour party, and the owners to vote for the Conservative party, each more representative of their respective ideologies and political expectations. In France there is a general trend towards the more traditional values of family and religion, which is also reflected in politics and a tendency towards stiff competitions between the Right and the Left. The year 2002, therefore, marked a departure from these more traditional values, which can be explained by a theory called

“new politics”. This implies a move towards post-materialistic values, suggesting that these provide the new alignment for political parties and voters alike. According to this theory, voters are nowadays more interested in general issues such as environmentalism, or feminism and these take priority over more traditional values in their voting decisions. Therefore a worker who feels strongly about environmental issues may not necessarily be seen voting for the Labour party but for the Greens instead if he feels that they are better prepared to deal with such issues. This is particularly interesting in the case of France and the 2002 presidential elections as the theme of “insecurity” was their centre point and a major decisional factor for voters, as is illustrated by the following quote: “As far as the perception of security issues is concerned, public opinion polls show clearly and overwhelmingly that their high public profile is seen as a concern but also as a reason for voting”.¹ This factor shall be considered in further detail later on.

A further important factor in the evolution of cleavages is that of the Left-Right cleavage. France’s political system, although it is a multiparty one is also strongly set towards bipolarisation, particularly during presidential elections. The change of alignment of voters towards post-material values means that political parties have to do the same therefore becoming more “catch-all” parties as explained by the Downs theory. The Downsian model suggests that in an attempt to gain more votes, all political parties move towards the middle of the political spectrum, abandoning some of their more traditional values which clearly placed them either to the Left or to the Right.² Bearing this in mind, it would appear that in 2002 the French opinion was that the Right Left divide was no longer as precise as it had been before.³ This could help to explain why voters saw their vote for Left or Right as not being that much different since both sides presented the same agenda, a point reinforced by the fact that the 2002 presidential

¹ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.42

² This theory was elaborated in 1957 in Anthony Downs’ book: *An economic theory of Democracy*

³ According to a survey conducted by the TNS Sofres for the Fondation Jean Jaurès and the “Nouvel Observateur” in January 2002, when asked : « with which of these opinions do you agree the most, 60% agreed with : « the notions of Left and Right are outdated: a politician’s stance can no longer be judged in those terms » » taken from <http://www.tns-sofres.com>

elections marked the end of a five year cohabitation during which the two mainstream parties of either side worked together in government. This brings us to the idea of political apathy and it being a possible influential factor on the outcome of the election. By 2002 the French electorate had reached a point of apathy which can easily be seen by the high figures of abstention in the first round of the presidential elections: 28.4%, a record since the first election of the president by universal suffrage in 1965.⁴ This is most likely due to the fact that, as mentioned above, the voters saw little difference between the ideas and candidates put forward by the Left and the Right. It also brings us to another way of explaining voting behaviour: by analysing votes placed depending on social category, age, gender and level of education.

This idea of being able to define how people will vote according to class, age, or gender is what is known as the sociological model, as is defined in Robert Elgie's: *French politics, debates and controversies*. In the article "Vote et insécurité" by Vincent Tiberj, much research is conducted based upon these factors, and it is important to take this into consideration when looking at who voted for Le Pen and why. According to Almond and Verba political culture (in five countries: the United States, Britain, West Germany, Italy and Mexico although this can also be applied to France) can be divided into three groups: the participants, the subjects, and the parochials.⁵ The participants are those who are the most active of the three, having more knowledge about politics and getting involved on a regular basis. The subjects, although they are less politically aware than the participants, will nevertheless get involved from time to time, for example when presidential elections occur. Finally the parochials are those who know practically nothing about politics and rarely bother to partake in political life. Using this type of analysis to explain voting behaviour, it can generally be said (and this is highlighted in Vincent Tiberj's study on insecurity as well as in recent studies conducted by the TNS Sofres) that the people who are

⁴ Figures obtained from : http://www.tns-sofres.com/etudes/dossiers/d_abstention.htm

⁵ M. J. Sodaro, *Comparative politics, a global introduction*, Palgrave MacMillan, (2001), p.259-260

less involved or less politically active are those who are less well educated or come from a poorer background, or the younger generations who do not feel politically concerned, as opposed to the more educated people who have an affiliation with a political party.⁶ This is possibly because they feel that voting will make no difference to their status and that nothing is done for them in society. In the case of the 2002 presidential elections, how can these categorisations be useful to us and help us to better understand the results of the first round? One would generally expect the participants to be the main deciders of the outcome of such elections, however as is mentioned in *Le vote de tous les refus*, the majority of French people were disinterested by this campaign, with 60.9% answering no to the question: “the way the presidential election campaign is unfolding, does it make you want to get out and vote?”⁷ This answer could be interpreted in two ways: either all of the electorate have become parochials, or subjects, or they remain participants but are nonetheless disillusioned. This would seem to be the most logical explanation. In fact, *Le vote de tous les refus* clearly points out: “abstentions are on the increase, regardless of how politically involved the electorate is. This deserves to be underlined”.⁸ Coming back to the idea of an atmosphere of political apathy, this makes perfect sense and indicates that we are dealing with disillusioned participants. In this case, the idea of the FN vote as a vote of protest is even more interesting, since it contends with the idea that people were aware of their possibilities and what they would, or would not entail, as is summed up by the following quote: “To all appearances after this first round of the presidential election, abstention “in the political game”⁹ is tantamount to a condemnation.”¹⁰

⁶ For a more detailed study, more precisely on how these categories relate to abstention see Ch. 5 : « La poussée des abstentions : protestation, malaise, sanction » by Muxel A. in Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p. 125-153

⁷ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.35

⁸ Ibid, p.138

⁹ In this chapter the analysis is based upon the difference between abstention by people « in the game » who are politically aware but apathetic and people « out of the game » who are neither politically aware or involved

¹⁰ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.148

b)The voting system

Since we are exploring the influence of institutional factors on the outcome of the 2002 presidential elections, this brings us to the particularity of the French voting system which is a two ballot majoritarian type. The fact that the voter has two rounds in which to pick his or her candidate makes the first vote lose some of its importance as it does not designate one candidate from the outset:

Here, voters have one vote. If a candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the vote, s/he is elected. However, if no candidate receives this figure, then there is a second ballot at which the person who receives simply the most votes cast is elected. In general, this type of system encourages voters to cast votes for larger parties and for parties to form electoral alliances.¹¹

The two ballot round is quite particular by the fact that it gives a feeling of safety and protection from the smaller more extreme parties, since they have to reach a certain percentage of votes before going through to the second round. In fact the two ballot system was created for that purpose since during the short period that France did use proportional representation for its other elections it made it easier for the FN to gain seats in parliament. They therefore returned to the two ballot system in order to be sure to keep them out. However as is illustrated by the first round of the 2002 presidential elections this does not always work. On the other hand if France had a First Past the Post system as is seen in the UK, it is more than likely that the Front National would not be a party considered being a threat (although in France its status was largely underestimated), and the voters would certainly not have allowed themselves such a vote of protest for fear of seeing him become President, due to there being no second round which would safely keep him out of government, as it did in France. The fact that the French are aware of the “safety net”, so to speak, of the second round especially in an atmosphere of political discontent, can be a potential threat to the mainstream

¹¹ Elgie R.&Griggs S., *French politics debates and controversies*, Routledge (2000), p.120

candidates as was clearly illustrated by the pushing out of the socialist candidate Lionel Jospin.

As mentioned previously in the context of the Left-Right cleavage and realignment, the two ballot system encourages plurality but also sets a trend towards bipolarisation, as the second round often tends to be a run-off between a representative of the Left and one of the Right (except in 2002). In 2002 this idea was emphasised even more by the fact that since the beginning of the presidential race the general opinion was that the two most likely candidates to go through to the second round would be the then President Jacques Chirac and his Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, both just reaching the end of a five year period of cohabitation. It could be said that this bipolarisation, accepted as normal in the French political atmosphere is what biased voters' intentions and influenced their final choice in the first round, since they expected the second round to be a Left-Right confrontation. Another explanation given for this pre-announced duo of Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin is that of the previous five year period of cohabitation. In his article "Les effets pervers d'une préselection annoncée", Jean-Luc Parodi uses this theory as an explanation to why there was the expected inevitability of the Chirac/Jospin duo and how, in turn, this affected the vote for the Front National.¹² According to him, the cohabitation plays a role on the outcome of the first round in six ways:

By reboosting the popularity of the President of the Republic (after the disenchantment of 1995-1997); by ensuring for the cohabiting Prime Minister a level of satisfaction unprecedented under the Fifth Republic; by giving both almost total control over their political domain; and, as result, selecting them in advance as the sure-fire second-round candidates; by thus organizing the competition as between two outgoing office-holders; and finally, thereby, doing away with that

¹² "Les effets pervers de la préselection annoncée" meaning: "The enigma of cohabitation or the perverse effects of a choice foretold"

chance to indulge one's fantasy that is always present at least in part in this great symbolic rite of contemporary democracy- going to the polls.¹³

This study implies that the unusually long cohabitation had a negative effect on the electorate, despite it being a rather successful period overall. The electorate saw the two main protagonists of the cohabitation as being the two main candidates for the second round of the elections and were therefore disillusioned by the possibility of not really having any choice of candidate as they were convinced that the same two faces they had seen for the past five years would be in the second round. This would greatly serve to explain why they felt they could place a vote of protest, or dispense of a more useful vote in the first round.

Although these factors may be influential on their own, they were further reinforced by the general opinion reflected in the media and opinion polls which were being published at the time, both of which were adamant about the fact that Jospin and Chirac would go through to the second round, leaving few other possibilities. As is said in *French politics, debates and controversies* when speaking about the electoral period since the 1980s: "this period is marked by disillusionment with the four parties within the bipolar quadrille and the rise of other party political forces".¹⁴ The attitude of the media towards the question, as well as the political disillusionment of the French and the fact that the French electorate was practically certain that J. Chirac and L. Jospin would be facing each other in the second round, may have encouraged them to think that they could place a vote of protest and not worry of its consequences: the two places on the second round were supposedly secured.

Finally when looking at the functioning of France's electoral system, there is an important change in politics and in the unwinding of the presidential

¹³ Parodi J.-L., "L'énigme de la cohabitation, ou les effets pervers d'une présélection annoncée", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. 52, no. 5-6 Octobre-December, 2002

¹⁴ The bipolar quadrille implies "that there are two political poles, one on the left and one on the right, within each of which there are two forces". Quotations from Elgie R. & Griggs S, *Cit. Op.*, p.123

elections which should also be taken into account, which is the increased importance focused on the politicians considered to be of presidential material themselves, rather than the political parties. This makes voting based on charisma and other personal factors possible, with people “focusing on the personal qualities of a candidate to gain important information about characteristics relevant to assessing how the individual will perform in office.”¹⁵ This comes under the strategic school of thought, as described in Robert Elgie’s *French politics, debates and controversies*, which suggests that:

The most volatile voters in the system now have a distinct sociological, political, ideological and participatory profile and that these voters are particularly responsive to short-term factors, such as candidates and campaign issues.¹⁶

Moreover in the case of the 2002 elections and Le Pen’s personal success, this seems to be an important factor as he is said to have changed his image quite considerably compared to the one he had given in previous elections, to one of a man who “gives the impression of being a leader won over by wisdom and appeased by age.”¹⁷ This could have made quite a difference on whether or not people voted for him as it would contrast with his previously belligerent image. In the case of the two-ballot system this brings us back to the idea of the “safety net” of the second round but also to the dissatisfaction with the two main candidates rather than the parties they represented, which resulted in the vote for Le Pen.

Having looked at what institutional factors could have had an influence on these elections and how, it is also important to look at what else might have been involved especially since more often than not all of these factors are quite closely

¹⁵ Dalton R., *Citizen politics : public opinion and political parties in advanced western democracies*, Chatham House (1996), p.208

¹⁶ Elgie R.&Griggs S., *French politics debates and controversies*, Routledge (2000), p.133

¹⁷ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.204

linked to one another. This brings us to the question of insecurity which played an important role in the voters' choice of candidate.

II) Insecurity

We previously looked at different factors determining vote choice and in this study were mentioned post-materialistic values, along which voters are expected to realign as opposed to more traditional cleavages. In this respect, the question of security which was raised over the period of the 2002 presidential elections and before is crucial. Since voters now appear to be more concerned with issues as opposed to values, the use of the theme of security during these elections is particularly interesting, as it was brought to the front of the political scene by the media and then used in the period of presidential campaigning as a decisional vote factor both by the candidates themselves and the voters: "One had to be deaf, blind or intellectually dishonest not to perceive that security was the main concern of the French at the outset of the campaign."¹⁸ This quote clearly illustrates the importance of the question of security, and therefore the importance that it had during the presidential campaigning, as well as its influence on the choice of candidate. This being said, it is obvious why the presidential candidates and Jacques Chirac in particular chose to make this the central point of their campaign. As Chirac said himself:

I watch the newscasts too you know. And month after month, what do I see? Every day acts of violence, delinquency, crime. It's the clear reflection of a certain situation. After all, I didn't choose the topics for you.¹⁹

¹⁸ Petit G.&Blachas C., « Les médias et la campagne présidentielle » in Duhamel O.&Méchet P., *L'état de l'opinion 2003*, Editions du Seuil (2003), p.193

¹⁹ Ibid p.196

It is obvious from the outset that insecurity will be either the strongpoint or the downfall of each presidential candidate or at any rate for those who stand a fair chance of going through to the second round. Having established that the theme of insecurity was a key one to the presidential campaign, we must now see how this affected the voters. It is in fact as early as December 2000 that: “the public preoccupation about insecurity overtakes that of unemployment.”²⁰

Under the section of institutional factors we had looked at the sociological school of thought used to explain vote choice, where it is thought that education, age, gender and social background are determinants. In the main paper looked at on the question of insecurity, “Vote et insécurité” [Insecurity and the vote] by Vincent Tiberj, these are the main factors used to explain the reasons behind the Le Pen vote in the first round, as it is found that in general people who suffer the most from this feeling of insecurity are: women, people whose level of education is lower than that of the baccalaureate, people with a low income and workers or employees.²¹ These people are those seen as being the most concerned by a feeling of insecurity and therefore placing it at the top of their priorities when deciding which candidate to vote for. Finally, an additional factor also related to the sociological school of thought and which is seen as contributing the most to the said feeling of insecurity is ethnocentrism, as is illustrated by the following quote: “taken on its own, the level of ethnocentrism is the first logical explanation of the feeling of insecurity”.²² Through studies undertaken by the author on the subject it would appear that there is a strong correlation between people’s level of ethnocentrism and their feeling of insecurity, and ultimately to their choice of candidate. Since the feeling of ethnocentrism is generally characteristic of people who are less well educated and of certain classes, this shows that the feeling of insecurity is mainly a

²⁰ Perrineau P. & Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po (2003), p.44

²¹ The baccalaureate is the French end of high school exam equivalent to A levels in the UK. Quote taken from Tiberj V., « Vote et insécurité », published by the CEVIPOF, p.6

²² Ibid p.18

subjective one influenced by many factors, which mainly involves the part of the population who is less politically implicated from the outset.

In the same line of thought one must also take into account voter disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the political representatives and the feeling that they could not be trusted to solve the problems that were of most importance to the French. On the question of security, this is especially important as it appears that most people were unconvinced by Jacques Chirac's and especially Lionel Jospin's ability to deal with the issue, as opposed to Jean-Marie Le Pen.²³ Moreover this is not found by simply looking at the usual supporters of the Front National but also by looking at voters who may have changed their position between the previous presidential or general elections and these ones. In his study, Vincent Tiberj establishes various different ways of analysing this feeling of insecurity, where it stems from and what causal link it might have with the vote for Le Pen. His first point, as to be expected, is that the increase in the feeling of insecurity is relative to the increase in the number of acts of violence and street crimes. He also however, differentiates between insecurity linked to violence, and economic insecurity both of which, in his opinion, contribute to an overall atmosphere of insecurity and in consequence a choice of candidate. Furthermore his study shows that there is actually little relevance whether or not the percentage of crimes increases, as the level of people feeling insecure remains the same, and that the feeling of insecurity is actually more linked to sociological factors rather than statistics.

To bring us back to the factor of political apathy, Vincent Tiberj also notes in his study that people lacking trust in politicians and the institutions are also amongst those whose feeling of insecurity is higher. These arguments would seem to suggest that it is the part of the population who has little or no interest in politics who was the most concerned by this topic of insecurity and that this therefore influenced their vote. Judging by what has been said before, one would

²³ Statistically people who cite delinquency as one of the most important decisional factors design Jean-Marie Le Pen as their first choice candidate (23%) as opposed to Jacques Chirac (22%) and Lionel Jospin (10%). Figures taken from Tiberj V., « Vote et insécurité » published by the CEVIPOF

draw the conclusion that these people would also be the ones to not vote at all. If this is the case and their opinion was influenced solely by the theme of insecurity as portrayed by the media, then this would explain a lot about the choice of Le Pen in the first round.

What one must also not forget, and that is crucial to the theme of insecurity was that for once the general opinion and the other politicians themselves had drawn attention to a topic which was right in Le Pen's line of thought. For years his program had been based on this idea of a feeling of insecurity, mixed with the problem of immigration but it was not necessary for him to mention it in this case as the media had done the job of making security the French people's top priority. All Le Pen had to do, was to wait for the votes to come to him, as is illustrated by the following quote: "The FN President's low-profile candidacy derives largely from the fact that he is convinced that the political context of insecurity is his best asset and that it is enough to let himself be borne along the wave."²⁴

How then, is it possible to link this feeling of insecurity to the French people's choice of candidates? This brings us to the question of the media itself and the role it played in determining who would be present at the second round, whether on its own or when linked to other factors such as the theme of insecurity

III) The Media

a) General observations

The 2007 presidential elections clearly illustrate the importance of the media in a presidential campaign and the role they play in increasing or decreasing a candidate's popularity. As is pointed out in *Le Monde* when speaking of the media coverage and meetings organized by the presidential candidates: "In comparison to 2002, we have doubled the number of our

²⁴ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po (2003), p.205

responses”.²⁵ This indicates that the candidates are aware of the importance of the media and the fact that they constitute “a very important means of relaying opinion”, and that in 2002 this was already the case even if since then the use of the media has only increased.²⁶

This brings us back to the elections of 2002 and the part that the media played in the outcome of both rounds. It is expected that during such periods of high political activity the media should be there to cover and pass on all important information to the voters, but also to “evoke interest, mobilise their competences and their imagination in order to find the right angles of attack to awaken curiosity”.²⁷ However as we have mentioned before, there was an overall lack of interest in this campaign from the outset, which was reflected in the media by less overall coverage of the candidates, their programs, political debates and the campaign as a whole. This would seem contradictory to the “mission” described above, and would help to understand how an already disinterested electorate would not feel the need to find out more about the campaign or other candidates than what was being told them: the inevitable Chirac-Jospin duo. However at the same time the media as well as the general public were simply fed up with politics and did not have enough belief in the politicians to make the campaign interesting, which was simply reflected in the way they covered the campaign. This only furthered peoples’ beliefs that their vote ultimately would not make a difference as the outcome was already sure, as is well pointed out in *Le vote de tous les refus*:

Over and above the question of insecurity and the sometimes sterile disputes it has given rise to, the main impact that can be detected from the first round of the presidential election is undeniably on the way the media and the opinion polls spread and fostered a belief that

²⁵ This particular quote is referring to François Bayrou, candidate for the centre party UDF (Union pour la Démocratie Française). Quote taken from : Normand J.-M., “Medias: les candidates n’ont négligé ni “Atout chien” ni “Funérarium Magazine””, *Le Monde*, 18th April 2007 from <http://www.lemonde.fr>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Perrineau P. & Ysmal C., Cit op., p.55

a final confrontation between Chirac and Jospin was inevitable, and a Jean-Marie Le Pen breakthrough, therefore, unthinkable.²⁸

This ties in with the argument of voter apathy, already mentioned in relation to the question of insecurity as well as institutional factors, and illustrates the first in a series of direct links between the media and the effect that it had on people's votes. Due to the idea of the inevitability of this confrontation between two mainstream contenders, the French "thought they could afford not to vote practically, scattering their votes on other candidates of the left because they had gained the certitude that Lionel Jospin would be at the second round whatever happened."²⁹ Furthermore, as mentioned when looking at the evolution of cleavages one must not forget the fact that the French felt that the notions of Left and Right were no longer as clear as before, and were using other criteria along which to align themselves. Therefore it is understandable that when faced with two candidates from either side the voters felt deprived of choice, and even more so since both men had been under cohabitation for the past five years, making it harder to distinguish them and their individual policies.

To further this idea of a direct link between the media and the end results, one could argue that the media minimised the Le Pen threat by their lack of coverage, contributing to making him invisible and making his threat appear a lot less credible than it actually was, which in turn resulted in people feel they could safely place a vote for him without any consequences. However, Raymond Khun points out in *The Media in France*, that the French media do not tend to openly show their political position and do not side with one candidate or the other. From that point of view, it made the task of commenting on Le Pen as being a potential threat hard since it may have appeared that the media were taking his side and be "seen by the socialists as a threat to the credibility of their candidate without

²⁸ Ibid, p.58

²⁹ Ibid, p.59

any apparent proof.”³⁰ This could in part explain why they gave so little time to Le Pen during the presidential campaign but does not excuse it nonetheless, especially since according to the regulations set by the CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel) the time allocated on air to each candidate should be equally divided between all of them, regardless of whether or not they are considered to be actual contenders of the second round.³¹ In this case the time should have been divided equally between all sixteen candidates and it clearly was not, with Jospin and Chirac getting eight hours of coverage each, everyone else getting just under two hours or less.³² In fact it would appear that this contradicts the idea of the media not taking any sides as this preferential treatment clearly shows they have. On the other hand, because of this very low mediatisation of Le Pen, it could be said that the media were not responsible for his election to the first round and did not contribute to his popularity, and therefore that most people who voted for him had already intended to do so regardless of the coverage he did or did not get.

b) The media and “insecurity”

We previously looked at the theme of insecurity and the importance it had throughout the presidential elections, but within this there is also the role that the media played to be considered. As mentioned previously, it was clear from the outset that insecurity would be the French people’s number one priority during the 2002 elections. This theme had in fact been a concern for the French since as early as December 2000, and it would seem that at that exact same time, when security overtook unemployment in peoples’ concerns, that the media hopped on the bandwagon and that this “cross over of perceptions was translated by a sudden surge of interest of the newspapers for the questions of

³⁰ Ibid, p.64

³¹ The Conseil Supérieur de l’audiovisuel is a body which supervises all television programs, makes sure they adhere to the broadcasting rules, and in the case of elections that equal coverage is given to each candidate or party.

³² Figures obtained from Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.57-58

insecurity as is shown by the spectacular increase of the number of articles in January 2001.³³ This brings in the idea of the media having an agenda effect as in, by bringing up or focusing on certain issues, they in turn make certain voters or even politicians themselves prioritise these same themes therefore setting them on the political agenda. This is very much the case of the theme of security, highly mediatised at all times, even when unemployment once more became the first concern of French people for a while. However as is also pointed out by *Le vote de tous les refus*, the media are not alone to blame since Jacques Chirac for one also made use of this theme or feeling of insecurity by making it the centre point of his campaign, thereby making it an incentive for it to be covered by the media. Nevertheless one cannot neglect the fact that during 2002 the coverage of insecurity and its surrounding themes (small crimes, violence etc.) increased, dramatising it and “giving weight to certain events and setting them up as potential subjects of public concern. Once what they have bet on assumes priority, it can act as the determining criterion for judging the candidates”³⁴ It is also said in *L'état de l'opinion 2003* that the media is the main body to be blamed for the over dramatisation and coverage of insecurity, television on its own representing 62% of this, but also for not being able to take an objective stance on the matter and “its way of treating this information without any distance or any attempt of explanation”.³⁵ If one links this with the studies done on types of voter and vote choice, as looked at in the section on insecurity, then it is possible to see how the use of this theme by the media had an influence on people's choice of candidate. If the people who felt most concerned by the question of insecurity were also people who knew little or nothing of politics, then it is understandable that the exploitation of the theme of insecurity by the media influenced their votes in favour of Le Pen.

c) Opinion Polls

³³ Ibid p.44

³⁴ Petit G.&Blachas C., « Les médias et la campagne présidentielle » in, Duhamel O.&Méchet P., *L'état de l'opinion 2003*, Editions du Seuil (2003) p.196

³⁵ Ibid p.200

Under institutional factors the role of the cohabitation preceding the presidential elections and the influence it had in terms of pre-selecting Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin was looked at. However another important factor to be taken into account when looking at this phenomenon of pre-selection is the role of the opinion polls and the use that was made of them by the media. To this effect, *L'Etat de l'opinion 2003*, a book which reviews all the surveys of the previous year in the form of a compilation of articles, goes over some of the most important points of the 2002 presidential elections. From the start it is made clear that the job of pollsters in assessing public opinion is extremely difficult due to people not being willing to answer, or lying and then having to re-evaluate the numbers and answers comparing them to polls of previous years in order to make the figures more realistic:

Their instruments did not allow them to gauge the precise standing of the candidates and the actual order of those chosen for the second round was thus thrown into confusion. No organisation had guessed from the opinion polls that Jean-Marie Le Pen would take second place in front of Lionel Jospin.³⁶

This quote illustrates the fact that even though the pollsters may have been getting answers that gave Jean Marie Le Pen a high popularity rate, or put him in third position, they could never have predicted the success that took him through to the second round. As an explanation for this, the article insists upon the fact already highlighted throughout this essay, that a majority of the French were largely disinterested by the 2002 presidential campaign, and claim that this was

³⁶ Méchet P., « Divers aveuglements de la campagne électorale » in, Duhamel O.&Méchet P., *L'état de l'opinion 2003*, Editions du Seuil (2003) p.11

the main reason why it was so hard to predict Le Pen's place in the second round:

Apathy, indecisiveness and protest votes are often difficult matters to entrust to anyone conducting surveys for a poll organisation; they are enough to upset the operation of the survey instruments and move the person placed in second position down to third.³⁷

What one must also not forget, aside from the difficulty of the task of the pollsters, is the use that is made of their results by the media. Opinion polls are updated on a regular basis with new figures being published every day during the presidential campaign. However there is a time between which they are disclosed and when they reach the public, via the media (papers, television news, or even radio programs as well as of course via the candidates' camps themselves) which leaves the figures open to interpretation, or even liable to be left out, depending on whether or not they are considered worthwhile in terms of interest as is illustrated by the following quote:

The press has to sell too. We have to catch our readers' attention. Now, if when we publish results we lay heavy stress on the fact that these figures are not sure forecasts and that the margin of error is such that in any case, it's 50/50, what is the point for our readers?³⁸

Furthermore there are so many different institutes conducting surveys that the media can then choose which figures they publish or even combine figures from different surveys in their evaluation of the situation. This would prove the point

³⁷ Ibid, p.16

³⁸ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po (2003), p.62

that the information was, to some extent, manipulated by the media therefore continuing to uphold the idea of the first round being played out in advance and the idea that Le Pen constituted no major threat to either of the two main candidates. It also proves the same type of point where the theme of insecurity is concerned: "When the pollsters say that concern over unemployment is almost as strong in public opinion as insecurity, journalists still prefer to focus their comments on insecurity as being more mediagenic and sensational."³⁹ It is true that opinion polls being published so regularly could cause a lack of interest from the general public, especially if the front runners are always the same, after a while the public fail to pay attention to the figures of anyone else as they consider the first round as being already over before it has even started. Furthermore as mentioned before one must not forget the difficulty entailed in interviewing a representative part of the population and obtaining answers which will reflect the true opinion of the electorate. In terms of determining who votes for Le Pen and how many votes he will obtain this is even harder since more often than not people find it hard to confess to voting for a party of the extreme right and will either lie about their preferences or not answer. However it is made clear in *L'état de l'opinion 2003* that the pollsters do their best to predict as accurately as possible voting intentions and that they also warn the media that the figures are unreliable and subject to change and that they are not clear indicators of what will actually take place. Therefore even though the polls may have put L. Jospin and J. Chirac ahead of the race it is possible to say that it was due to the interpretation of these figures by the media and their consequent favouritism of these two candidates that reinforced the belief of them being sure to go through to the second round, rather than the opinion polls themselves.

d) Between both rounds

³⁹ Grunberg G., « Le drôle de printemps électoral » in, Duhamel O.&Méchet P., *L'état de l'opinion 2003*, Editions du Seuil (2003), p.25

Although until now most of the study has focused on the first round of the election since it was the one which caused the most surprise and controversy, it is also important to look at the media coverage between both rounds and how this contributed to the end result of the massive re-election of Jacques Chirac. The change of attitude of the media between the first and second rounds is quite remarkable since, as has been mentioned throughout this essay, they started off by portraying the only two real contenders to the second round as being outgoing president Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, thereby reinforcing general opinion on the matter and contributing to a loss of interest in the campaign. Once this had been proven wrong by Le Pen outdoing Jospin and taking his place in the second round, the media felt a sudden need to go to the complete opposite extreme by giving extensive coverage to all anti Le Pen demonstrations that took place during the next two weeks, and a hypermediatisation of the candidate and all surrounding him. During those weeks between both rounds the French population and in particular the younger generations took it upon themselves to group together *en masse* in order to protest and demonstrate in the streets, calling upon people to go and vote against Le Pen in the second round. These demonstrations were given extensive coverage by the press with headlines in the papers and were also filmed and relayed by the television. This is highlighted in *Le vote de tous les refus* when it says: “the strong evidence of the anti-Le Pen demonstrations certainly helped to raise public awareness.”⁴⁰ The media felt guilty of the part they had played in Le Pen’s success in the first round, as if by not paying enough attention to him and over doing the importance of J. Chirac and L. Jospin they had given him the possibility to arrive as an element of surprise, and therefore decided to back the efforts of the electorate to get people to vote against him in the second round. Muxel A. in seems to think that it was the mass mobilisation efforts of the young who “during the fortnight between the two electoral rounds, proved to be prime movers in remobilizing public opinion”.⁴¹ Even though it appears that whatever

⁴⁰ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.150

⁴¹ Ibid p.153

happened, Chirac was sure to win the second round, it is the coverage of these protests and the turnaround of the media's position which contributed to his re-election by such a high percentage (82% in total and a drop of abstention by eight points).⁴² This once again goes to show that the media contributed to the result of the second round and had an influence, even if it was slighter, on people's choice of vote. However it is also true that not many people who voted for Lionel Jospin on the first round were likely to swing their votes to Le Pen, and the number of people who voted for Le Pen was likely to stay the same since the people who had abstained on the first round but voted on the second were likely to be voting for Chirac in order to make sure Le Pen did not win the election. Therefore it is hard to determine which of these factors actually contributed the most to the end result.

e) The media: guilty or not guilty?

Having looked at all these different factors, how is it possible to create a link between them and the media and show that it did indeed influence the outcome of the election on both rounds? First of all it is vital to point out that even though these factors can have an influence on their own, it is the combination of these and the media that created the end result. For example, when taking into account institutional factors as looked at in chapter one, it is most important to keep in mind voter apathy and the evolution of cleavages. The evolution of cleavages on its own will indeed mean that people's preferences for candidates and parties will change as can sometimes be seen by the increased popularity of Green parties, as in Germany. However it does not necessarily mean that people will realign with more extremist parties especially since in the case of the Front National most of their policies are quite old fashioned (reinstallment of the death penalty, removal from the European Union and return to the Franc). In France in particular there is a strong tradition for a Left-Right competition as Le Monde rightly points out: "It is clear that the Left-Right divide is a fundamental given in

⁴² Figures obtained from Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.149

the French debate [...] French people define themselves to a degree in terms of that polarity”.⁴³ The FN vote in 2002 would suggest that the mainstream parties are not realigning themselves enough for the taste of the French, but it is hard to see how this factor on its own could be the cause of this vote. There are different types of votes of protest, the French could have voted massively for Lionel Jospin thereby showing their discontent for the Right, or vice versa thereby showing their discontent for the Left. The fact that they chose to vote for an extreme right candidate shows that there was deep dissatisfaction, but also points towards the explanation of the media having something to do with this. The fact that the theme of insecurity was overexploited, a theme obviously favourable to the Front National rather than the theme of unemployment which might have been more favourable to parties of the Left, or simply giving the same weight to all issues surrounding the presidential campaign, clearly illustrates the role of the media where the Le Pen vote is concerned.

Furthermore as has been pointed out numerous times, in 2002 the number of people abstaining was exceptionally high, and one could say that it was the media's role to maintain people's interest in politics and the campaign that was unfolding around them, therefore motivating them to vote. However as we have seen the media only served to reinforce public opinion that there was not much point in voting since both candidates were already assumed to be certain. This is an obvious cause for a vote of protest towards the extreme right since both candidates were from the Left and Right respectively and seen as incapable of dealing with the French people's problems and in particular, the question of security. When asked who is believed most credible on the question of delinquency, the French people's first answer was Jean-Marie Le Pen at 23%.⁴⁴ Also, as is pointed out by Mercier A. in *Le vote de tous les refus*, the media themselves have also come to be bored by politics and politicians, their apathy then being reflected in their articles, comments or cartoons. The most

⁴³ J.-P. Stroobants, “Une droite modérée est proche de la social-démocratie”, *Le Monde*, n 19355, 17th April 2007

⁴⁴ Tiberj V., *Vote et insécurité*, published by the CEVIPOF p.31

obvious examples of this are the newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné*, a satirical newspaper and the widely popular TV satire “Les Guignols de l’info” (similar to the British *Private Eye* and the British “Brass Eye” respectively). However these are “openly satirical and chosen as such by their readers”.⁴⁵ This means that despite the fact that politicians are being openly criticised if not ripped to pieces (Jacques Chirac’s alter ego on Les guignols de l’info was a character called Super Menteur (Super Liar), a character frequently called upon to lie when other politicians were put on the spot in their interviews, although when Le Pen went through to the second round even the Guignols lessened their criticism of Chirac), the audience are politically aware and most likely politically active and this criticism is therefore not as likely to have an influence on their decision of whether or not to vote. However when the mainstream media also start to have a more cynical opinion of politics and politicians, this can have a negative effect on the electorate. For example in *Liberation* on the 7th of February 2002 a cartoon portrayed Chirac jumping on a table in front of his followers shouting “Our strategy: to change strategies every fifteen minutes: the Left won’t understand a thing!” or in *Le Monde* on the 20th of April 2002 on the subject of Jospin’s and Chirac’s slogans “Living together” and “France together”: “Together is a remake of Jaurès revisited by J-J. Goldman and de Gaulle upstaged by Amélie Poulain.”⁴⁶ It is comments such as these, to be found in mainstream papers that can cause people to feel even more disillusioned with politics and reinforce their feeling of the presidential election not being about France or themselves, but about the politicians and their own personal ambitions. In this respect, and combined with the atmosphere of political apathy that was around at the time, one can see where the link between the media and abstention might be. These quotes also portray the feeling of frustration linked to politicians and would

⁴⁵ Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.82

⁴⁶ “Ensemble” (French for together) was a song written by popular French songwriter Jean Jacques Goldman; Jean Jaures was a socialist French politician of the late 19th /early 20th Century; Amélie Poulain is a cult film celebrating naivety and trust. Both Chirac and Jospin had chosen “Ensemble” as their campaign slogan which was left open to much mockery.

Quotes taken from Perrineau P.&Ysmal C., *Le vote de tous les refus*, Presses de Sciences Po. (2003), p.83

explain why people chose to place a vote of protest in order to waken up their leaders to the reality of their discontent.

We have also looked at the question of security and how the media, by over exploiting it, managed to create an atmosphere which was favourable to Le Pen. According to Vincent Tiberj's study on insecurity on the media, it tends to be the lower classes and less well educated people who felt more "insecure" and concerned by the question of security. If one takes into account that these people are also generally those who are less politically involved or apathetic then the arrival of an incentive to vote in the form of a post-material value makes their potential vote more dangerous. The media should have been aware that insecurity was a theme that was central to Le Pen's program and that by giving it extensive coverage they were in fact only making matters worse. All of these factors brought together clearly point towards the influence that the media had on vote choice and therefore their responsibility for the outcome of both rounds of the election.

IV) Presidential elections 2007

Although this essay is written at the time when the next president of France has not yet been chosen, it is nevertheless important to look at these elections and to see whether or not comparisons can be drawn between the two elections, and whether the French have learnt their lesson since 2002. On the 10th of April 2007, the number of indecisive voters was evaluated to still be at 42%, a figure still quite high considering the first round of the election was only two weeks away.⁴⁷ Furthermore, when speaking to French voters it was obvious that they were, and still are indecisive about which candidate to choose. Before the first round one person simply did not know who to vote for since none of the three main candidates satisfied her, and was therefore thinking of voting for Arlette Laguiller (candidate of the Lutte Ouvrière, extreme left party) at the first

⁴⁷"La personnalité de M. Sarkozy, enjeu de la fin de campagne", *Le Monde*, 10th April, n°19349, p.7

round.⁴⁸ This illustrates the idea of feeling one can dispense of a useful vote and vote for a smaller candidate at the first round, as was found in 2002 with people feeling that they could allow themselves to vote for Le Pen. It seems that once again this year the main candidates still do not fulfil the expectations that the French people have of them, therefore meaning a repeat of 2002 could have been possible. On the subject, a person said “if we get Le Pen and Sarkozy at the second round a majority of the French will not go and vote and so we will be stuck with Le Pen as president”.⁴⁹ Even though this may be quite an extreme vision of what might happen, it is not impossible as 2002 has already shown us. Considering the massive turnout of 84.6% at the first round of the presidential election on the 22nd of April, the acclamations of a “double victory” are not so wrong. With 36.9 million voters, and 3 million more voters than in 2002 it appears that the French did indeed learn their lesson and decided to take it upon themselves to massively realign behind the two main parties of Left and Right, giving far fewer votes to the smaller parties, therefore re-creating a strong bipolarisation rather than showing a lack of interest and letting the extreme parties triumph. Despite the fact that the second round is now safe from a repeat of 2002, it does not change the fact that people still seem to be unsure of who to choose of Mme. Royal and Mr. Sarkozy. For some, and in particular for those who voted for the centrist candidate F. Bayrou, neither one is a satisfactory choice: “I don’t really trust Royal, but I know that I don’t want Sarkozy”.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that this can no longer turn in to a vote for the extreme right, it still shows an uncertainty and feeling that the French cannot find a satisfactory candidate. According to *Le Monde* Ségolène Royal seems to lack that clarity and straightforwardness that Mr. Sarkozy does: “Mme. Royal would seem to suffer from an impression of flip-flopping and indecision which derives less from the style and personality of the candidate than from the absence of a clear-cut

⁴⁸ The three main contenders before the 22nd of April were Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP), Ségolène Royal (PS) and François Bayrou (UDF). Opinion obtained from a friend who is eligible to vote in the upcoming elections

⁴⁹ Opinion obtained from a friend who is eligible to vote in the upcoming elections

⁵⁰ L. Bronner, « Pavillons contre HLM, le clivage des banlieues », *Le Monde*, 24th April 2007, n°19361, p.3

Socialist Party ideology.”⁵¹ This could have been a threat to her presence at the second round, and is now a threat to her becoming president, whilst Nicolas Sarkozy on the other hand suffers from his image of being a man with a will of steel, and as he said himself “I am told that I scare people”.⁵² . What does this tell us about the French political society as it is today, and whether or not it has changed since 2002? Even though the vote on the 22nd of April seems to indicate a renewal of bipolarisation, a recent study done by the TNS-Sofres institute in France shows that the left-right cleavage still has its limits and it remains hard to align French voters along this divide. When asked with which opinion they agree the most, 53% of the French agree with “the notions of left and right are outdated: a politician’s stance can no longer be judged in those terms”.⁵³ Even though this is seven points less than when asked the same question in 2002, it still shows that a high percentage of people no longer feel concerned by the traditional right/left divide.⁵⁴ Furthermore the study undertaken in 2007 groups the voters into six categories: authoritarian liberals; authoritarian statists; bourgeois bohemian centrists; the indifferent; bourgeois bohemian leftists; and the sceptics, two of which are also mentioned in the article in *Le Monde* intitled “The limits of the Left-Right cleavage”. The two biggest groups are the sceptics, and the two “bohemian” groups put together, the former being characterised by a low interest in politics, predominantly less well educated and from the lower social class, with a vote intention of 29% for Nicolas Sarkozy and 21% for Jean Marie Le Pen; the latter being characterised by having a high interest in politics, predominantly well educated and from the upper social classes with a high vote intention for Ségolène Royal and François Bayrou.⁵⁵ According to *Le Monde*, the left-right divide is no longer a simple one, but more of a diagonal type that goes from “culturally liberal and economically conservative, to culturally conservative

⁵¹ J.-B. De Montvalon, « Mme. Royal menacée au premier tour, M. Sarkozy au second », *Le Monde*, n°19351,(12th April 2007), p.8

⁵² « La personnalité de M. Sarkozy, enjeu de la fin de campagne », *Le Monde*, n°19349 (10th April 2007), p.7

⁵³ “Nouveaux clivages/clivages anciens”, Poll done by the institute TNS Sofres, 29 March 2007

⁵⁴ Please refer to note 3, p.4 concerning the results of the poll done in 2002

⁵⁵ Figures obtained from “Nouveaux clivages/clivages anciens”, Poll done by the institute TNS Sofres, 29 March 2007

and economically liberal”, therefore making it harder for the French to situate themselves according to a party or a candidate in particular.⁵⁶ Considering that French voters are already finding it hard to identify with one side or the other, this will make matters worse for both candidates in the second round and will make matters harder for those who chose to vote for F. Bayrou in the first round. Where the 18.6% of the centrist candidate’s votes will go is subject to huge debate. Even though it is estimated that 38% of their votes will go to Ségolène Royal, and 35% to Nicolas Sarkozy, there is still a large proportion of people who are estimated to abstain: 27%.⁵⁷ The people who voted for F. Bayrou feel that they can identify with neither of the two candidates present in the second round and are talking about voting for “the lesser evil”. This once again brings us back to the idea of a useful vote being cast.

In our study of the 2002 presidential elections, we had also looked at the impact of the personal image of the candidates, a theme which is also pointed out in *Le Monde* of 10th of April 2007. The image of N. Sarkozy as being cold, upfront and without fear of making what can sometimes be seen as outrageous statements (as that of paedophilia and suicide being genetic) have left him open to criticisms from his opponents as well as by the people in general, thereby making him more vulnerable. On the other hand, Ségolène Royal as mentioned before suffers from the opposite kind of image of being someone without much direction. In both cases one could understand why the French would not want to vote for either candidate. However as *The Economist* points out, if the French are looking at personal traits of the candidates, or even their political background “with three such varied front-running candidates, the question is: which France”?⁵⁸ It would appear that to some extent the same problems or issues are still here in 2007 as they were in 2002 and that the French will remain undecided until the last minute. Only the results of the second round will be able to tell us whether or not they have learnt their lesson from 2002 and whether French politics will finally start to change.

⁵⁶ Cohen D., “Les limites du clivage droite-gauche” in *Le Monde*, 12th April 2007, n. 19351, p.2

⁵⁷ Figures obtained from <http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-823448,36-900879,0.html>

⁵⁸ « The fire in their veins », *The Economist*, n°8523 vol.383 , (April 6-13th2007), p.76

Conclusion

Having looked in detail at all the different possible explanations for the outcome of the 2002 presidential elections in both rounds, it is possible to reach the conclusion that media were in large part, if not almost entirely responsible for Le Pen's success in the first round which resulted in him going through to the second one, and Chirac's re-election with the largest majority ever seen (82%) in the second round. There were of course factors such as voter apathy and loss of interest that contributed to what can be called this "vote of protest" in the first round, but in the context of the time the media simply helped to contribute to these feelings amongst voters which ultimately encouraged them to feel that they could safely vote for Le Pen. From the outset the media contributed to, and reinforced, the idea that the duo Chirac and Jospin was inevitable and that they were the two main contenders bound to go to the second round without even a thought of there being any other alternative possible. This they did, as we have already looked at in detail, by giving them more air time and importance than the other candidates and neglecting candidates such as Le Pen himself, therefore minimising the idea of them being a potential threat. They also contributed to creating a political and social atmosphere that was favourable to Le Pen by contributing to the theme and idea of "insecurity" as being central to French peoples' interests and to the political campaigns of the candidates. "Insecurity" being a theme on which Le Pen could count on for votes and being a principal point of his program for many years was sure to gain him those extra votes necessary to take him through to the second round. Finally, as also looked at in detail, the misinterpretation or misuse of the figures published by the opinion polls further contributed to the idea of the Chirac/Jospin duo being the inevitable outcome therefore only reinforcing the apathy of the voters for the present political situation, who had had enough of the previous five years of cohabitation. The media's role throughout the presidential campaign could only reinforce the

already existing feelings of apathy amongst voters and contributed to the final turn of events which made the Le Pen vote rocket. The conclusion reached after extensive reading on the subject and having looked at all the possible factors involved, is that the media is to be held responsible for the striking outcome of the 2002 French presidential elections.

What does this imply in broader terms? It would imply conducting surveys during the presidential elections and between rounds in order to have empirical evidence of the media influencing people's votes, and would involve further detailed studies of presidential elections since De Gaulle⁵⁹, in order to determine whether or not the mediatization of politics and presidential elections is a growing trend since 1965, or has only been accentuated in recent years by the development of other means of communication, and in particular the internet.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ De Gaulle himself was very much aware of the importance of the media and created the ORTF (office de radio-diffusion télévision française) in 1964. (obtained from <http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org>)

⁶⁰ The use of the internet for political campaigning can be seen by the fact that all three main contenders to the presidency this year had their own websites: <http://www.bayrou.fr>, <http://www.desirsdavenir.org> (for Ségolène Royal) and <http://www.sarkozy.fr>

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