

Jack Trego

INT 490 Senior Capstone Project

A Potentially Significant Split: The French Political Left and the 2017 Presidential Election

## **Roadmap**

In this present paper, I will be undertaking a study of the French political left using the 2017 French presidential election as my case study in order to analyze a potentially significant split within this political wing. My thesis is the following. Nascent social cleavages emerging in French society in the previous thirty years have found form in the splintering of the French political left. Starting with a brief overview of the French political left's modern history in the era of the French Fifth Republic, as well as noting the Socialist Party's large success in this period, I will then delve into the 2017 election. At this point, I will use a qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine the Socialist Party's performance in this election and the development of other left politicians as two manifestations of the same essential event: the splintering of the French political. After this pre-analysis and a section dedicated to the "first intimations of a left split in France," I will then introduce Herbert Kitschelt's Model for Party Change to address this potential split using an analytical structure. His model delineates three levels of party change, ranging from a party's political adaptation to the birth of a completely new party. Applying this model to the events of the 2017 French presidential election, I will conduct a more thorough analysis of the significance of this potential left split. Finally, to conclude the paper I will provide an overview of my findings and also indicate possible future developments of this split in the French political left.

## Modern History of the French Political Left

The nature of the French Fifth Republic allows for a wide-reaching political spectrum to exist and prosper. From the far left to the far right, and everything in between, various diverse political parties have been able to find a foothold in the political space, find an electorate, and make their voices heard. During the timeframe of this Fifth Republic, the political left – in the form of the *Parti socialiste* (PS, Socialist Party) – has prospered and staked itself as a permanent installation in the political realm.

In 1981 the PS ascended to the top of the French government via François Mitterrand, Socialist President of the French Fifth Republic from 1981 to 1995. In this time period the PS and the *Parti communiste française* (PCF, French Communist Party) formed a partnership, which, though subsequently falling through when the PCF exited in 1984, was founded on a principle forged at the Épinay Convention in 1971. This principle was a commitment by the PS to only form coalitions with other left parties and not centrist or right parties.<sup>1</sup> Despite swings of power to either side and power sharing between left and right, the Socialist Party has remained committed to this principle ever since.

The history of the left in France is thus characterized by coalitions among leftist parties: the Popular Front, the Left Block, etc.<sup>2</sup> From 1997 to 2002 the Plural Left– a coalition comprised of the Socialist Party, the French Communist Party, the Greens, the Left Radical Party, and the Citizens’ movement – governed France under Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who served with Jacques Chirac. This coalition dominated politics in France during the period when it was together. A wide-ranging of parties – from the far left to center-left – gave it a solid platform

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Nichanion, “Reuniting France’s Plural Left,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, May 15, 2017, [democracyjournal.org/arguments/reuniting-frances-plural-left/](http://democracyjournal.org/arguments/reuniting-frances-plural-left/).

<sup>2</sup> Neill Nugent and David Lowe, *The Left in France* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1982), 13.

to be very productive, initiating new reforms and passing several laws.<sup>3</sup> Other leftist groups, such as The Left Front, were birthed in this period and following it. The year 2012 was meant to be another high point for the PS with the election of their candidate, François Hollande, to the Presidency. However, by the end of his presidency his approval reached as low as 4% approval – a disaster for him and the party – that foreshadowed future shifts of the political left landscape.<sup>4</sup>

## **The 2017 French Presidential Election**

### *The Socialist Party*

Preceding the 2017 presidential election, the Socialist Party held a primary to decide its candidate. Open to all who pronounced to hold left values, a left primary was seen as a way to unify the Socialist Party after the damaging Hollande presidency. Among others, Manuel Valls, Prime Minister from 2014 to 2016, announced his candidature. Seen to be the front-runner, he nevertheless lost to Benoît Hamon. Hamon's victory was slightly unexpected, as he represents a somewhat more left position within the PS. These primaries were characterized by other irregular events. Firstly, François Hollande did not seek re-election and so did not participate: the first time a president in the Fifth Republic has failed to do so.<sup>5</sup> Second, Manuel Valls refused to support Hamon after being defeated by him in the primaries, and instead supported Emmanuel Macron. Third, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the radical left party *La France insoumise* and Emmanuel Macron of the centrist party Onward! refused to participate despite both sharing in at least some left values. Both had their reasons for opposing it: Mélenchon feared it could deter or halt his own presidential bid, and Macron's refusal was against the system of primaries. Macron

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Szarka, "The Parties of the French 'Plural Left': An Uneasy Complementarity," *West European Politics* 22, no. 4 (1999): 24.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Baptiste de Montvalon, "Seuls 4 % des Français sont satisfaits de l'action de Hollande," *Le Monde*, October 25, 2016, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2016/10/25/hollande-une-impopularite-record\\_5019914\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2016/10/25/hollande-une-impopularite-record_5019914_823448.html).

<sup>5</sup> de Montvalon, "Seuls 4 % des Français."

criticized it, stating it “creates deception and discredit in politics.”<sup>6</sup> Both candidates’ decisions characterize their outsider nature, and both gained points in the polls for refusing to participate.<sup>7</sup> After this primary, an emerging realization was felt: “The primary has cemented the deep divisions within the Socialists between what Valls once called ‘two irreconcilable lefts’ – a hard-left faction represented by Hamon versus his own centre-left, pro-business camp.”<sup>8</sup>

In the first round of the presidential election and the legislative election held a month later, the PS continued its shaky descent. PS presidential candidate came in a dismal fifth with 6.36% of the vote. He placed behind Macron, Marine Le Pen, François Fillon of The Republicans (who was plagued by scandal), and Mélenchon.<sup>9</sup> An absolutely horrid showing by one of the most powerful parties in the history of the French Fifth Republic. Following his defeat, Hamon immediately announced his support for Macron against Le Pen – a subject I will evoke later in this paper. The PS endorsed him despite having directly criticized Macron both during and after he was Minister of the Economy in Hollande’s government.<sup>10</sup> In the legislative election held a month later, the PS lost 90% of their seats. Lacking any solid campaign ideas – they couldn’t use any from Hollande or Hamon – and facing an internal crisis of many deputies not running for reelection, they were helpless.<sup>11</sup> The PS dropped from 280 seats and the Presidency in 2012 to 30 seats and 5<sup>th</sup> place in 2017.<sup>12</sup> Where did their votes go in both

<sup>6</sup> Le Meneec, “Pourquoi Emmanuel Macron et Jean-Luc Mélenchon.”

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> AFP, “Ex-PM Valls fights outsider for French presidential nod,” *The Guardian Nigeria*, January 23, 2017, [guardian.ng](http://guardian.ng).

<sup>9</sup> French Constitutional Council, *Décision n° 2017-169 PDR du 26 avril 2017, Déclaration du 26 avril 2017 relative aux résultats du premier tour de scrutin de l’élection du Président de la République*, <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2017/2017169PDR.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Le Meneec, “Pourquoi Emmanuel Macron et Jean-Luc Mélenchon.”

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Briançon, “French Socialists fast headed for split,” *Politico*, May 1, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/french-socialists-fast-headed-for-split/>.

<sup>12</sup> Briançon, “French Socialists fast headed for split.”; French Interior Ministry, *Résultats des élections législatives 2012*, [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les\\_resultats/Legislatives/elecresult\\_\\_LG2012/\(path\)/LG2012//FE.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les_resultats/Legislatives/elecresult__LG2012/(path)/LG2012//FE.html); French Interior Ministry, *Résultats des élections législatives 2017*, [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/elecresult\\_\\_legislatives-2017/\(path\)/legislatives-2017/FE.htm](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/elecresult__legislatives-2017/(path)/legislatives-2017/FE.htm).

elections? To the left and right of them: to the radical left and to the center. For instance, it was noted that 47% of people who voted for Hollande in 2012 voted for Macron in 2017.<sup>13</sup> (Macron also pulled from the right: The Republicans' seats in the National Assembly dropped from 194 to 113 from 2012 to 2017.)<sup>14</sup>

On top of all these defeats, they were forced to sell their historic home on rue de Solférino in Paris resulting from budgetary constraints.<sup>15</sup> It is clear from the primary and the two elections that the Socialist Party was facing serious defeat in 2017. But to what extent is this descent significant in terms of a potential split in the French political left?

### *Second Round of the 2017 Presidential Election*

Two issues fiercely debated between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen during the second round of the 2017 presidential election were immigration and the European Union (EU). Le Pen's political party, the *Front national* (FN, National Front), is nationalist, and thus anti-immigration; protectionist, and thus anti-globalization and anti-Europe. Thus, Le Pen often brought up these two issues – but for good reason. In 2009, the Eurozone crisis sent shockwaves throughout the EU that are still felt today, putting into question the power structures of the EU. Later, in 2015, the refugee crisis marked another turning point for the EU. In its attempts to equally and equitably relocate the vast number of refugees fleeing civil war, the system neared its breaking point. Many far-right politicians – like Le Pen, the Alternative for Deutschland party in Germany, the Italian Five Star Movement, among others – pounced on this issue and called for stricter immigration rules. Immigration and the European Union were two of the large political

<sup>13</sup> “From solidarity to solitary: The incredible disappearing French Socialist Party,” *The Economist*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/06/21/the-incredible-disappearing-french-socialist-party>.

<sup>14</sup> French Interior Ministry, *Résultats des élections législatives 2012*.; French Interior Ministry, *Résultats des élections législatives 2017*.

<sup>15</sup> “France's cash-strapped Socialists sell historic headquarters for €45.5 million,” *France 24*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.france24.com/en/20171220-france-socialist-party-cash-strapped-sell-historic-headquarters-million>.

points debated in the French presidential election, representative of previously existing divisions within French society.<sup>16</sup>

Following the first round of the 2017 French presidential election, a unique phenomenon occurred for the second time in French politics. Faced with a Le Pen presidency, nearly all of the candidates from the first round announced their support for Macron and implored their voters to manifest this support at the polls in the second round. As Benoît Hamon said at the time, “‘There’s a clear distinction to be made between a political adversary and an enemy of the republic. This is deadly serious now.’”<sup>17</sup> This wave of support for the centrist candidate crossed over political and ideological lines, forming a so-called republican front against the possibility of a Le Pen presidency. The behavior of these defeated candidates mimics that of those after the first round of the 2002 presidential election, in which Jacques Chirac faced against Marine Le Pen’s father and the founder of the FN, Jean-Marie Le Pen. At that time, all of the candidates announced their support for Chirac, who won with a landslide victory by gaining upwards of 80% of the vote.<sup>18</sup> In Macron’s case, victory was won at a much lower threshold: the current president of the French republic won with only 66.1% of the vote: a sizable margin, but not as much as Chirac’s gap 15 years prior.<sup>19</sup>

This doomsday sentiment was shared by almost all of the defeated candidates – all except Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who stood alone in his refusal to announce direct support for Macron. And despite outcries from the public, he stood firm in his decision. When further questioned, his spokesperson stated that “Not a single vote should go to the FN [National Front]”, but he neither

<sup>16</sup> Richard Wike et al., “‘European Public Opinion Three Decades after the Fall of Communism: 4. The European Union”, *Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes and Trends*, October 14, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Nossiter, “‘This is Deadly Serious’: French Parties Set Sights on Marine Le Pen,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/23/world/europe/france-election-parties-unify-against-marine-le-pen.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Sasha Polakov-Suransky, “Is Democracy in Europe Doomed?” *The New York Review of Books*, Oct 16 2017.

<sup>19</sup> French Interior Ministry, *Résultat de l’élection présidentielle 2017*.

affirmed a vote for Macron, nor affirmed that his supporters should abstain.<sup>20</sup> In the end, Macron won and the abstention rate of the second round was estimated at 25.3%.<sup>21</sup> A poll taken of Mélenchon's supporters taken days before the second round vote revealed that 65% would not vote for Macron.<sup>22</sup> A troubling statistic for what many viewed as the election that had the ability to tip the scales in favor of xenophobic populism clouding over Europe and the world.

### *Post-Election*

On May 14, 2017 Macron took office as the youngest president in the history of France and the youngest head of state since Napoleon. He consolidated his power a month later with large winnings in the parliamentary election, in which his party won 308 seats despite only having been formed a year prior.<sup>23</sup> Together with their ally the Democratic Movement, who won 42 seats, Macron enjoyed a sizable margin in the National Assembly to enact his policies.

Mélenchon has continued to criticize Macron for his policies and actions, and most notably for his reactions to the Yellow Vests movement. With other left politicians, though, Mélenchon has more amicable relations. For instance, he stated that he would work with Benoît Hamon – on the condition that he leave the PS. Which he did: less than two weeks after the legislative election in which Hamon lost his seat as a PS deputy, he formed a new party called Génération.s with a vision to “refound and gather the left” which evidently splintered.<sup>24</sup> In its

<sup>20</sup> Kim Willsher, "Mélenchon's team urge 'not one vote for Le Pen' but stop short of backing Macron," *The Guardian*, April 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/26/melenchons-team-urge-not-one-vote-for-le-pen-but-stop-short-of-backing-macron>.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Belouezzane, "Présidentielle 2017 : abstention record pour un second tour depuis l'élection de 1969," *Le Monde*, Mai 7, 2017, [https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/05/07/presidentielle-2017-abstention-record-pour-un-second-tour-depuis-l-election-de-1969\\_5123757\\_4854003.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/05/07/presidentielle-2017-abstention-record-pour-un-second-tour-depuis-l-election-de-1969_5123757_4854003.html).

<sup>22</sup> Kim Willsher, "Majority of Mélenchon supporters will not back Emmanuel Macron, poll finds," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/02/majority-of-melenchon-supporters-will-not-back-emmanuel-macron-poll-finds>.

<sup>23</sup> French Interior Ministry, *Résultats des élections législatives 2017*.

<sup>24</sup> "Benoît Hamon : quitter le PS pour refonder la gauche," *Le Monde*, July 1, 2017, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/benoit-hamon/benoit-hamon-quitter-le-ps-pour-refonder-la-gauche\\_2264587.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/benoit-hamon/benoit-hamon-quitter-le-ps-pour-refonder-la-gauche_2264587.html).

foundation, Hamon demonstrated his desire re-assemble the remains of the left following this election. Not only did the PS perform horrendously in the presidential election, lose 90% of its seats in the legislative election, but its presidential candidate left the party to form his own and the Party's General Secretary, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, announced his resignation from this position.<sup>25</sup> One can clearly see from Mélenchon's actions and events with the PS that this party – truly *the* left party in recent history – was facing serious defeat.

### *First Intimations of a Left Split in France*

All of these events point to a possibly significant split in the French political left. Macron's and Mélenchon's decision to not participate in the left primary was the first indication. Despite both sharing in left values, neither desired to participate in the primary for multiple reasons. Furthermore, the implosion experienced by the Socialist Party during the presidential and legislative elections has contributed to this shift. Mélenchon's decision to not support Macron in 2017 is significant in that he made the opposite decision in 2002: in that election, he chose to support the right-wing Jacques Chirac against Jean-Marie Le Pen of the National Front. In 2002 Mélenchon was also a member of the Socialist Party, whereas now he has broken off and formed his own party. When pressed for his reasoning this time, Mélenchon's election campaign director, Manuel Bompard, said that "The context and political situation are different, but don't expect me to say the FN has changed or Marine Le Pen is different. That's a smokescreen. The basis [of the FN] remains exactly the same."<sup>26</sup> If the FN has remained the same – despite her efforts to 'un-demonize' her father's party – then the question remains: what is different?<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ryad Ouslimani, "Résultats législatives 2017 : Jean-Christophe Cambadélis quitte la tête du PS," *RTL*, June 18, 2017, <https://www.rtl.fr/actu/politique/resultats-legislatives-2017-jean-christophe-cambadelis-quitte-la-tete-du-ps-7789018571>.

<sup>26</sup> Willsher, "Mélenchon's team urge".

<sup>27</sup> Nossiter, "Le Pen's Inner Circle Fuels Doubt About Bid to 'Un-Demonize' Her Party," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/world/europe/marine-le-pen-national-front-party.html>.



The political and global landscape in 2017 are utterly dissimilar to those in 2002. Political divisions have become inflated, exterior issues like the European Union have penetrated national political discussion, and an increasingly globalized world resulting in increased immigration have contributed to greater cleavages within society and politics. Within France and the 2017 elections, the PS is beginning to crumble, Macron's party Onward! drew in many of their voters, and Mélenchon is seemingly luring the rest of the political left to the radical side.

As the two main frontrunners on a left platform, Mélenchon and Macron's ideologies differ in several fundamental ways. Whereas Mélenchon has focused his political structure on four main "emergencies" – (1) the democratic emergency, (2) the social emergency, (3) the ecological emergency, and (4) the geopolitical emergency – Macron has firmly positioned himself as a pro-business liberal, formulating his policies around improving working conditions for people and for promoting businesses.<sup>28</sup> Mélenchon's readiness to criticize the status quo is emblematic of a radical left unafraid to tear down the current system to achieve its goals, whereas Macron's focus on the economic and social sides of French life echo past policies from The Republicans and the PS, respectively. What is significant of the conflict between Mélenchon and Macron is not that it is based in their respective political ideologies, but rather that this ideological gulf has stopped them from working together. Whereas left and leftist parties have, in the recent past, always formed coalitions, these two have not been able to reach across that divide. Since the 1971 Épinay Convention the PS was the holder of this principle of left coalitions, but in the wake of their possible dissolution into other parties this policy could disappear along with it, as hinted by Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the former PS General

<sup>28</sup> "Montréal. Une centaine de personnes pour La France Insoumise," *La Dépêche*, March 14, 2017, <https://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2017/03/14/2535490-une-centaine-de-personnes-pour-la-france-insoumise.html>.

Secretary.<sup>29</sup> These occurrences have led me to wonder if this policy's disappearance with the PS and the rise of Mélenchon and Macron on two sides of the left spectrum are all contributing to a split within the French political left itself. To return to a previous quote used, it was put best by Manuel Valls who remarked in 2016 that "the plural left veered into irreconcilable lefts".<sup>30</sup> His statement was perhaps more prescient than imagined, in view of what happened in the 2017 election. These questions have led me to seek out a more structured way to analyze these events.

### **A Potentially Significant Split**

*Model: Herbert Kitschelt's 3 Levels of Party System Change*<sup>31</sup>

Herbert Kitschelt, in his article "European Party Systems: Continuity and Change", provides an intelligent model for categorizing party system change. It is divided into three levels. Level I change occurs when parties adopt their messages and organizational form to new voter expectations: parties adapt to what their voters want without fully changing themselves. Level II change occurs when new party organizations replace old, discredited parties, but with no ideological change. These new parties remain in the same ideological bloc as old parties, but with a new organization, leadership, and name hope to capture new voters. Level III change occurs when new parties emerge as a result of nascent "cleavage structures and competitive dimensions."<sup>32</sup> Level III change is rarer than Level I and II changes in that it necessitates larger societal changes that affect the population significantly enough to create a veritable divide.

Kitschelt defines cleavages as "lasting divisions (disagreements of interest or orientation) between social or political groups that may give rise to open conflict"; they can be based on the

<sup>29</sup> Nichanian, "Reuniting France's Plural Left."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, "European Party Systems: Continuity and Change," *Developments in West European Politics* (1997): 131-150.

<sup>32</sup> Kitschelt, "European Party Systems," 135.

traits of the people that belong to a group, their attitudes, and/or their “joint activities.”<sup>33</sup> His model is based on the theory of cleavage structures as introduced in Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan’s seminal work, *Party Systems and Voter Alignment: Cross-National Perspectives*. In it, they set out a framework for understanding how societal divisions are manifested in party systems. Their basic claim is that the national and industrial revolutions as experienced in each European state spawned the societal divisions that are manifested in party systems and cleavages.<sup>34</sup> For instance, the process of nation-building put “administrative centers...against peripheral, locally rooted elites.”<sup>35</sup> These processes take place over hundreds of years. For instance, they provide a chart showing the four ‘dichotomies’ which European states passed through to arrive at their current state: the Reformation, the “Democratic Revolution”, the Industrial Revolution, and then the commitment to either “Landed or Urban” interests.<sup>36</sup>

However, their model does leave room for certain new developments to be manifested in party systems. For instance, they make clear that the party systems of now reflect cleavage structures of the past – on a much more accelerated timeline (as little as 20 years).<sup>37</sup> In addition, they note that “To most citizens of the West the currently active parties have been part of the political landscape” for their entire lives, so their place on this landscape seems given, a fact.<sup>38</sup> For instance, the Socialist Party from the 1970s onwards. However, as divisions in society emerge in party divisions a generation or two late, the conditions to renew these party systems come into effect just as the latter seem to be at their most settled and powerful.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>34</sup> Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 47.

<sup>35</sup> Kitschelt, “European Party Systems,” 132.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 50.

What new societal divisions have potentially emerged in the last 60 years to be manifested in a division in the French political left? The two issues debated in the 2017 French presidential election point to it: the European Union and immigration. In one word: Europe.<sup>39</sup> The Eurozone and refugee crises are only the most recent issues reinforcing and sparking debate; Euroscepticism has existed in France since the beginning of the European project. The second round of the 2017 election was seen as the ‘final battle’ between pro-Europe and anti-Europe, between globalization and protectionism, open and closed society, multiculturalism and chauvinism. And yet, this point only marks another step in the long critiques of the European project, starting from its early days until now. Views on Europe have penetrated within the national borders of France, entering and influencing political dialogue of other issues. These conflicts also manifested themselves within the left. With no Socialist Party to make a left coalition – thus breaking the tradition to keeping tensions between warring sides of the left within the left and center-left “without ever fully detonating their ties” – the left was able to splinter off into its constituent parts.<sup>40</sup> The question still remains, though: is this split significant? Using Kitschelt’s model, we see three clear levels of party system change.

#### *Application of the Model of Analysis*

In applying this election to the three levels of party system change as modeled by Kitschelt, all three levels are seen. Firstly, Level I change is seen in the choice of Benoît Hamon to represent the Socialist Party as their presidential candidate. The PS’ voter base chose a politician who represented a more progressive/radical left position within the party. Hamon thus

<sup>39</sup> By Europe here, I mean the entirety of efforts made since the Schuman Declaration in 1951 done with the goal of European unification and integration.

<sup>40</sup> Nichanian, “Reuniting France’s Plural Left.”

promoted a more radical vision of left politics without the PS' basic policies and nature ever truly changing. In the end, their attempt to 're-brand' themselves with Hamon at the helm failed.

This election also featured Level II change, which occurs when new parties emerge but do not differ at all from the parties that they replaced. Macron's rise is an example. Although he positioned himself as a bright new figure in politics, a fresh face above the worn left-right spectrum, two years on from his inspiring election it is clear that his policies are little more than revamps of policies from the PS and the centre-right Republicans, the main party on the right. For example, three of Macron's twelve main principles concern work and business: these policies stem directly from policies of The Republicans, the main party on the right.<sup>41</sup> And Macron's policies on social equality and protection by the state echo past Socialist Party policies.<sup>42</sup> In addition, PS voters flocked to Macron in the election as they saw in him someone who would continue what the PS couldn't.<sup>43</sup> The protests and disapproval he faces provides further evidence to this non-change: he faces the *Gilets jaunes* (Yellow Vests) protests, while his predecessors Sarkozy (Paris, 2005) and Hollande (Amiens, 2012) both experienced their own protests. This sheds light on Macron's failure to respond to the wishes of the French public.

Level III change, in its nature, is trickier to indicate. One has to clearly delineate what new "cleavage structures and competitive dimensions" have emerged that have created the conditions for new parties to be birthed. For that, long-term studies must be undertaken to track and analyze such new societal divisions; the lack of such studies limits this paper. However, my evocation of Europe as a central issue of the 2017 election points to a highly probable social

<sup>41</sup> Les Républicains, *Charte des principes fondamentaux des Républicains*, October 2019.; En Marche !, *Programme présidentiel - Emmanuel Macron*.

<sup>42</sup> Le Parti Socialiste, *Charte des socialistes pour le progrès humain*.; En Marche !, *Programme présidentiel - Emmanuel Macron*.

<sup>43</sup> "From solidarity to solitary."

cleavage existing in France: those for and those against Europe. Such debates have existed in France since the days of the European Coal and Steel Community, the EU's first iteration, and have continued to dominate European politics ever since. They arrived at a tense point in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty, which further integrated Europe: Grunberg notes that "Maastricht Referendum was the catalyst that brought the European issue into the field of major national political controversies."<sup>44</sup> The penetration of Europe into French national politics is evident most recently in the form of Marine Le Pen and her National Front party. Her success demonstrates Euroscepticism's power in France, and how this divide is becoming a veritable social cleavage within the French national borders; this social and political division entails many other policies, domestic and foreign. For instance, one's stance on immigration and integration of refugees. Moreover, the rise of Mélenchon on the radical left as both a pseudo-response to Le Pen and also his own political entity stakes further claim to the existence of this nascent cleavage. For example, his calls to "disobey" European treaties to improve conditions in French is somewhere in the middle of Macron's wish to reform and reinforce the European Union, and Le Pen's calls for a complete 'Frexit'.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Mélenchon – from within the PS, no less – is an example of Level II change in that he occupies a new position on the political landscape, owing in part to new social divisions resulting from the politics of Europe dissolving into national debate.

## **Conclusion**

Within the frame of the 2017 French presidential election, we saw both external and internal ramifications. The potential external effect – that of it setting off a populist wave across

<sup>44</sup> Gérard Grunberg, "Euroscepticism in France 1992-2002," in *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism Volume 1*, ed. Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Alexandre Boudet, "Pourquoi le plan B pour Mélenchon pour l'Europe n'est pas le même que celui de Le Pen," *The Huffington Post France*, March 11, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/03/11/pourquoi-le-plan-b-de-melenchon-pour-leurope-nest-pas-le-meme\\_a\\_21879262/](https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/03/11/pourquoi-le-plan-b-de-melenchon-pour-leurope-nest-pas-le-meme_a_21879262/).

Europe and the world – was discussed widely. Much less brought up, though, was the internal aftermath of this election: essentially the dissolution of the PS, the stunning emergence of Macron, and the humble rise of Mélenchon together form the story of how the French political left splintered at this election. Europe has penetrated French national political dialogue to emerge as a veritable social cleavage within its borders; the fierce debates seen during this election are evidence of that. Moreover, the rise of Le Pen and the far right, the climate crisis, and immigration emergencies within the EU are all nascent competitive dimensions over which the various parties and politicians of this election argued over. The left split is a manifestation of this emerging cleavage structure and these new competitive dimensions.

However, there are two main limitations to this paper. Firstly, it uses as its base a single election. There is no way to tell currently if this left split is permanent or temporary. Secondly, a serious lack of long-term data or studies specifically targeted to this subject is manifest. And yet, this paper has evoked a potentially momentous event: the fall of the largest left party in recent French history leading to the emergence of new political actors who have made a clean break with its history and practices. For the future of the French Fifth Republic – its history of left coalitions and *cohabitations* between right and left – this rupture within the political left is a subject that should be closely studied in the following years and elections as the French, and the world, combat new crises and shifting political trends.

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