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DATA, MEASURES AND METHODS

The 2017 French Election Study (FES 2017): a post-electoral cross-sectional survey

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Abstract This article describes a post-electoral cross-sectional survey conducted after the French presidential election of 2017. The French Election Study consists in a national representative sample of 1830 people, who were interviewed face-to-face in the days following the second round. The paper introduces the questionnaire and the methodology used. Data quality is also discussed in comparison with previous French cross-sectional presidential election studies.

Keywords French elections · Election studies · Data quality · Sampling · Turnout overreporting

Introduction

France has not been a pioneer in national election studies. Although the first election studies were conducted in the 1950s (Mayer and Sauger 2012), a solid tradition has been established from only 1988 onward. Sciences Po's research center CEVIPOF has been a key actor in this movement by commissioning a cross-sectional survey after each presidential contest from 1988 to 2012. Other projects also emerged in more recent times. This article introduces such a survey, the second in the *French Election Study* series, fielded in 2017.[1]

[1] A number of projects have also collected opinion data for the 2017 presidential election. For the project we are aware of, CEVIPOF has fielded a massive online panel covering almost 2 years (from November 2015 to July 2017, see https://www.enef.fr/); the long-term panel *Dynamob* (Electoral choices and political values: 2013–2017) has also included systematic questions before and after the election (http://

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The 2017 French Election Study (FES 2017) is generally characterized as a post-presidential election cross-sectional survey. It compares with the simplest versions of traditional national election studies. As France's institutional context remains dominated by the President, this study focuses on the presidential election. The legislative elections held 2 months after are not included. The sample size is 1830 persons, selected through a quota method as it is often the case in France. FES 2017 also includes the fifth questionnaire module of the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.*[2]

Data from FES 2017 are already available to the research community upon request to the authors of this paper. Data will also be available through the portal of the Center for Socio-Political Data (cdsp.sciences-po.fr).

The rest of the paper describes this study in more detail, presenting the content of the questionnaire in second section, as well as sampling and fieldwork procedures in third section. It ends with a fourth section discussing the overall quality of the estimates provided by this survey.

Questionnaire

The 2017 French Election Study was not primarily thought of as a tool to understand the specificities of the 2017 presidential election. Instead, the survey aimed to ensure comparability with previous surveys on French elections, other national surveys and comparative programs as well, so as to make a general contribution to the understanding of electoral behavior. In this way, the FES 2017 questionnaire encompasses three main components: comparison in time, comparison across countries, and specific research projects.

Comparison in time

FES 2017 first delivers data in line with previous cross-sectional French presidential election studies. Taking onboard the general layout of the 2012 French Election Study,[3] it may be characterized like most electoral surveys in France by its strong emphasis on the measurement on values and attitudes of voters on the one hand and by a precise description of their sociodemographic background on the other hand. Such features underline the continuing importance of the Columbia school in France. From nearly 350 variables in the data file, more than 50 directly tap at the measurement of attitudes and values in terms of both their economic and non-economic dimensions (measurement of attitudes toward minorities and migrants are particularly well developed). More than 80 variables are used to measure the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents and their environment.

Footnote 1 continued
quanti.dime-shs.sciences-po.fr/en/). The Comparative National Election Project (CNEP) fielded a specific survey as well (https://u.osu.edu/cnep/).

[2] www.cses.org.

[3] http://bdq.reseau-quetelet.cnrs.fr/fr/Details_d_une_enquete/1278.

Of course, questions about voting behavior, political positioning and relations to the political system are well represented too (about 90 variables in total). Propensions to vote (PTVs) are included in these measures. Views about candidates are more developed than the assessment of parties, this being driven both by the presidential nature of the competition and the important fluidity of the party system at that point. Unfortunately, very few of these variables allow us to monitor long-term changes as electoral surveys in France have been marked by their considerable instability (probably due to their lack of institutionalization). Yet, a more solid body of repeated indicators has been included in the latest studies, indicators which are of course present in this survey as well. It should be noticed that the same body of "classical" variables are repeated in identical terms in the long-term panel study "Dynamob."

Comparison across countries

FES 2017 is also the vehicle for the implementation of the fifth module of the Comparative study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project. This program represents a large-scale comparative effort about electoral behavior, with close to 50 countries involved in the project worldwide. A new CSES module is run every 5 years. In 2017, CSES had a specific focus on the "politics of populism" (Hobolt et al. 2016). It included specific questions about the definition of the nation and attitudes toward elites and out-groups.

Specific research questions

FES 2017 also included a specific research focus.[4] The context of the 2017 election provided a unique opportunity to test the link between populist attitudes (Akkerman et al. 2014; Farrell and Laughlin 1976; Schulz et al. 2017) and the vote for those who are perceived as "populist" candidates. The presence of candidates using populist rhetoric, both on the left and on the right, makes it possible to distinguish populism from other ideological components. The case of Macron, and his critique of the establishment, also reinforces the case. FES 2017, thus, develops the CSES module on populism one step further and tries to capture the three components of populism (anti-elitism, preference for popular sovereignty, and belief in the homogeneity of the people) along with other dimensions of relations with the nation and the political system. This provides an opportunity to understand more specific developments of radical right and radical left politics. Related components of this main theme include representations of democracy (and alternative forms of rule)

[4] A team of about 20 researchers has been associated with the project. We especially thank Abdelkarim Amengay, Bruno Cautrès, Mirjam Dageforde, Anja Durovic, Romain Lachat, Nonna Mayer, Florence Nocca, Jan Rovny (from Sciences Po Paris), Viviane Lehay and Vincent Tiberj (from Sciences Po Bordeaux), Chloé Alexandre, Sandrine Astor, Céline Belot, Pierre Bréchon, Frédéric Gonthier, Cal Le Gall, Raul Magni-Berton, Corentin Poyet, Max-Valentin Robert, Sonja Zmerli (from Sciences Po Grenoble), Camille Bedock (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Charlotte Dolez (Université Catholique de Louvain), Filip Kostelka (Université de Montréal) for the invaluable contribution to the project they provided.

and personality traits through the inclusion of the reduced "Big 5" battery (Gosling et al. 2003).

A second specific focus of FES 2017 is the measurement of new forms of work and social mobility. The survey includes items forming a scale of "precariousness," references to the occupations of both parents and partner, and indications of a subjective feeling of social mobility. The general assumption tested here looks at the link between social exclusion, attitudes, and participation in politics.

A number of smaller issues are also included in the project. To mention only a few, there is a battery of questions on feelings toward candidates based on candidates' pictures rather than their name; perceptions of the honesty of the various candidates; and the perceived political orientations of parents.

Sample and fieldwork

Sampling design

FES 2017 is a post-electoral cross-sectional survey. Its sampling design is based on the so-called quota sampling, which is the method usually used in France even in academic oriented studies (Gschwend 2005). Post-electoral surveys have indeed always followed such a method (see Table 1, except for two studies in 1988 and 2012). The target population was French citizens registered on electoral rolls within "continental" France.[5]

The sampling frame was based on a matrix of stratification cross-tabulating "big" regions (for a total of 8 territorial units) and category of agglomeration (with 4 different types, Paris and its suburbs being a category by itself). In this matrix of 29 valid cells, 100 primary sampling units were selected (PSU). Each unit was defined at the scale of the electoral district (*circonscription*), with then a target of 18 interviews by PSU.

In a second step, quotas of different population subgroups were defined. We used four criteria: sex (two categories), age (in five categories), education level (in 4 categories), and a combination of occupation (retired or not) and profession (in 6 categories). These quotas were fixed in accordance with the latest available data from official statistical sources (INSEE). Education was the only exception in this regard. The lowest category of education has been deliberately underrepresented for two reasons. The first is that official data come for a different population, i.e., the general population of nationals. We know, however, that registered voters usually represent only about 90% of this population, with a significant underrepresentation of the least educated in this population (Durier and Touré 2017). Second, fieldwork institutes tend not to consider education in their traditional quotas and are usually unable to meet this criterion for the least educated people. This is due both to self-

[5] Continental France is the national territory except for overseas territories and Corsica. These territories are usually excluded from face-to-face surveys for cost reasons. Metropolitan France only excludes overseas territories.

Table 1 French presidential election studies: cross-sectional surveys

	FNES 1988	CEVIPOF 1988	CEVIPOF 1995	CEVIPOF 2002	CEVIPOF 2007	CEVIPOF 2012	FES 2012	FES 2017
Scope	Registered	Citizens	Registered	Registered	Registered	Registered	Registered	Registered
Territory	Continental	Continental	Continental	Continental	Metropolitan	Metropolitan	Continental	Continental
Interviews	1013	4032	4078	4017	4006	2782	2014	1830
Registered voters	1013	3847	4078	4017	4006	2504	2014	1830
Cross section	1013	4032	4078	2195	4006	2504	2014	1830
Panel				1822				
Data collection	Face-to-face	Face-to-face	Face-to-face	Phone	Phone	Phone	Face-to-face	Face-to-face
Survey institute	Sofres	Sofres	Sofres	Sofres	Ifop	Opinionway	Sofres	Sofres
Start of fieldwork		09.05.1988	08.05.1995	15.05.2002	09.05.2007	10.05.2012	09.05.2012	09.05.2017
End of fieldwork		20.05.1988	23.05.1995	03.06.2002	23.05.2007	29.05.2012	09.06.2012	23.05.2017
Stratification	Region	Region	Region	Region	Region	Region	Region	Region
	Size of town	Size of town	Size of town	Size of town	Size of town	Size of town	Size of town	Size of town
Random sampling	Cities						Cities (400)	
							Addresses	

Table 1 continued

	FNES 1988	CEVIPOF 1988	CEVIPOF 1995	CEVIPOF 2002	CEVIPOF 2007	CEVIPOF 2012	FES 2012	FES 2017
Quota sampling		Age	Age	Age * sex	Age	Age		Age
		Sex	Sex		Sex	Sex		Sex
		Occupation	Occupation	Occupation	Occupation	Occupation		Occupation
					Education			Education
Funders		Fnsp, Cnrs, Ministère de la Recherche	Fnsp, Cnrs, National Science Fondation	Cevipof, Cidsp, Cecop, Ministère de l'Intérieur	Cevipof, Ministère de l'Intérieur	Cevipof, Sig	Liepp, Mairie de Paris, Sciences Po	Sciences Po, Liepp, Uga
Principal investigators	Pierce	Mayer, Boy et alii.	Mayer, Boy, Lewis-Beck	Cevipof-Cidsp-Cecop	Cevipof	Cevipof	Sauger	Gougou, Sauger

selection and also to overestimation by respondents of their education level. The sample design is then deliberately skewed toward more educated people.

Fieldwork

FES 2017 is a post-electoral (after the runoff of the presidential election) face-to-face survey. Fieldwork started on May 9 and ended on May 23. It was undertaken by Kantar—TNS—Sofres, after a public bid. Prior to fieldwork, a pretest with 30 people was conducted just before the election.

Interviews were computer-assisted, respondents having access to a tablet for questions usually associated with an answer card. This made it possible to preserve the confidentiality of responses in case of suspicion of desirability bias. In total, the sample comprises 1830 completed interviews, with an average length of 51 min per interview.

Response rate

The response rate is usually not computed for quota samples as no a priori set of people to be interviewed is precisely defined. However, we monitored contacts for this study, as shown in Table 2. The best indicator for comparison with other surveys is the ratio between refusals and completed interviews. This ratio equals 2.7, meaning that a potential response rate would be less than 25% with the usual standards. Yet, we recall that quota samples do not try to maximize response rate.

Post-stratification and weighting

There is no established method to weight data with quota samples. What is generally available are post-stratification weights so as to reach known values of the population parameters. FES 2017 comes with six such post-stratification weights with a combination of criteria based on sociodemographic characteristics (the ones used for quotas) and electoral choice (results of the first and second rounds of the presidential election).

Table 2 Monitoring of contacts during fieldwork (2017 French Election Study)

	Number	% total	% contact
Addresses visited	20,195		
Non-contact	10,795	53.5	
Contact	9400	46.5	
Refusals	4956		52.7
Outside quotas targets	2178		23.2
Non-eligible	374		4.0
Non-completed interviews	62		0.7
Completed interviews	1830		19.5

Data quality

Assessing the data quality of surveys can be a complex undertaking. The total survey error approach has made tremendous progress in this regard (Assael and Keon 1982; Biemer and Lyberg 2003; Weisberg 2005). We subscribe generally to this approach, but here we propose a first modest assessment, based on estimates of election results and with comparison to previous experiences in French electoral studies. Table 3 compares these estimates and their differences with accurate population parameters (differences in parentheses) for seven electoral studies from 1988 to 2017. Results are given for turnout and are then detailed by candidate for both the first and the second rounds of presidential elections.

For an easier assessment of Table 3, Table 4 displays overall indications of data quality. We computed the sum of the ratio between estimates in the survey and candidates' real scores in both rounds (labeled total deviation in %). Lower values indicate better quality. Note that this indicator is very sensitive to deviations for minor candidates. We also indicate the percentage of estimates which are clearly outside of the theoretical interval of confidence (at the 95% level).[6] Once again, lower values are indicators of better quality. This indicator does not, however, tell anything about the importance of deviations outside the confidence interval. This is partly done in the measure of total deviation (in points) between candidates estimates and candidates true value. This indicator is restricted to first round candidates. Again, lower values are indicators of better quality.

All in all, FES 2017 data seem to perform quite well on the indicators proposed. It records one of the lower values on each measure of deviation, showing that it corresponds to quite a good reconstitution of true population parameters even before any post-stratification.

As with all previous surveys, FES 2017 overestimates voter turnout, but it does so rather less than before. Part of the explanation might be linked to the inclusion of face-saving response items in the standard turnout question (Zeglovits and Kritzinger 2014; Morin-Chassé et al. 2017). The questionnaire combined the classical short preamble designed to address the problem of social desirability with innovative extra response categories. As suggested in the literature, FES 2017 offered four different response options: "I did not vote" "I thought about voting but eventually I did not go," "I usually vote but this time I did not go," "I voted." Compared to previous French presidential election studies, it succeeded at reducing overreporting by a range of 4–6% points.

Regarding the first round, most candidates return their actual level of the vote, except for Mélenchon (who was overestimated by more than 4 points) and Fillon (who was underestimated by 5 points). Fillon's underestimation is very likely the result of the context of the election itself. Informal discussions with pollsters indicate that Fillon's voters have been "disappearing" in surveys, with a even more greater underrepresentation at the time of the legislative elections in June. Interestingly, the underestimation of Marine Le Pen's vote is rather limited, albeit it

[6] See Sauger (2008) for a discussion of these aspects in the context of quota sampling.

Table 3 Underestimations and overestimations of the vote in French presidential election studies (1988–2017)

	CEVIPOF 1988	CEVIPOF 1995	CEVIPOF 2002	CEVIPOF 2007	CEVIPOF 2012	FES 2012	FES 2017
Turnout	91.3 (+9.3)	86.6 (+6.6)	86.2 (+13.4)	93.8 (+8.5)	91.8 (+10.4)	90.3 (+8.9)	85.0 (+5.0)
EXG	0.4 (=)	5.0 (−0.4)	0.3 (−0.2)	0.4 (+0.1)			
LO	1.5 (−0.5)		6.5 (+0.7)	1.7 (+0.4)	0.7 (+0.1)	0.5 (−0.1)	0.6 (+0.0)
LCR/NPA			5.4 (+1.1)	5.3 (+1.1)	1.1 (−0.1)	0.9 (−0.3)	1.5 (+0.4)
PCF/FG/LFI	5.6 (−1.3)	7.1 (−1.6)	3.8 (+0.4)	2.1 (+0.1)	13.1 (+1.8)	12.8 (+1.5)	23.8 (+4.2)
PS	39.5 (+5.6)	28.3 (+5.1)	20.0 (+4.2)	28.0 (+2.6)	33.4 (+5.3)	35.5 (+7.4)	6.9 (+0.6)
DVG	2.9 (+0.8)		2.4 (+0.3)	1.5 (+0.2)			
Greens	4.7 (+0.9)	3.6 (+0.3)	7.3 (+2.0)	1.4 (−0.2)	2.1 (−0.2)	3.2 (+0.9)	
Centre			6.0 (+0.6)	20.4 (+1.6)	9.5 (+0.3)	8.0 (−1.2)	25.0 (+1.2)
ECO			1.4 (−0.5)				
CPNT			2.8 (−1.5)	1.0 (−0.2)			
Misc.		0.3 (=)			0.2 (=)	0.1 (−0.1)	1.8 (+0.4)
UDF	15.1 (−1.4)		8.0 (+1.1)				
RPR/UMP/LR	19.3 (−0.5)	15.2 (−5.3)	20.9 (+1.5)	31.1 (+0.1)	24.2 (−2.8)	21.4 (−5.6)	14.9 (−5.0)
MPF/DLF/DLR		4.4 (−0.4)		1.4 (−0.9)	1.7 (−0.1)	1.7 (−0.1)	4.0 (−0.8)
DVD		22.8 (+4.3)	3.8 (−1.4)				1.1 (+0.2)
FN	10.9 (−3.7)	13.2 (−2.1)	10.2 (−7.0)	5.8 (−4.9)	14.1 (−4.2)	15.8 (−2.5)	20.6 (−0.9)
EXD			1.2 (−1.2)				
Turnout	93.5 (+8.9)	88.0 (+7.5)	91.2 (+10.3)	94.3 (+9.0)	92.7 (+10.7)	90.3 (+8.3)	80.7 (+7.4)
PS	60.2 (+6.2)	48.3 (+1.0)		48.7 (+2.0)	61.0 (+9.7)	64.3 (+13.0)	
Centre							71.1 (+5.4)
RPR/UMP	39.8 (−6.2)	51.7 (−1.0)	91.9 (+9.9)	51.3 (−2.0)	39.0 (−9.7)	35.7 (−13.0)	
FN			8.1 (−9.9)				28.9 (−5.4)

Table 4 Indicators of survey quality for French presidential election studies (1988–2017)

	1988 CEVIPOF	1995 CEVIPOF	2002 CEVIPOF	2007 CEVIPOF	2012 CEVIPOF	2012 FES	2017 FES
Total deviation (in %) for candidates estimates	189	139	627	295	153	333	182
% of cases out of theoretical margins of confidence at 95%	91	58	53	62	61	50	43
Total deviation (in points) for candidates in the first round	24	19.5	23.7	12.4	14.9	19.8	13.7

is more significant in the second round. This may be linked to the "normalization" of the National Front but also to the use of tablets for recording votes.

Taking the opportunity to make more general observations about survey quality with the experience of French post-electoral surveys, we can note that mode of interviews (between phone calls and face-to-face) does not lead to any systematic difference in terms of vote recall; increase in sample size does not make survey estimates more precise; random sampling does not perform better on these indicators than quota sampling.

Conclusion

This general overview of the 2017 French Election Study aimed at introducing this survey to the research community. We repeat that data are available to all people for research purposes, first by contacting Nicolas Sauger, and soon on the website of the Center for Socio-Political Data (Sciences Po Paris).

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