MACRON'S CENTER: AN ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGICAL ALIGNMENT AND VOTER SATISFACTION IN FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

After decades of alternating governance between the mainstream left and right in France, a new centrist force emerged in 2017 led by Emmanuel Macron. This thesis investigates the nature of centrism in the Macron era, asking what the political center truly represents in the French context. While Macron presents himself as transcending the left-right divide, his program and electoral base may not reflect a coherent centrist ideology. To evaluate this claim, the thesis compares post-election satisfaction among voters ideologically aligned with the winning candidate using post-electoral data. The results show that Macron's centrist voters report slightly lower satisfaction than ideologically aligned voters of Chirac, Sarkozy, or Hollande. However, the contrast is especially stark between Macron in 2022 and Chirac in 2002, both of whom faced far-right challengers in the second round. These findings suggest that Macron's success rests on strategic positioning and circumstantial factors rather than ideological coherence. The research combines quantitative comparisons with analysis of existing literature and an expert interview to situate Macron's centrism in French politics. This thesis contributes to existing literature by addressing a gap in the study of voter satisfaction and ideological alignment in the French case and how Macron's centrist block affects ideological representation in the Fifth Republic. It then concludes that the ideological center under Macron is temporary and less a stable political identity than a byproduct of polarization, personalization, and strategic voting within the Fifth Republic.

DEDICATIONS

To my parents Kinga and Istvan,

If I ever become even half the person you are, I will consider my life a success. Every step I have taken has been made possible by your sacrifices, your resilience, and your unwavering faith in me. This work is, in every sense, yours as much as mine.

To my sister Angela,

Your support is felt through every breath you take and I hope that I can become the role model you set me out to be.

To Nagyi,

My dearest grandmother, your love for the sciences has been the greatest source of inspiration for me. It would be the highest honor for this work to find a place among the thousands of books on your shelves, each of which you know by heart. The world holds no secrets for you but you, have always been, the world's greatest hidden gem.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PvdA: Labour Party of the Netherlands

CDA: Christian Democrats of the Netherlands

PS: Parti socialiste, Socialist party of France

LR: Les Républicains, Republicans of France

SPD: Social Democrats of Germany

CDU: Christian Democrats of Germany

LREM: La République en marche !

FN: Front national, National Front

RN: Rassemblement national, National Rally

UMP: Union pour un mouvement populaire

UDF: Union pour la démocratie française

LFI: La France insoumise

NFP: Le nouveau front populaire

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For much of the twentieth century, European politics were structured around a clear ideological opposition between the left and the right. On one hand, the left, traditionally rooted in socialism and social democracy, advocated for economic redistribution and state intervention. On the other hand, the right, grounded in conservatism and liberalism, emphasized market freedoms and traditional social orders. Yet by the latter half of the century, particularly in countries like the Netherlands and across Scandinavia, this division began to decrease in significance. Social democratic and conservative parties alike converged on support for the welfare state and the mixed economy. This narrowed the ideological distance - which is understood as the gap between voter or party self-placements on a left-right spectrum - that had once defined electoral competition.

This convergence was particularly visible in the Netherlands, where both the Labour Party (PvdA) and the Christian Democrats (CDA) endorsed a corporatist welfare model, and in Denmark, where the center-right Moderates began supporting the foundations of the social democratic welfare state by the 1990s. In both cases, ideological boundaries became less important not only in rhetoric but in policymaking. The Dutch "purple coalitions" of the late 1990s, which united left-liberal and right-liberal parties, embodied this trend (Green-Pedersen & van Kersbergen 2002). Similarly, in Denmark, governing coalitions across the ideological spectrum maintained broad welfare commitments, thus reflecting a consensus that prioritized strategic technocratic governance over ideological contestation. This softening of ideological differences produced electorates that became increasingly used to moderation and managerialism, which in turn weakened traditional partisan identities. This centrist consensus

around the welfare state marks a sharp contrast with developments in countries like the United States, where ideological polarization between left and right remained more deeply present.

This historical convergence towards the center has important implications for understanding the nature of democratic choice today. Where politics once offered contrasted alternatives, they increasingly offered variations on a broadly converged model. Major parties evolved into "catch-all" organizations, as presented initially by Otto Kirchheimer, prioritizing electoral pragmatism over ideological mobilization (Krouwel 2003). Along with the mainstream parties, far-left and far-right parties have become more and more popular, raising the question whether centrism also opens the gate for the rise of the extremes. In this context, the traditional left-right divide persists in name but changes significantly in substance.

It is against this backdrop that the rise of Emmanuel Macron must be situated in France. Macron's centrist project raises fundamental questions about the nature of political representation in the Fifth Republic: is the form of centrism advanced by Emmanuel Macron a coherent political ideology, or is it best understood as a strategic response to France's institutional configuration and electoral fragmentation?

This thesis examines whether Emmanuel Macron's electoral success represents ideological alignment with his voter base, or whether his victories are better understood as the result of positional advantage or as the electoral benefit of occupying the middle ground in a fragmented and polarized political landscape. More broadly, it asks whether the ideological center in France is a real, cohesive constituency, or a space largely created by institutional mechanics. This thesis contributes to debates on electoral systems and the shifting meaning of ideological positioning in modern democracies. It aims to offer a deeper account of what "the center" truly represents

2

today: a true political identity or a relative point of view dependent on what the current political landscape may be.

The research will proceed in eight chapters. It begins with a literature review that explores the distinction between centrism as a strategic position and as a substantive ideology, followed by an examination of voter satisfaction and its role in democratic legitimacy. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework, defining key concepts such as spatial voting and situating Macron within theories of post-democracy. Chapter IV analyzes the French case in depth, tracing the decline of the Parti socialiste (PS) and Les Républicains (LR), and outlining how the two-round system contributed to Macron's rise. Chapter V details the mixed-method methodology, combining survey-based quantitative analysis with qualitative insights from literature and an expert interview. The sixth chapter presents the results of the empirical analysis, followed by a discussion in Chapter VII that connects these findings to broader debates on centrism, political representation, and institutional design. The thesis concludes by evaluating whether the ideological center in France is a meaningful political identity or a temporary construct of electoral mechanics.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Centrism: Ideology or Strategic Position?

Historically, centrism in Europe found early expression through classical liberalism and later Christian democracy. In the postwar decades, as in the Netherlands and Scandinavia, major parties from both the left and right converged on shared support for welfare states and mixed economies. Scholars observed that ideological convergence gave way to the rise of "catch-all parties," which diluted traditional commitments in favor of broader, centrist appeal (Krouwel 2003, 26-29). One of the most famous examples is that of the SPD and the CDU in Germany during World War II, where Allied powers urged the SPD to moderate its ideological stance leading to little to no contrast between the two parties (Krouwel 2003, 26). A similar pattern of ideological convergence unfolded in Denmark, where the Social Democratic Party reoriented itself in response to the post-Keynesian economic consensus of the 1980s and 1990s. Facing repeated electoral defeats and credibility issues, the party shifted toward fiscal responsibility, market-oriented reforms, and a pragmatic stance on welfare retrenchment. This repositioning allowed it to re-enter government under conditions that required broad political compromise and technocratic policy solutions. This transformation marked a departure from traditional programmatic social democracy and moved Danish politics toward a more centrist, consensus-based model, where the boundaries between left and right became increasingly blurred (Green-Pedersen and van Kersbergen 2002). These insights suggest that centrism often emerges from the pragmatic needs of electoral competition rather than from distinct ideological conviction.

The theoretical distinction between centrist ideology and centrist positioning remains central to recent work. Another interpretation proposes that centrism can be understood in three dimensions: as an ideological commitment to moderation, as an organizational strategy to

capture the median voter, and as a policy style blending left and right (Burton 2013). Yet centrism often lacks substantive content, serving more as a rhetorical device to signal majoritarian appeal (Burton 2013). A "thin"-centred ideology has a limited core, such as the division between "the people" and "the corrupt elite", and lacks the ideological ground and policy framework of "thick" ideologies like socialism or liberalism (Mudde 2004). Macron's centrism, which draws from both left and right without a consistent ideological foundation, can be seen as a "thin" ideology defined more by strategic flexibility than clarity. Centrism could reflect a "thin" ideology in its form as a vague preference for moderation and lacks the substance of a "thick" ideology. Rather than being grounded in a coherent set of beliefs or values, it is defined primarily by its distance from perceived extremes and used as a tool of strategic positioning.

2.2 Median Voter Theory and the Strategic Center

The strategic interpretation of centrism is deeply rooted in the spatial model of voting. According to the median voter theorem, in a two-party system, rational politicians will converge toward the policy preferences of the median voter to maximize electoral success (Downs 1957, as cited in Grandjean 2020, 71-77). Centrism, in this framework, is not an independent ideology but a necessary outcome of competitive electoral logic.

Empirical research in European contexts largely supports this dynamic. The convergence of left and right parties toward a centrist welfare consensus in the late twentieth century, particularly in proportional systems like the Netherlands, illustrates how electoral incentives push political actors toward moderate positions. However strategic centrism is not purely voter-driven and party elites often proactively reposition themselves toward the center even without clear voter demand, suggesting that centrism can be elite-driven rather than a popular ideological movement (Green-Pedersen and van Kersbergen 2002). Furthermore, the direct election of the

5

president, combined with a two-round runoff system favors candidates who can assemble a broad, if ideologically incoherent, second-round coalition. The "presidentializing logic" of the French system intensifies the personalization of leadership and reduces the role of traditional partisan organization (Clift and McDaniel 2017).

The two-round electoral system in France adds further complexity. While Downs' model primarily addresses single-round systems, runoff elections incentivize strategic positioning at different stages: appealing first to one's base, then pivoting toward the center to secure a majority. This creates opportunities for figures like Macron to position themselves advantageously in the second round, even if their first-round support is less ideologically cohesive.

2.3 Voter Satisfaction and the Question of Representation

Beyond electoral victory, democratic legitimacy also depends on whether voters feel represented by those they elect. Political science literature highlights that ideological proximity between voters and elected officials correlates strongly with satisfaction and perceived legitimacy (Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017). If the ideological center were truly a substantive political community, we would expect centrist voters to exhibit high levels of satisfaction with a centrist president. However, some studies of "winner-loser gaps" in democracies suggest that satisfaction is often lower among the winning group in established democracies (Nadeau, Daoust, and Dassonneville 2023).

Applied to the French context, these findings imply that if Macron's electoral base is primarily strategic rather than ideological, his presidency might suffer from lower levels of satisfaction even among those who ostensibly supported him. This would indicate that the French center is less a coherent ideological constituency than a temporary coalition created by the demands of

the two-round system. Furthermore, political legitimacy reveals itself most clearly in moments of crisis (Schmitt 1922). In Macron's case, his re-election, despite widespread dissatisfaction, was likely influenced by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. At a time when voters sought safety and stability, many turned to the incumbent president as a guarantor of order. This suggests a form of legitimacy grounded in the perception of continuity and control during uncertainty rather than satisfaction with previous policies or governance.

Although the literature provides useful distinctions between centrism as ideology and centrism as strategy, it often struggles to capture the particular context of the French case. Many of the dominant theories were developed with more stable or two-party systems in mind, and do not fully reflect the volatility or institutional features of the Fifth Republic. In France, elections are highly personalized, and the traditional left-right divide, while weakened, continues to shape political expectations and identities. This makes it harder for a centrist project to take root in the way these theories might predict. In addition, few studies consider how the structure of the electoral system itself can produce centrist outcomes without a corresponding ideological base. As a result, much of the existing work risks overstating the coherence or durability of the center in contexts like France. This thesis addresses that gap by examining whether voters who identify as centrist and support a centrist candidate like Macron actually feel represented by him. By focusing on post-election satisfaction, it tests whether the ideological center in France this study functions as a genuine ideological constituency or merely as the temporary space between the left and the right, shaped by institutional incentives, the current political climate, or strategic positioning.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of centrism remains notoriously difficult to define with precision. It was spoken of in the 1990s when a "social democratic renewal" took place, notably with the victory of Tony Blair in the United Kingdom (Giddens 1996). Blair's "Third Way" became synonymous with what we might refer to as centrism. It can be understood as economically liberal, which is often associated with right-wing, conservative thought, and socially liberal, generally associated with left-wing ideology (Kallinich 2021). Macron seems to be the current-day embodiment of this *double-liberal* stance. His political movement, La République En Marche (LREM, now renamed Renaissance), was founded on the principle of being "neither right nor left," aiming to appeal to a broad electorate disillusioned with established parties. His approach was also labeled as "technocratic populism", which refers to a political approach that combines anti-establishment rhetoric with an emphasis on technocratic competence (Buštíková and Guasti 2019, as cited in Perottino and Guasti 2017). This form of populism positions leaders as outsiders challenging a failing political system, while simultaneously relying on their expertise to legitimize their authority.

Macron's project can also be understood through Colin Crouch's theory of post-democracy. In a post-democratic setting, the formal institutions of democracy remain intact. Elections are held, parties compete, and public debate continues; but the real substance of political contestation is increasingly hollowed out (Crouch 2004). Decisions are shaped less by mass participation or ideological conflict and more by technocratic elites, corporate actors, and media strategy. In such contexts, parties tend to avoid programmatic clarity in order to maximize appeal across a fragmented electorate. Macron's rise fits closely with this model. His campaign bypassed the traditional party system, relied heavily on curated media narratives, and presented a managerial

style of politics that emphasized competence and unity rather than ideological confrontation. The avoidance of clear commitments, framed as "pragmatism" or "modernization," is a hallmark of post-democratic leadership. Macron's claim to be "neither right nor left" reflects less a coherent centrist ideology, but rather a reluctance to situate his program within existing political divides. Rather than resolve political tensions, this strategy often defers them or manages them through policy experimentation without public mandate. It reflects this centrist blend: economically, he introduced pro-market reforms such as lowering corporate taxes and restructuring labor laws to increase flexibility, while socially, he maintained a strong commitment to welfare through reforms inspired by the Scandinavian "flexicurity" model (Ross 2019, 78). He also proposed educational investments, administrative modernization, and a reinforced pro-European agenda. While Macron might be embodying this particular definition of centrism, it remains an open question whether his actions and his program correspond with the electorate's understanding of centrism.

This also raises the question of whether Macron's centrism qualifies as a "thin" or "thick" ideology. A "thin" ideology provides only vague normative direction, while a "thick" ideology, by contrast, is rooted in a consistent set of values, policy positions, and a social base (Mudde 2004). Macron's centrism lacks the institutional and ideological anchoring that would make it a "thick" ideology. It is more accurately described as a reactive and strategic posture, tailored to the immediate electoral context rather than built on lasting political principles. This distinguishes Macron from other centrist projects. For example, Ciudadanos in Spain emerged with a clear liberal-reformist agenda, positioning itself against Catalan nationalism and corruption with specific programmatic commitments (Rama, Cordero, and Zagórski 2021). Similarly, the historical UDF in France, although fragmented, was anchored in a Christian-democratic and pro-European tradition that gave it a recognizable ideological profile. By contrast, Macron's movement was assembled rapidly with limited grassroots involvement and

functioned largely as an extension of his personal political brand. Its ideological content has remained fluid and often contradictory, further confirming its "thin" character.

In the context of an unstable and discredited party system, this ideological thinness can in fact be a strategic asset. Because it lacks a fixed doctrinal foundation, Macron's centrism allows for flexibility and adaptation across electoral cycles. It enables him to appropriate policy ideas from both the left and the right while avoiding the constraints of a traditional partisan base. In a political environment marked by volatility and voter realignment, such malleability gives Macron the ability to reframe his platform according to shifting public moods and external events. This reinforces his position as a "default" candidate in times of institutional uncertainty.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FRENCH CASE AND THE DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL PARTIES

Emmanuel Macron's rise cannot be understood without considering the profound transformation of the French party system in the years leading up to 2017. For decades, France's political field was dominated by two governing blocs: the Parti socialiste (PS) and Les Républicains (LR, formerly UMP and UDF) serving as the mainstream left and right respectively. These parties alternated power and appeared structurally embedded within the institutions of the Fifth Republic, which was founded in 1958. However, by 2017, both parties faced severe crises of ideological coherence and internal cohesion. The PS, weakened by the unpopularity of President François Hollande and factional disputes, was increasingly seen as a party without clear direction or constituency. Hollande's turn toward pro-market reforms and fiscal austerity contradicted his campaign promises, eroding trust even within his own base and fracturing the party's traditional alliance between its social-democratic and more radical factions (Clift and McDaniel 2017; Damiani 2017). Lastly, the design of the French electoral system acts as a facilitator for a centrist vacuum. While it has favored the mainstream left and right up to 2017, a two-round majoritarian model will strongly encourage a strategic vote in the second round, making it ideal ground for large centrist coalitions to emerge. The first two sections of this chapter will focus on the decline of the mainstream left and right parties while the last section will focus on how France's unique semi-presidential system might have favored the rise of Emmanuel Macron.

4.1 The decline of Les Républicains

The post-Gaullist right, long a dominant force in French politics, had steadily lost its ideological coherence and electoral dominance. Originally composed of Gaullist[2] conservatives and liberal centrists, the mainstream right successfully absorbed centrist voters in the 1990s and early 2000s under the UMP, consolidating a broad coalition under the leadership of figures like Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. LR appeared poised to regain power following Hollande's unpopular presidency. François Fillon, having emerged unexpectedly as LR's candidate through the party's primaries, was widely seen as a strong contender for the 2017 elections. Yet the so-called *Penelopegate* scandal, which were allegations of public funds being misused to pay his wife and children for fictitious jobs, deeply damaged his campaign. The affair not only undermined Fillon's personal credibility but also reinforced public perceptions of widespread corruption among political elites (Choffat 2017). As a result, both major parties were eliminated in the first round of the presidential election, an unprecedented event in the history of the Fifth Republic (Lefebvre 2018). Existing internal fractures between cultural conservatives and economically liberal moderates deepened within LR at this time and were intensified by external pressures like Marine Le Pen's radical right and the Fillon scandal. These tensions culminated in a political realignment in which the liberal wing of LR drifted toward cooperation with Macron, while the more conservative wing edged closer to the populist radical right (Evans and Ivaldi 2021).

4.2 The decline of the Parti Socialiste

In parallel, the PS succumbed to internal fragmentation and came to a head during the 2017 presidential election, when the PS failed to present a unified platform or credible candidate. The

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[2] The Gaullists were the supporters of Charles de Gaulle, first president of the Fifth Republic.

presidency of François Hollande had already done considerable damage to the party's legitimacy. Elected in 2012 on a center-left platform promising to confront finance and reduce inequality, Hollande soon abandoned many of his core commitments. His government adopted pro-business measures such as CICE, which was a 20 billion euro tax credit intended to stimulate competitiveness. He also pushed through labor market liberalization with the El Khomri law and aligned with the European Union's fiscal discipline agenda. These shifts alienated the PS's traditional base without gaining the confidence of right-leaning voters (Clift and McDaniel 2017). The result was not only a collapse in approval ratings but also caused an internal split between the party's reformist and more radical factions. When Benoît Hamon, a representative of the party's left wing, won the PS primary in 2017, many senior figures refused to support him and defected to Emmanuel Macron's campaign instead. Hamon's program, which included universal basic income and ecological planning, was seen by critics within the party as unrealistic and disconnected from mainstream voters. In the presidential election, he received only 6.4 percent of the vote. The party's collapse continued in the legislative elections, where it fell from 295 seats to just 30 (Lefebvre 2018; Damiani 2017). As Lefebvre notes, this dramatic decline reflected more than strategic error. The PS had lost its ability to act as a social intermediary and no longer served as a collective force on the left. It was increasingly perceived as an empty electoral machine, out of touch with its former base and unable to respond to the political fragmentation Macron's candidacy had exposed. Furthermore, the far-right were not the only ones to gain popularity at this time, Jean-Luc Mélanchon and his far-left party La France Insoumise (LFI) made a debut with almost 20 percent of the votes in the first round. They will continue to rise and absorb both the PS and the Green party in the coalition, gaining the most seats out of any party in the 2024 legislative elections under their new coalition name: Le Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2024).

4.3 The Two-Round System and Its Implications

France's two-round majoritarian system plays a critical role in shaping electoral outcomes, particularly favoring candidates who can position themselves as broadly acceptable alternatives in the second round. According to the Downsian model of spatial voting, rational candidates will converge toward the center of the ideological spectrum to capture the median voter (Downs 1957, as cited in Grandjean 2020, 71–77). In a two-round system, this effect is amplified because candidates must first secure enough support to qualify for the runoff, often appealing to a more partisan electorate in the first round, then pivot to the center to consolidate the broader electorate in the second. This dynamic heavily benefited Emmanuel Macron since he started his movement on the basis of being a self-proclaimed centrist, allowing him to present himself as the reasonable alternative to Marine Le Pen's far-right populism. The second-round logic of "blocking the far right" is not unique to Macron; Jacques Chirac similarly benefited from a "Republican Front" strategy in 2002 when he defeated Jean-Marie Le Pen by a landslide[3]. However, while both Chirac and Macron won decisive second-round victories, the support bases they mobilized differed significantly in their levels of satisfaction. As the data analysis will show below, Macron's voters who identified as centrist in 2022 reported lower satisfaction compared to Chirac's right-wing voters in 2002, suggesting that Macron's centrist positioning, while electorally effective, did not translate into a similarly cohesive political constituency.

While staying ideologically vague, Macron was able to capitalize on the systemic vacuum that has helped sideline the historically dominant parties. His campaign drew support from both disaffected socialists and moderate conservatives, effectively constructing a novel "catch-all" electoral coalition. Macron's success also benefited from the loss of credibility of traditional

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[3] Based on Post Election 2002 database variable xq226, 72% of the surveyed reported having voted for Chirac principally to block Jean-Marie Le Pen.

party structures, many of which were weakened by internal divisions, unpopular records in government, or scandal (Choffat 2017). This environment of political fragmentation and voter disaffection allowed Macron to present himself as a competent outsider; young, forward-looking, and detached from the current system[4]. The success of LREM marked not only the defeat of traditional parties but the symbolic end of the "parti politique traditionnel" as the dominant model (Lefebvre 2018). This declaration will be contested later in the thesis as there is a high chance that the traditional party system will reform after Macron's second and final term if no one is able to carry on his movement.

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[4] Although he presented himself as an outsider, he served as Minister of the Economy under President François Hollande.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This thesis employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative analysis of voter survey data with qualitative analyses of existing literature and an expert interview.

The quantitative component of this thesis uses individual-level data from a series of French post-electoral surveys covering the presidential elections from 1995 to 2022. All datasets were produced by the Center for Political Research of Sciences Po (CEVIPOF) and the waves used were collected immediately following the second round of each presidential election. They provide consistent information on voters' ideological self-placement, second-round vote choices, and post-election satisfaction. The data used for this research was purposefully taken directly after the election result to measure immediate feelings of the respondents about the candidate and not satisfaction with policies for governing on the longer term. This way, analysis can focus on advertised ideological alignment rather than long term governance and policy making.

The qualitative dimension involves a detailed analysis of existing academic literature, as explored throughout the thesis, complemented by a research interview. To enhance understanding of the empirical findings, particularly regarding the ideological coherence of centrism and voter satisfaction, an expert interview was conducted with Jean-François Copé, former Minister of Budget under President Nicolas Sarkozy, government spokesperson, ex-president of the UMP, and mayor of Meaux. This interview provided valuable historical and contextual insights into the political significance and practical challenges associated with centrism within the French political landscape.

The quantitative analysis relies on three main variables harmonized across the datasets: ideological self-placement, second-round vote choice, and satisfaction measures. Ideological

self-placement was recorded on a left-right scale ranging from 0 to 10 in all surveys. Second-round vote choice identifies whether respondents voted for the eventual winner of the presidential election. Sympathy[5] measures assess how satisfied voters were with the winner given that they voted for him and that they belonged to the same ideological category as the winner (left, center, right). Either direct satisfaction questions or, where necessary, carefully constructed proxies were used. All measures of satisfaction were rescaled to fit a 0-10 scale to ensure comparability across datasets.

To define ideological "bases" consistently across elections, voters were categorized according to their ideological self-placement as follows: those placing themselves between 0 and 3 were classified as left-wing, those between 4 and 6 as centrist, and those between 7 and 10 as right-wing. The candidates were classified as follows: Chirac and Sarkozy right wing, Macron center, and Hollande left wing. This categorization allowed for a standardized comparison of satisfaction levels across different ideological groups and different presidential elections.

In order to ensure comparability over time, some adjustments were necessary. The 1995 satisfaction variable (q26a5) was originally recorded on a 0–100 scale and was rescaled to a 0–10 scale. For 2002, satisfaction (XQ245_6) was recorded on a 1–10 scale and rescaled to a 0-10 scale. The surveys from 2007, 2012, and 2017 offered direct 0–10 satisfaction scales without modification. In 2022, where no single satisfaction measure was available, a composite index was constructed by averaging five perception items related to Emmanuel Macron's image (X11IMG_EM_1, X11IMG_EM_2, X11IMG_EM_3, X11IMG_EM_6, and X11IMG_EM_8).

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[5] In post-electoral contexts, especially within the CEVIPOF surveys, sympathy reflects the emotional response voters have toward the winner or how positively they view the president they voted for and whether they feel ideologically close to him. Because the research does not look to draw conclusions based on long term satisfaction with policy or governance of a particular president but rather an immediate response about alignment, the variable "sympathy" was used to measure satisfaction and the terms can be used interchangeably.

To control the results, a separate analysis was done using satisfaction with Macron's party, LREM, as a proxy (X11SYMPPARTST_4).

Finally, the use of proxies and composite measures was justified by the need to maintain conceptual consistency. Across all datasets, the satisfaction variable captures either direct approval of the president's election, perceived competence, or leadership evaluation. Whenever direct satisfaction was not available, only variables that closely aligned with these dimensions were selected. This methodological rigor ensures that comparisons of satisfaction across elections remain meaningful and analytically sound.

Voter satisfaction, or sympathy with the candidate in this case, is used to capture not only whether individuals approve of the winning candidate but also whether they feel ideologically represented by the result. Research suggests that voters who are ideologically aligned with the party or candidate in power tend to express higher satisfaction with democracy and government performance (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017). Satisfaction thus serves as a meaningful indicator of how well political systems translate preferences into representation. In the context of this thesis, satisfaction helps assess whether centrist voters who supported Emmanuel Macron in 2017 and 2022 felt genuinely represented, or whether their support was primarily strategic. If satisfaction among Macron's ideological base is lower than among the left under Hollande or the right under Sarkozy, it suggests that Macron's electoral success might not have been driven by ideological congruence but by something else. This use of satisfaction data allows for a comparative, voter-centered perspective on the French center.

CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS

6.1. Satisfaction by President and Ideological Base

When comparing satisfaction levels among each president's ideological base, the results show no substantial difference between Emmanuel Macron's first term and those of previous presidents (See Figure 1). Voters on the right who supported Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 and Jacques Chirac in 1995, and voters on the left who supported François Hollande in 2012, expressed comparable levels of satisfaction to centrist voters who supported Macron in 2017. However, the contrast becomes striking when Macron's reelection is compared to Jacques Chirac's re-election in 2002. These are parallel cases in which the incumbent president won under conditions of national mobilization against the far right, making them comparable. However, despite this similarity, the gap in satisfaction is important: right-wing voters who supported Chirac in 2002 reported high levels of satisfaction with the outcome, while centrist voters who supported Macron in 2022 expressed far lower levels of satisfaction across both proxies used (See Figure 2). In both elections, the electorate's desire to block the far right played a central role in the second-round vote, yet the ideological return on that strategic vote was not equivalent. The results suggest that Macron's centrism[6] does not generate the same sense of representation or approval among his ideological base that Chirac was able to secure from his own.

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[6] The composite index for Macron and the party satisfaction or sympathy for LREM for the 2022 data showed no significant difference that would alter the conclusions drawn from the results (See Figure 3 in the appendix).
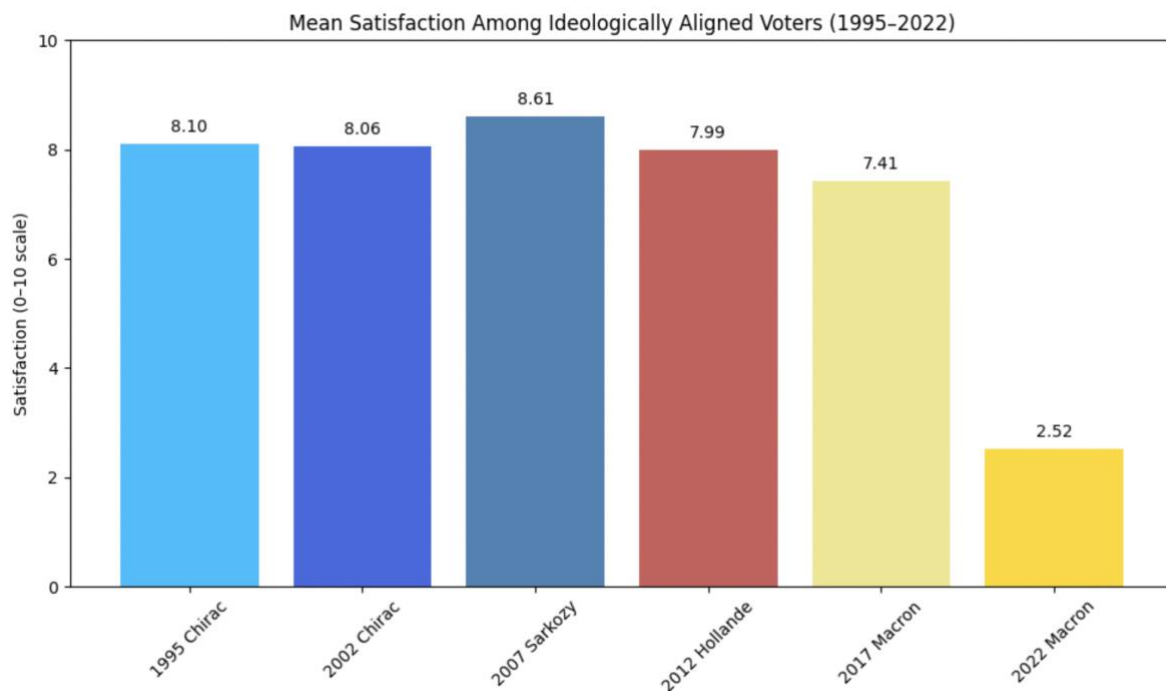
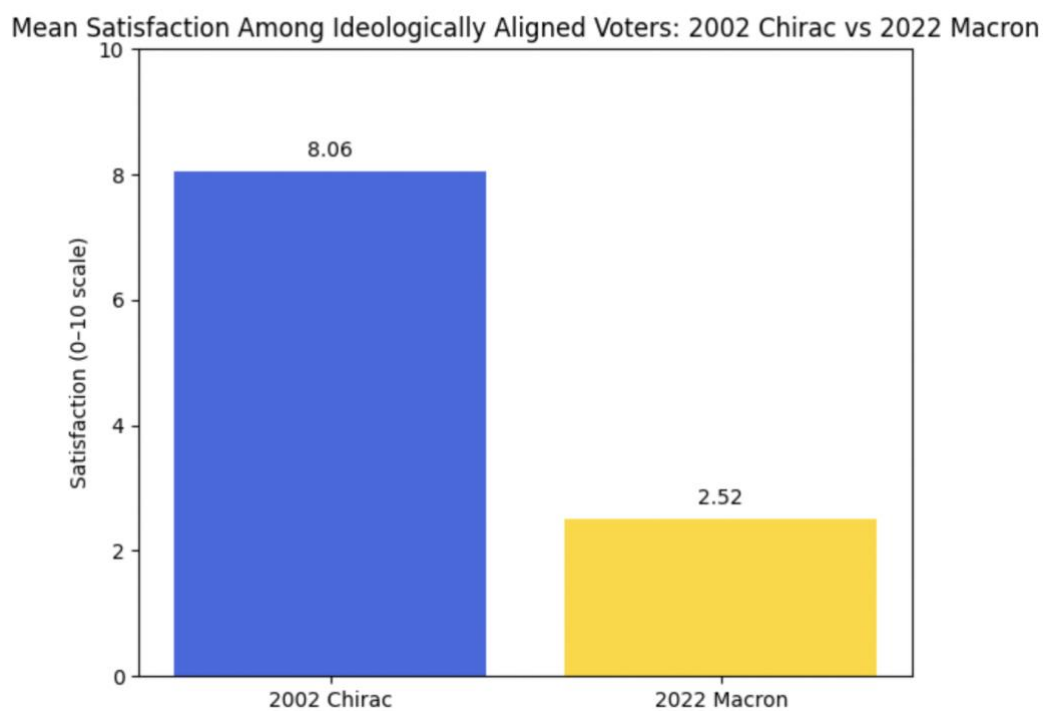*Figure 1: Mean satisfaction among ideologically aligned voters for each candidate.*

Figure 2: Mean satisfaction immediately after Jacques Chirac and Emmanuel Macron's reelections among respective ideological bases.

20

6.2 Interpretation of Results: Chirac and Macron's Re-Elections

Looking more closely at the other presidencies, it becomes clear that the patterns of satisfaction often align with the ideological clarity of the candidate's platform. Chirac in 1995 represented a Gaullist continuity that resonated with a traditional conservative base. Sarkozy in 2007 campaigned on an assertive reform agenda and positioned himself firmly on the right, earning strong approval from ideologically aligned voters. Hollande's victory in 2012 was carried by a clearly defined center-left message, and despite growing disillusionment during his term, his left-wing supporters initially expressed satisfaction that reflected ideological alignment.

Macron's electoral base, by contrast, was far more mixed. In 2017, many of his voters came from both the moderate right and left, united more by their rejection of established parties and opposition to Marine Le Pen than by a shared ideological position. This base proved electorally effective but lacked cohesion. The fragility of this support becomes even more apparent in 2022, where Macron's re-election was marked by widespread disaffection. While Chirac's 2002 victory was perceived by many as a reaffirmation of republican unity and legitimacy, Macron's victory in 2022 was seen as a default outcome. The contrast between Macron's re-election in 2022 and Chirac's in 2002 is not only statistical but emotional. Chirac's second-round victory against Jean-Marie Le Pen was met with a wave of civic mobilization, mass demonstrations, and a sense of republican duty. Voters from across the political spectrum framed their support as a proud defense of democratic values. By contrast, the tone of Macron's re-election was one of frustration. According to a survey done by Ipsos, nearly 42 percent of Macron voters in the second round said they voted for him "to block Marine Le Pen," not because they supported his program. This result has been referred to as a vote by default and emphasizes the absence of enthusiasm in this second round. Abstention reached 28 percent, which was the highest second-round abstention rate since 1969 (Teinturier and Doridot 2022).

While the two elections share structural similarities, it is important to note that Jean-Marie Le Pen represented a more radical and openly provocative strand of the far right than Marine Le Pen. She has made deliberate efforts to normalize her image and broaden her appeal, notably by renaming the party from the Front National (FN) to the Rassemblement National (RN). Nevertheless, these figures suggest that, unlike Chirac, Macron failed to generate ideological commitment, thus reinforcing the idea that his electoral victories stem more from institutional positioning than from genuine political alignment. This serves as evidence to show that Macron's centrism succeeds in mobilizing votes but struggles to produce the satisfaction needed to suggest a coherent ideological center.

6.3 Interview Analysis: Rethinking the Center Through expert insight

The empirical findings of this thesis suggest a fundamental disconnect between Emmanuel Macron's centrist positioning and the ideological satisfaction of his self-identified centrist voters. To further interpret these results, a research interview was conducted with Jean-François Copé, ex-Minister of Budget under President Nicolas Sarkozy, government spokesperson, ex-president of the UMP, and mayor of Meaux. He offered valuable qualitative insights into the historical and political meaning of centrism in the French context.

First, the interviewee emphasized that centrism is not part of France's political tradition. Unlike in the Fourth Republic, when coalition politics fostered a centrist parliamentary culture, the Fifth Republic institutionalized a clear left-right divide. In this view, Macron's rise to power represents an exception, not a continuation. As the interviewee put it, "centrism is an incongruity since the beginning of the Fifth Republic".

Macron's project was described as circumstantial, not ideological. The respondent underlined that Macron's victories were less about conviction and more about contingency: "He was elected not because of a structured doctrine, but because a series of obstacles fell away before him[7]." Unlike Tony Blair's "Third Way," which remained anchored in social democratic tradition, Macronism lacks a clear ideological basis. Blair remained within the Labour Party and articulated a center-left program. By contrast, Macron's "en même temps[8]" rhetoric is seen not as synthesis but as avoidance. As the interviewee stated, "Macronism is an absence of choice." This refusal to choose is precisely what alienates voters. The ideological void at the center offers no stable identity: "We know what it means to be on the right or the left, or even center-right, but not to be simply 'at the center'." Centrism, in this sense, becomes a space defined by indecision.

The implications for the future of French politics are significant. According to the interviewee, the traditional left-right divide is likely to re-emerge in a new form once Macron exits the political stage. It is unlikely that someone will be able to carry on the LREM torch since the party was essentially build around a single personality. If this traditional realignment fails to materialize, the far right may well be the main political force to fill the resulting vacuum. This assessment reinforces the broader concern that a vaguely defined political center can serve as a gateway to the extremes. By drawing support from both the mainstream left and right, Macron has hollowed out the traditional party landscape. What remains is a polarized electorate in which the most mobilized and ideologically driven factions are found on the far ends of the spectrum. In this context, the erosion alternatives does not work against polarization like

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[7] The interviewee refers to the François Fillon scandals here. Many consider that he was the favorite to win the 2017 election before the controversies came to light.
[8] "At the same time" was Macron's motto during his presidential campaign.

intended but instead risks empowering actors who thrive on anti-establishment sentiment and ideological confrontation.

M. Copé also touched on the welfare state, which, according to him, "no longer functions properly." It is seen as outdated, unassessed, and financially unsustainable, which further complicates any effort to build a unifying centrist platform. These structural failures reinforce the need for parties to choose between competing visions rather than remain in rhetorical neutrality.

Finally, the interview emphasized the need to distinguish between institutional alliances and electoral appeal. Even if political parties strike agreements, public support must be rebuilt around core values. The respondent suggested that the right could unify voters across previous Macron and Le Pen camps by appealing to order on one side and progress on the other. But this requires a clear ideological offer, something Macron ultimately failed to provide. In his view, "Macron's greatest failure was refusing to offer a coherent doctrine".

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

The gap in satisfaction found through the research points to a fundamental weakness in Macron's political base. Unlike Chirac, whose re-election reaffirmed a relatively coherent right-wing identity, Macron's victory rested on a revolutionary movement lacking strong ideological attachment. His brand of centrism drew support from electors rallying behind the anti-establishment rhetoric that Macron was proning during his campaign, but the center is evidently a difficult constituency to incarnate. It is fluid and always in movement, so any attempt at decision making will inevitably divide his support base (Kallinich 2021, 5).

Another lens that can be applied to Emmanuel Macron's project are the dynamics of a post-democratic context, where democratic institutions remain intact but the space for genuine political contestation has narrowed. In this setting the substantive direction of policy is shaped largely by economic elites and corporate interests. Political leadership increasingly avoids ideological conflict and instead seeks broad appeal through technocratic, managerial language. Macron's movement was never rooted in grassroots mobilization or longstanding partisan traditions. Rather, it was designed to attract a fragmented and politically "passive middle class" (Crouch 2004, 60). This middle class has dramatically grown in size and does not have a historically typical ideological stance like the working class or the elite. This reflects the same strategy once employed by New Labour in Britain, which succeeded not by challenging the priorities of the center-right, but by adopting them (Crouch 2004, 59). This phenomenon is not unique to France and Macron, the convergence of ideas has been a trend in Europe, leading to less and less differences between certain parties like Tony Blair adopting neoliberal economic policies or the CDU and the SPD coming closer in Germany. The increasing lack of contract between political parties is giving way to, on one hand, personalist centrist movements like

Macron's, and on the other, the rise of far-left and far-right parties across Europe. This dynamic can be understood as the result of ideological convergence and the need for parties to distinguish themselves from others while successfully gaining electors with populist techniques.

As mentioned previously, another contributor to Macron's rise, despite his seeming unpopularity among his ideological base, could be the institutional architecture of the Fifth Republic. The direct election of the president and the two-round runoff system favors candidates who can assemble the most sympathy relative to the other candidate in the second round. In many ways, the system forces people to vote for the least worst alternative, and consequently, for someone who does not necessarily represent their true political beliefs. The "presidentializing logic" of the French system focuses on the personalization of leadership and reduces the role of traditional partisan organization (Clift and McDaniel 2017). Macron's campaign style and policy vagueness allowed voters from varied ideological backgrounds to project their hopes onto him, or away from the other runoff candidate. He thus benefited not from a coherent centrist ideology but from a conjunction of strategic positioning and institutional incentives. In this sense, Macron's emergence represents the erosion of existing cleavage without really having formed a new one. His 2017 victory marks the culmination of a double crisis: the ideological exhaustion of the traditional left and right, and the systemic failure of the institutions designed to manage that ideological competition.

Together, the data analysis and the interview conducted support the broader argument of this thesis that Macron's centrism is not a defined ideology but a strategic response to France's institutional mechanics and political vacuum. The implications are clear: without ideological clarity, the center may win elections, but it cannot govern in a unified manner and will always end up displeasing part of their voter base.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to determine whether Emmanuel Macron's repeated electoral success reflects genuine ideological alignment with centrist voters or is instead the product of strategic positioning shaped by France's two-round electoral system. Through a comparative analysis of voter satisfaction across five presidencies (Chirac in 1995 and 2002, Sarkozy in 2007, Hollande in 2012, and Macron in 2017 and 2022), the findings suggest that Macron's ideological base, those who identify as centrist and voted for him, expresses significantly lower levels of satisfaction than left- or right-wing voters did under more clearly defined presidencies.

The most striking contrast emerges between Chirac's re-election in 2002 and Macron's in 2022. Both victories were achieved under conditions of national mobilization against the far right. Yet while Chirac's win generated a sense of unity and political reassurance, Macron's was met with resignation, frustration, and high abstention. This difference highlights the distinction between a candidate who symbolizes a shared political direction and one who is chosen largely to prevent an undesirable alternative. It is also worth considering whether, in a post-modern political context, ideological coherence is no longer the key criterion for success. In an era shaped by social media, fast-moving information cycles, and personalist politics, the expectations placed on political identity may have shifted. Macron's victory in 2022 did not inspire the same kind of ideological clarity as Chirac's in 2002, but it may reflect the reality of contemporary electoral behavior, where adaptability and visibility often outweigh ideological consistency.

Macron's centrist positioning has proven electorally effective but ideologically hollow. His platform lacks the coherence, institutional grounding, and voter loyalty that typically define a substantive political identity. Instead, Macronisme appears to result from personal appeal, the

collapse of France's traditional party system with the decline of the republican and socialist parties, and circumstances such as the *Penelopegate* scandal or the war in Ukraine. In this sense, the ideological center in France does not currently reflect a stable or clearly defined constituency, but rather a contingent and temporary alignment influenced by political fragmentation and the need for change.

Despite filling the gap in research on voter satisfaction relating to centrism in France, this thesis has several limitations. First, the quantitative analysis is limited to immediate post-election voter satisfaction because of the nature of the dataset. There were no large-scale panels done which capture respondents' longer-term evaluations of presidential performance, aside from the post-electoral surveys done after Chirac and Macron's first terms. Thus, it might not fully reflect sustained ideological alignment or policy approval for the other one-term presidents. Second, while qualitative data from literature review and an expert interview enrich the analysis, the use of a single expert perspective introduces potential subjectivity and limits generalizability. Future research could incorporate broader qualitative data, including additional expert interviews and voter focus groups, as well as longitudinal studies examining how voter satisfaction evolves throughout a presidency. In addition, further research should investigate how ideological centrism, in its thinner and more flexible forms, may contribute to or coexist with the growing radicalization and polarization observed globally. The rise of populist leaders like Donald Trump, along with the increasing influence of far-right parties across Europe raises important questions about whether centrism acts as a stabilizing force or inadvertently creates political vacuums that radical movements are well positioned to fill.

The findings of this thesis contribute to broader debates on democratic representation. They suggest that electoral systems can produce centrist outcomes without the presence of a coherent centrist ideology. In the absence of this coherence, centrism in France is inevitably temporary

and may pave the way for future far-right governance if the party system is not rebuilt following the void that will be left by the Macroniste movement. Emmanuel Macron may have occupied the space between left and right, but the question of what that space truly represents remains open.

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APPENDIX

Code for the data analysis of the post-electoral surveys:

```python
import pandas as pd
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt

# ------------------------------
# CHIRAC 1995 - Satisfaction Analysis (Right-Aligned Voters)
# ------------------------------

# Load dataset
df_1995 = pd.read_stata("POSTELEC1995.dta", convert_categoricals=False)

# Select relevant variables: ideology, second-round vote, satisfaction
df_1995 = df_1995[["q29a3", "q6a2", "q26a5"]].copy()

# Handle missing values
missing_values = [9996, 9997, 9998, 9999, 6666, 999]
for col in df_1995.columns:
    df_1995[col] = df_1995[col].apply(lambda x: pd.NA if x in missing_values else x)

# Rescale satisfaction to 0-10 scale
df_1995["q26a5"] = df_1995["q26a5"] / 10

# Filter right-aligned voters (ideology = 2)
right_voters = df_1995[df_1995["q29a3"] == 2]

# Split by second-round vote for Chirac
voted_chirac = right_voters[right_voters["q6a2"] == 2]
did_not_vote_chirac = right_voters[right_voters["q6a2"] != 2]

# Compute mean satisfaction
mean_chirac_1995 = voted_chirac["q26a5"].dropna().mean()
mean_non_chirac_1995 = did_not_vote_chirac["q26a5"].dropna().mean()
mean_all_right_1995 = right_voters["q26a5"].dropna().mean()

# ------------------------------
# CHIRAC 2002 - Satisfaction Analysis (Right-Aligned Voters)
# ------------------------------

# Load dataset
df_2002 = pd.read_stata("POSTELEC2002.dta", convert_categoricals=False)

# Select relevant variables: ideology, second-round vote, satisfaction
df_2002 = df_2002[["xq221", "xq206", "xq245_6"]].copy()

# Handle missing values
missing_values = [0, 96, 97, 98, 99, 6666, 9996, 9997, 9998, 9999]
for col in df_2002.columns:
    df_2002[col] = df_2002[col].apply(lambda x: pd.NA if x in missing_values else x)

# Rescale satisfaction to 0-10 scale
df_2002["xq245_6"] = (df_2002["xq245_6"] - 1) * (10 / 9)

# Filter right-aligned voters (ideology 4 or 5)
right_voters = df_2002[df_2002["xq221"].isin([4, 5])]

# Split by second-round vote for Chirac
voted_chirac = right_voters[right_voters["xq206"] == 1]
did_not_vote_chirac = right_voters[right_voters["xq206"] != 1]

# Compute mean satisfaction
mean_chirac_2002 = voted_chirac["xq245_6"].dropna().mean()
mean_non_chirac_2002 = did_not_vote_chirac["xq245_6"].dropna().mean()
mean_all_right_2002 = right_voters["xq245_6"].dropna().mean()


# ------------------------------
```

```python
# SARKOZY 2007 - Satisfaction Analysis (Right-Aligned Voters)
# -------------------------------

# Load dataset
df_2007 = pd.read_stata("ENEF2007.dta", convert_categoricals=False)

# Select relevant variables: ideology, second-round vote, satisfaction
df_2007 = df_2007[["Q302", "Q309", "Q317S1"]].copy()

# Handle missing values
missing_values = [11, 96, 97, 98, 99, 6666, 9996, 9997, 9998, 9999]
for col in df_2007.columns:
    df_2007[col] = df_2007[col].apply(lambda x: pd.NA if x in missing_values else x)

# Filter right-aligned voters
right_voters = df_2007[df_2007["Q302"].isin([4, 5])]

# Split by second-round vote for Sarkozy
voted_sarkozy = right_voters[right_voters["Q309"] == 2]
did_not_vote_sarkozy = right_voters[right_voters["Q309"] != 2]

# Compute mean satisfaction
mean_sarkozy_2007 = voted_sarkozy["Q317S1"].dropna().mean()
mean_non_sarkozy_2007 = did_not_vote_sarkozy["Q317S1"].dropna().mean()
mean_all_right_2007 = right_voters["Q317S1"].dropna().mean()

# -------------------------------
# HOLLANDE 2012 - Satisfaction Analysis (Left-Aligned Voters)
# -------------------------------

# Load dataset
df_2012 = pd.read_stata("ENEF2012.dta", convert_categoricals=False)

# Select relevant variables: ideology, second-round vote, satisfaction
df_2012 = df_2012[["iQ4", "Q22", "IQ32_i2"]].copy()

# Handle missing values
missing_values = [88, 96, 97, 98, 99, 6666, 9996, 9997, 9998, 9999]
for col in df_2012.columns:
    df_2012[col] = df_2012[col].apply(lambda x: pd.NA if x in missing_values else x)

# Filter left-aligned voters (ideology 0-3)
left_voters = df_2012[df_2012["iQ4"].between(0, 3)]

# Split by second-round vote for Hollande
voted_hollande = left_voters[left_voters["Q22"] == 1]
did_not_vote_hollande = left_voters[left_voters["Q22"] != 1]

# Compute mean satisfaction
mean_hollande_2012 = voted_hollande["IQ32_i2"].dropna().mean()
mean_non_hollande_2012 = did_not_vote_hollande["IQ32_i2"].dropna().mean()
mean_all_left_2012 = left_voters["IQ32_i2"].dropna().mean()

# -------------------------------
# MACRON 2017 - Satisfaction Analysis (Center-Aligned Voters)
# -------------------------------

# Load dataset
df_2017 = pd.read_stata("V15_2017.dta", convert_categoricals=False)

# Select relevant variables: second-round vote, ideological self-placement, satisfaction
df_2017 = df_2017[["OVOTEP17B", "OQ7", "OPLPTV1Q2_10"]].copy()

# Handle missing values
missing_values = [96, 97, 98, 99, 6666, 9996, 9997, 9998, 9999]
for col in df_2017.columns:
    df_2017[col] = df_2017[col].apply(lambda x: pd.NA if x in missing_values else x)

# Filter center-aligned voters (ideology 4-6)
center_voters = df_2017[df_2017["OQ7"].between(4, 6)]

# Split by second-round vote for Macron
voted_macron = center_voters[center_voters["OVOTEP17B"] == 1]
did_not_vote_macron = center_voters[center_voters["OVOTEP17B"] != 1]

# Compute mean satisfaction
```

```
mean macron 2017 = voted macron["OPLPTV1Q2 10"].dropna().mean()
mean non macron 2017 = did not vote macron["OPLPTV1Q2 10"].dropna().mean()
mean_all_center_2017 = center_voters["OPLPTV1Q2_10"].dropna().mean()


# ------------------------------
# MACRON 2022 – Satisfaction Analysis (Center-Aligned Voters)
# ------------------------------

# Load dataset
df_2022 = pd.read_stata("ENEF2022_X1_X12.dta", convert_categoricals=False)

# Select relevant variables: ideological self-placement, second-round vote, satisfaction proxy
df_2022 = df_2022[["X11Q7", "X11PRES22BX", "X11SYMPPARTST_4"]].copy()

# Handle missing values
missing_values = [96, 97, 98, 99, 6666, 9996, 9997, 9998, 9999]
for col in df_2022.columns:
    df_2022[col] = df_2022[col].apply(lambda x: pd.NA if x in missing_values else x)

# Filter center-aligned voters (ideology 4-6)
center_voters_2022 = df_2022[df_2022["X11Q7"].between(4, 6)]

# Split by second-round vote for Macron
voted_macron = center_voters_2022[center_voters_2022["X11PRES22BX"] == 1]
did_not_vote_macron = center_voters_2022[center_voters_2022["X11PRES22BX"] != 1]

# Compute mean satisfaction using party sympathy as proxy
mean_macron_2022 = voted_macron["X11SYMPPARTST_4"].dropna().mean()
mean non macron 2022 = did not vote macron["X11SYMPPARTST 4"].dropna().mean()
mean all center 2022 = center voters 2022["X11SYMPPARTST 4"].dropna().mean()


# ------------------------------
# MACRON 2022 – Composite Satisfaction Analysis (Control)
# ------------------------------

# Load dataset
df_2022_alt = pd.read_stata("ENEF2022_X1_X12.dta", convert_categoricals=False)

# Select variables for ideological placement, vote, and satisfaction items
df_2022_alt = df_2022_alt[[
    "X11Q7", "X11PRES22BX",
    "X11IMG_EM_1", "X11IMG_EM_2", "X11IMG_EM_3",
    "X11IMG_EM_6", "X11IMG_EM_8"
]].copy()

# Handle missing values
missing_values = [96, 97, 98, 99, 6666, 9996, 9997, 9998, 9999]
for col in df_2022_alt.columns:
    df_2022_alt[col] = df_2022_alt[col].apply(lambda x: pd.NA if x in missing_values else x)

# Define satisfaction components and compute composite score
satisfaction_items = [
    "X11IMG_EM_1",  # Good image of France
    "X11IMG_EM_2",  # Presidential stature
    "X11IMG_EM_3",  # Understands people's problems
    "X11IMG_EM_6",  # Can handle crises
    "X11IMG EM 8"   # Can unite the French
]

df_2022_alt["satisfaction_macron_composite"] = df_2022_alt[satisfaction_items].mean(axis=1) *
2


# Filter center-aligned voters
center_voters_2022_alt = df_2022_alt[df_2022_alt["X11Q7"].between(4, 6)]

# Split by second-round vote
voted_macron_alt = center_voters_2022_alt[center_voters_2022_alt["X11PRES22BX"] == 1]
did_not_vote_macron_alt = center_voters_2022_alt[center_voters_2022_alt["X11PRES22BX"] != 1]

# Compute mean satisfaction using composite score
mean_macron_2022_composite = voted_macron_alt["satisfaction_macron_composite"].dropna().mean()
```

```
mean non macron 2022 composite =
did not vote macron alt["satisfaction macron composite"].dropna().mean()
mean_all_center_2022_composite =
center_voters_2022_alt["satisfaction_macron_composite"].dropna().mean()


import matplotlib.pyplot as plt

# ------------------------------
# Full Timeline: Satisfaction 1995-2022
# ------------------------------

years = ["1995 Chirac", "2002 Chirac", "2007 Sarkozy", "2012 Hollande", "2017 Macron", "2022
Macron"]
satisfaction_means = [
    mean_chirac_1995,
    mean_chirac_2002,
    mean sarkozy 2007,
    mean hollande 2012,
    mean_macron_2017,
    mean_macron_2022
]

plt.figure(figsize=(10, 6))
bars = plt.bar(years, satisfaction_means,
               color=["deepskyblue", "royalblue", "steelblue", "indianred", "khaki", "gold"])
plt.title("Mean Satisfaction Among Ideologically Aligned Voters (1995-2022)")
plt.ylabel("Satisfaction (0-10 scale)")
plt.ylim(0, 10)

for bar in bars:
    height = bar.get_height()
    plt.annotate(f'{height:.2f}', xy=(bar.get_x() + bar.get_width() / 2, height),
                 xytext=(0, 5), textcoords="offset points", ha='center', va='bottom')

plt.xticks(rotation=45)
plt.tight_layout()
plt.show()

# ------------------------------
# Focused Comparison: 2002 Chirac vs 2022 Macron
# ------------------------------

years = ["2002 Chirac", "2022 Macron"]
satisfaction_means = [mean_chirac_2002, mean_macron_2022]

plt.figure(figsize=(6, 5))
bars = plt.bar(years, satisfaction_means, color=["royalblue", "gold"])
plt.title("Mean Satisfaction Among Ideologically Aligned Voters: 2002 Chirac vs 2022 Macron")
plt.ylabel("Satisfaction (0-10 scale)")
plt.ylim(0, 10)

for bar in bars:
    height = bar.get_height()
    plt.annotate(f'{height:.2f}', xy=(bar.get_x() + bar.get_width() / 2, height),
                 xytext=(0, 5), textcoords="offset points", ha='center', va='bottom')

plt.tight layout()
plt.show()

# ------------------------------
# Macron 2022 - Proxy Comparison (Party Sympathy vs Composite Score)
# ------------------------------

methods = ["Party Sympathy", "Composite Index"]
macron_2022_scores = [mean_macron_2022, mean_macron_2022_composite]

plt.figure(figsize=(6, 5))
bars = plt.bar(methods, macron_2022_scores, color=["gold", "orange"])
plt.title("Macron 2022: Satisfaction by Measurement Method")
plt.ylabel("Satisfaction (0-10 scale)")
plt.ylim(0, 10)

for bar in bars:
    height = bar.get height()
    plt.annotate(f'{height:.2f}', xy=(bar.get_x() + bar.get_width() / 2, height),
```

37

```
            xytext=(0, 5), textcoords="offset points", ha='center', va='bottom')
plt.tight_layout()
plt.show()
```

Graph of the 2022 Macron dataset showing no significant difference between using sympathy
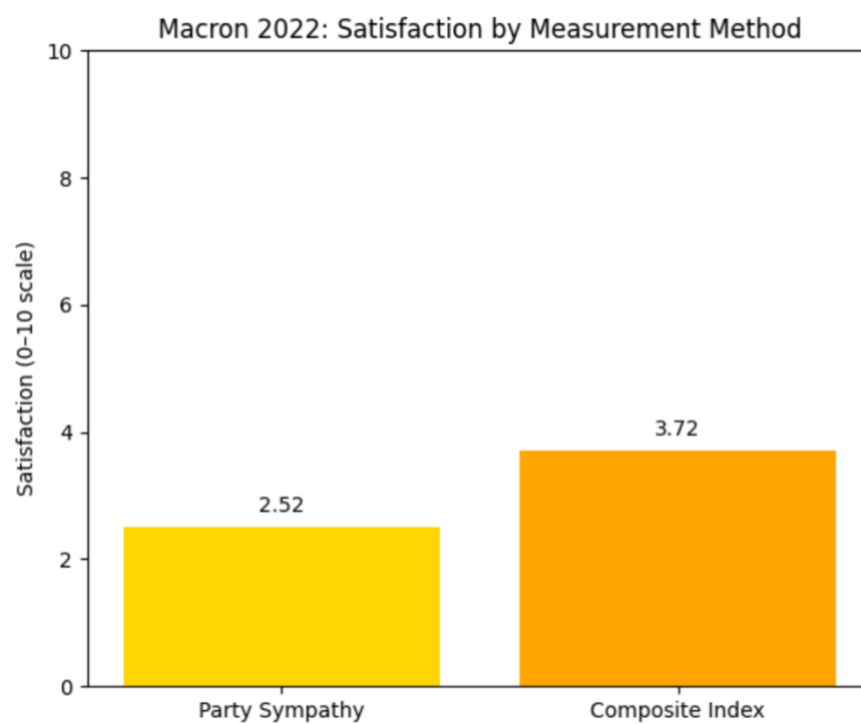with LREM as a proxy or the composite score:

Figure 3: Comparison of the Macron 2022 satisfaction data using party sympathy or the composite index.