

The March 2004 Regional Elections in France: Terms for a Transfer of Power

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On 21st and 28th March 2004, the French were summoned for a fourth time to elect their regional councillors.¹ In March 1998, the regional elections were held less than a year after the victory of the pluralist left (Socialist Party, French Communist Party, Radical Socialist Party, the Greens and the Citizens' Movement Party) in the early parliamentary elections held in 1997.² The results achieved by the parliamentary left were considered good, especially following the very poor showing in the 1992 regional elections. It took over the reins of eight regional councils – Aquitaine, Centre, Haute-Normandie, Ile-de-France, Limousin, Midi-Pyrénées, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, and Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur – as compared with 14 held by the parliamentary right – Alsace, Auvergne, Basse-Normandie, Bourgogne, Bretagne, Champagne-Ardenne, Corsica, Franche-Comté, Languedoc-Roussillon, Lorraine, Pays de la Loire, Picardie, Poitou-Charentes and Rhône-Alpes.

The 1998 regional elections were especially marked by the trend towards relative majorities – on the right or left – and by the potential for trouble from the *Front National*. Despite national directives (half-hearted), four presidents of UDF or RPR regions were elected with the willing help of the *Front National*: in Bourgogne, Languedoc-Roussillon and in Picardie and Rhône-Alpes. This was in part why the electoral system was modified for the regional elections of March 2004 (see below).

The March 2004 regional elections took place in an entirely different context. In the spring of 2002, Jacques Chirac was elected president over Jean-Marie Le Pen, surprise candidate in the second round.³ Moreover, the parliamentary right triumphed in the general elections that followed soon afterwards.

In actual fact, this right wing did restructure. From the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), the *Démocratie libérale* (DL) and a section of the *Union pour la Démocratie française* (UDF), a new political party was formed: the *Union pour un Mouvement populaire* (UMP), with as its mission to rule over the centre-right spectrum of the political scene. On the eve of the regional elections, this ambition met with strong opposition from the UDF and its leader François Bayrou.

In terms of social issues, the government was challenged and opposed for several months on a variety of reforms or draft reforms, such as pensions, showbusiness contract workers, and researchers.

Finally, as we noted, the National Assembly adopted a new electoral system. Proportional representation with one round was dropped for a mixed system with two rounds of voting based on majority representation. Retaining the voting system in force for local elections in cities of over 3,500 inhabitants, the electoral law gives a 'bonus' number of seats to the winner of the ballot. The first ranking list (in the first round if they obtain an absolute majority or in the second round) directly wins 25% of seats. The other 75% of mandates are distributed proportionately to the list results (including the first). The government established a high threshold for the lists participating in the second round: 10% of registered voters. In that way, it wanted to block the *Front National* as much as possible and the UDF, its centre-right rival, from standing in the second round. But in April 2003, the *Conseil Constitutionnel* censured the law for 'procedural fault'. And ultimately, access to the second round was opened to any list winning at least 10% of validly cast votes. In addition, any list achieving between 5% and 10% could merge for the second round.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES INVOLVED

On the Right

We pointed out that on the heels of the legislative elections, the hope of the UMP was to prevail over the centre-right spectrum of the political scene. Just before the election, this goal was out of reach. François Bayrou's UDF succeeded in maintaining sufficient vital numbers and even became an alternative to the UMP, discredited through a tense social climate and the first instance sentencing of its president, Alain Juppé. Former Prime Minister (1995–97), mayor of Bordeaux, close friend of Jacques Chirac and UMP president, Alain Juppé was given an 18-month suspended prison sentence on 30th January 2004 and barred from holding public office for ten years for having created fictitious jobs in the Paris city hall (where he was deputy mayor in charge of finances from 1984–95) to the benefit of the RPR of which he was general secretary 1988–94.

There was no prior overall agreement between the two parties. They only joined forces, from the first round, in six regions (Alsace, Auvergne, Picardie, Poitou-Charentes, Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur and Rhône Alpes); the UDF came in first in two regions (in Picardie and Rhône-Alpes). In the 16 other mainly urban regions, the two parties ran in the elections separately in a rather strained atmosphere. The UDF was hoping to win two symbolic

'primaries': in Ile de France, with André Santini, and in Aquitaine, with François Bayrou.

Things appeared simpler for the extreme right. After its split in December 1998, the *Front National* (FN) succeeded in becoming the extreme right-wing alternative in the 2002 presidential and legislative elections. The *Mouvement national républicain* (MNR), led by Bruno Mégret, did have 14 lists nonetheless, to which one should add the 'Alsace d'abord' list in Alsace.

On the Left

In the parliamentary left, the political game involved three main players: the Socialist Party (PS), the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Greens. There again, there was no overall agreement for the first round. The three parties jointly went to the polls right from the first round in eight regions (Bourgogne, Centre, Haute-Normandie, Languedoc-Roussillon, Lorraine, Pays de la Loire, Poitou-Charentes and Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur). In five other regions, the PS and the Greens formed an alliance, and in six there was a Socialist-Communist list in the first round. The PS went alone in three cases, the PCF in eight and the Greens in six.

As for the two extreme left-wing parties, the Trotskyist *Lutte ouvrière* (LO) and the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), they ran on a coalition list everywhere (except in Corsica).

THE RESULTS

A Reasonable Turnout

One big fear prevailed during the three last weeks preceding the first round of regional elections: unprecedented abstention. The fear turned out to be unfounded. Electoral participation was higher than expected, reaching over 62% for the first round on 21st March. Only four regions recorded abstentions above 40%: Alsace (40.50%), Champagne-Ardenne (41.29%), Lorraine (43.15%) and Rhône-Alpes (40.14%). *A contrario*, voter participation was better than expected in Corsica (72.51%), Limousin (67.08%), Midi-Pyrénées (66.82%) and Aquitaine (66.12%).

The second round confirmed the high rate of the first and was even higher, since the participation rate picked up 3.5 points to end up at 65.8% for France as a whole. The largest increases were made in regions where the uncertainty in the outcome was most glaring: in Auvergne (+5.8 points), Franche-Comté (+4.9 points), Lorraine (+4.3 points) and in Rhône-Alpes (+4.5 points).

Waterloo for the Parliamentary Right

The first round of the regional elections was very poor for the parliamentary right, and in particular for the UMP. Nationally, UMP and UDF together

only picked up a quarter of the votes and there were only two regions where the two parties got past the 40% mark.

Although the UDF confirmed that the UMP would still have to reckon with it, the party failed however in its attempt to win a 'primary' on the right: in Ile de France and Aquitaine, André Rossini and François Bayrou ended up with fewer votes than their UMP 'partners', Jean-François Coppe and Xavier Darcos. On the evening of 21 March, the UDF was poised to hold on in nine out of 16 regions where it ran alone. In addition, it had the possibility to form coalitions everywhere, except in Corsica.

For the Prime minister's party, the election results came as a shock. In particular, there was the scathing defeat in Poitou-Charentes, a region headed by Jean-Pierre Raffarin until he took up office in the Hotel Matignon, official residence of the French Prime Minister.

For its part, the extreme right wing – particularly the FN – confirmed it had taken root in the electoral process. All together, the extreme right-wing parties won nearly 17% of votes. This result was mainly due to the FN (15.05%), which thus confirmed its status of extreme right-wing party on the French political scene.

It is interesting to note that to a certain extent, the FN peaked out in its historical zones of power: the north, east and south-east of France, venues of 'large urban areas where the immigrant workforce is concentrated, where a too rapid urbanization destroyed the social fabric and brought about a rise in crime'.⁴ Yet, the extreme right-wing party had gains in the centre and on the Atlantic coast. Only in five regions did it fail to reach the 10% mark: Auvergne, Bretagne, Corsica, the Limousin and Pays de la Loire (see Table 1).

For the second round, UMP and UDF ran on a single list in 16 of the 22 regions (see Table 2). In some cases, the UDF refused to join with UMP because of their obliging attitude to the FN in 1998. This was especially the case in Bourgogne and Languedoc-Roussillon. This predominantly united presence did not generate an 'improvement' over the first round results. Quite the contrary, the defeat of the parliamentary right was spectacular. Election-wise and politically, it only saved the day in Alsace, the one region it managed to keep. Moreover, owing to support from the Corsican nationalists, it won, albeit as a minority, the regional presidency in Corsica. Even supposedly majority right wing regions like Lorraine, Bretagne or even Auvergne, where the former President of the Republic Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was unseated, were lost to the left.

So the right lost the reins of regional power which it had been holding tightly since the set-up of regional authority in the mid-1980s. In terms of votes, UMP and UDF together bottomed out (37% nationwide). They only succeeded in passing the 40% mark in six regions and did not get past 50% anywhere.

TABLE 1
ELECTORAL RESULTS OF RIGHTIST PARTIES AT THE FIRST ROUND (%)

	UMP- UDF	UMP	UDF	Other rightist candidates	Parliamentary right	FN	Alsace d'abord	MNR	Extreme right
Alsace	34.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	34.06	18.58	9.42	0.00	28.00
Aquitaine	0.00	18.40	16.03	0.00	34.43	11.45	0.00	0.00	11.45
Auvergne	36.39	0.00	0.00	3.45	39.84	9.59	0.00	1.03	10.62
Basse-Normandie	0.00	28.74	9.26	0.00	38.01	13.99	0.00	0.00	13.99
Bourgogne	0.00	21.78	12.98	0.00	34.76	15.77	0.00	1.75	17.52
Bretagne	0.00	25.60	11.06	0.00	36.66	8.47	0.00	1.92	10.39
Centre	0.00	20.71	13.70	0.00	34.40	17.52	0.00	0.00	17.52
Champagne-Ardenne	0.00	26.66	11.11	0.00	37.77	19.72	0.00	2.05	21.77
Corse	0.00	14.59	1.53	16.96	33.07	4.47	0.00	0.00	4.47
Franche-Comté	0.00	24.84	7.69	0.00	32.53	18.68	0.00	1.26	19.93
Haute-Normandie	0.00	21.15	12.50	0.00	33.65	15.91	0.00	1.81	17.73
Ile-de-France	0.00	24.79	16.12	0.00	40.91	12.26	0.00	1.18	13.43
Languedoc-Roussillon	0.00	24.23	5.71	0.00	29.94	17.17	0.00	0.81	17.98
Limousin	0.00	23.33	8.26	0.00	31.60	9.31	0.00	0.00	9.31
Lorraine	0.00	22.14	8.71	6.69	37.54	17.59	0.00	2.00	19.58
Midi-Pyrénées	0.00	19.00	10.15	0.00	29.15	11.78	0.00	0.00	11.78
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	0.00	17.27	8.01	0.00	25.28	17.94	0.00	1.21	19.14
Pays de la Loire	0.00	32.33	12.14	0.00	44.47	9.71	0.00	2.55	12.26
Picardie	32.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	32.26	22.94	0.00	0.00	22.94
Poitou-Charentes	32.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	32.93	10.50	0.00	0.00	10.50
Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur	26.09	0.00	0.00	2.92	29.01	22.95	0.00	2.94	25.89
Rhône-Alpes	31.22	0.00	0.00	2.18	33.40	18.21	0.00	1.65	19.86
France	8.78	16.64	8.47	0.85	34.73	15.05	0.26	1.21	16.52

TABLE 2
ELECTORAL RESULTS OF RIGHTIST PARTIES AT THE SECOND ROUND (%)

	UMP	UMP-UDF	Other rightist candidates	Parliamentary right	FN
Alsace	0.00	43.56	0.00	43.56	22.00
Aquitaine	0.00	33.46	0.00	33.46	11.67
Auvergne	0.00	47.33	0.00	47.33	0.00
Basse-Normandie	40.01	0.00	0.00	40.01	13.78
Bourgogne	32.14	0.00	0.00	32.14	15.37
Bretagne	0.00	41.34	0.00	41.34	0.00
Centre	0.00	34.39	0.00	34.39	16.46
Champagne-Ardenne	0.00	39.82	0.00	39.82	18.28
Corse	25.05	0.00	7.80	32.86	0.00
Franche-Comté	36.13	0.00	0.00	36.13	17.14
Haute-Normandie	0.00	32.72	0.00	32.72	14.59
Ile-de-France	0.00	40.74	0.00	40.74	10.11
Languedoc-Roussillon	33.11	0.00	0.00	33.11	15.71
Limousin	0.00	37.98	0.00	37.98	0.00
Lorraine	0.00	34.21	0.00	34.21	17.27
Midi-Pyrénées	30.43	0.00	0.00	30.43	12.06
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	0.00	28.43	0.00	28.43	19.73
Pays de la Loire	0.00	47.64	0.00	47.64	0.00
Picardie	0.00	35.87	0.00	35.87	18.66
Poitou-Charentes	0.00	36.20	0.00	36.20	8.70
Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur	0.00	33.81	0.00	33.81	21.01
Rhône-Alpes	0.00	38.20	0.00	38.20	16.05
France	5.78	31.21	0.04	37.04	12.77

Considering the new electoral system, the impact in terms of seats was explosive. The parliamentary right only won 496 seat of the 1722 up for grabs in the metropolitan regions: 327 for the UMP, 111 for the UDF and 58 for the various other right-wing parties (see Table 5).

The losses suffered by the *Front National* in the second round were limited. This confirmed the existence of an electorate ready to vote for the FN in any election, no matter what the conditions or what the stakes. The *Front National* got its best results in two regions which are its power zones, namely Alsace and Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur (where Jean-Marie Le Pen was declared ineligible to run because he could not prove he was resident in the region).

This result enabled the extreme right wing party to glean 155 seats within an electoral system that was unfavourable to it. Nonetheless, unlike the situation that prevailed in March 1988, it was not able to *strike deals* for its support or play any sort of pivotal role.

'Divine Surprise' for the Left

In contrast to the results of the parliamentary right, the regional elections brought remarkable success for the parliamentary left (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
ELECTORAL RESULTS OF THE LEFTIST PARTIES AT THE FIRST ROUND (%)

	PS- Greens	PS- PCF	PS-PCF- Greens	PS	PCF	Greens	Other leftist candidates	<i>Parliamentary left</i>	LO- LCR	LEFT
Alsace	20.12	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.73	0.00	0.00	23.86	3.03	26.88
Aquitaine	38.42	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.35	0.00	0.00	42.78	4.11	46.89
Auvergne	0.00	0.00	0.00	28.21	9.20	5.61	0.00	43.02	4.28	47.30
Basse-Normandie	0.00	23.91	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.37	5.66	37.93	4.83	42.76
Bourgogne	0.00	0.00	36.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.58	38.59	3.92	42.51
Bretagne	0.00	38.48	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.70	0.00	48.18	4.78	52.95
Centre	0.00	0.00	38.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	38.15	5.61	43.77
Champagne-Ardenne	0.00	27.94	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.51	0.00	35.45	5.00	40.45
Corse	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.84	6.62	0.00	32.03	40.49	0.00	40.49
Franche-Comté	31.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.18	0.00	0.00	35.46	4.71	40.17
Haute-Normandie	0.00	0.00	38.86	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	38.86	5.59	44.45
Ile-de-France	31.95	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.20	0.00	0.00	39.15	3.99	43.14
Languedoc-Roussillon	0.00	0.00	36.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	36.32	4.70	41.02
Limousin	0.00	41.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.02	0.00	47.16	6.61	53.77
Lorraine	0.00	0.00	29.22	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.69	33.90	4.69	38.59
Midi-Pyrénées	0.00	41.39	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.07	49.46	4.88	54.33
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	0.00	0.00	0.00	29.89	10.68	6.28	0.00	46.85	5.11	51.96
Pays de la Loire	0.00	0.00	37.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	37.20	6.07	43.27
Picardie	27.42	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.86	0.00	0.00	38.28	6.52	44.80
Poitou-Charentes	0.00	0.00	46.29	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	46.29	4.52	50.80
Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur	0.00	0.00	35.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.57	36.58	2.69	39.27
Rhône-Alpes	0.00	32.19	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.09	0.00	42.28	4.47	46.74
France	9.19	9.01	12.85	2.77	2.90	2.50	1.10	40.32	4.55	44.87
In the concerned electoral districts	31.53	34.72	36.77	27.82	6.11	8.26	4.95		4.58	

From the first round, together or individually, the parties of the parliamentary left achieved outstanding results with as highlight the result of the list led by Ségolène Royal (PS) in Poitou-Charentes (see above): 46.29% in the region headed until 2002 by the Prime minister in office.

It must be noted that everywhere the Greens ran alone, they obtained very significant results. Nowhere did they go below the 5% mark and in Rhône-Alpes, they even passed the threshold of 10% of the votes. Naturally the Greens only ran alone in the areas where they had rather strong support, but the fact is striking for a party that had gone through a major internal crisis following the 2002 elections and their participation in the leftist government of Lionel Jospin between 1997 and 2002.

As for the Communist Party, things were not so clear-cut. In some cases, they achieved unexpected results (Ile de France, Auvergne, Picardie and Nord-Pas-de-Calais) but in other instances, their decision to run alone did not pay off and led to results under 5%: in Alsace, Aquitaine and in Franche-Comté (in partnership with allies of Jean-Pierre Chevènement).

For the Socialist Party, the first round result simultaneously felt like revenge for April 2002 and as evidence of recovered credibility. Alone or in an alliance, the PS achieved an unheard of breakthrough for a regional election, which foretold the successful results in several region leaderships a week later.

As a reversed mirror image of the performance of the three parliamentary left parties, the extreme left-wing coalition of LO-LCR achieved disappointing results. Within an electoral system more problematic for them, the Trotskyist extreme left simultaneously suffered from the 'useful vote' effect and from a strategic positioning of 'neither to the left nor to the right', rather unacceptable for an electorate that wanted to make the government bite the dust. With 4.55% nationally, the LO and LCR bottomed out and only reached the 5% mark in seven regions.

In the second round, the parliamentary left ran on a united ticket at national level and nearly everywhere in all the regions (see Table 4). Indeed, in Champagne-Ardennes and Midi-Pyrénées, Socialists and Greens could not agree on the programme and/or list formation, which eliminated the Greens from the second round in these two regions.

The second round further confirmed the trends of the first. The victory of the left was therefore outstanding. Socialists, Greens and Communists together won 50.16% at France-wide level. The parliamentary left consequently won an absolute majority in metropolitan France, a result that it achieved in 12 out of 22 regions.

In terms of seats, the score was equally impressive to the extent that the left-wing parties secured 1063 of the 1722 seats up for grabs: 595 for the Socialist Party, 175 for the Communists, 165 for the Greens and 52 for

TABLE 4
ELECTORAL RESULTS OF THE LEFTIST PARTIES AT THE SECOND ROUND (%)

	PS-Greens-PCF	PS-Verts	PS-PCF	Other leftist candidates	PCF
Alsace	0.00	34.44	0.00	0.00	0.00
Aquitaine	0.00	54.87	0.00	0.00	0.00
Auvergne	52.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Basse-Normandie	46.22	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bourgogne	52.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bretagne	58.66	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Centre	49.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Champagne-Ardenne	0.00	0.00	41.89	0.00	0.00
Corse	0.00	0.00	0.00	41.50	8.31
Franche-Comté	0.00	46.72	0.00	0.00	0.00
Haute-Normandie	52.69	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Ile-de-France	49.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Languedoc-Roussillon	51.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Limousin	62.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Lorraine	48.51	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Midi-Pyrénées	0.00	0.00	57.50	0.00	0.00
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	51.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Pays de la Loire	0.00	52.36	0.00	0.00	0.00
Picardie	45.47	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Poitou-Charentes	55.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur	45.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Rhône-Alpes	46.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
France	38.17	7.98	3.73	0.23	0.05

the Left Radicals (see Table 5). Consequently, 20 regional executive leaderships out of 22 were held by the parliamentary left and by the PS in particular. In fact, the 20 regional presidencies were all held by Socialists. The lack of nationwide agreement for all the regions can explain this result. In so far there was no sharing arranged beforehand, the PS was easily able to impose a list leader over all left-wing lists running in the second round (with the exception of the specific case of Corsica). Out of the seven regions won in 1998, after this election, the Socialist Party found itself leading 20 of the 22 regions of metropolitan France.

A Closed-off Area, Just the Left and the Right

Except for the *Front National* no political force really came off well, apart from the parliamentary left and right poles. *Chasse, Nature, Pêche et Traditions* (CPNT) did submit lists in eight regions, but the results were most disappointing. Moreover, the electoral system was not favourable to them. CPNT refused to join in with any other list in the four regions where it could have done so. Consequently it lost all regional representation.

TABLE 5
SEATS WON BY PARTIES

	UDF	UMP	Other rightist candidates	FN	PS	PCF	Greens	PRG	Other leftist candidates	Total
Alsace	7	19	1	8	8	0	4	0	0	47
Aquitaine	8	11	2	7	43	0	9	1	4	85
Auvergne	3	13	1	0	18	7	5	0	0	47
Basse-Normandie	0	11	3	5	14	4	3	3	4	47
Bourgogne	0	14	0	6	23	6	6	1	1	57
Bretagne	7	15	3	0	36	7	7	2	6	83
Centre	7	12	1	9	25	13	8	2	0	77
Champagne-Ardenne	5	9	1	6	21	6	0	1	0	49
Corse	0	12	10	0	0	2	0	7	12	51
Franche-Comté	0	12	0	5	16		6	0	4	43
Haute-Normandie	2	5	6	6	20	7	7	2	0	55
Ile-de-France	22	40	2	15	65	20	26	5	14	209
Languedoc-Roussillon	1	11	4	8	23	9	7	3	1	67
Limousin	2	10	0	0	19	6	4	0	2	43
Lorraine	1	14	4	9	31	6	6	0	2	73
Midi-Pyrénées	6	12	3	8	43	9	0	9	1	91
Nord-Pas-de-Calais	5	16	3	16	40	18	9	2	4	113
Pays de la Loire	6	22	5	0	33	9	13	1	4	93
Picardie	6	7	2	8	19	8	5	1	1	57
Poitou-Charentes	1	8	6	3	20	7	6	2	2	55
Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur	5	26	1	18	34	17	12	4	6	123
Rhône-Alpes	17	28	0	18	44	14	22	6	8	157
France	111	327	58	155	595	175	165	52	76	1722

For its part, the *Mouvement pour une écologie indépendante* (MEI) stood candidates in six regions. It achieved honourable results, especially in its 'core' region, Alsace. But wedged in by the electoral system, the MEI strictly stuck to its strategy of total independence vis-à-vis both the left and the right. No merging was achieved in the three cases where it might have been possible and unsurprisingly, the MEI ended up with no representative at all.

CONCLUSION

The fourth French regional election turned out to be an election with most serious consequences for the parliamentary right and for the UMP in particular. This party, an offshoot of the Gaullist RPR, had set itself the objective of becoming leader of the centre-right on the political scene and a threatening politico-electoral machine against the left.

Both goals were handed a severe thrashing. Despite not being able to win a single *primary* on the right, the *Union pour la Démocratie française* was able to make itself indispensable for the electoral and political future of the parliamentary right. In addition, the *machinery* was hardly productive at all. The UMP results were disastrous and the right saw the parliamentary left gain control of 20 out of 22 regions in metropolitan France – a stinging defeat for the Prime Minister, and perhaps even more so for the *Président de la République*, Jacques Chirac, whose room for manoeuvre has been greatly reduced.

For the parliamentary left, these elections were genuine rejuvenation. To be sure, PS, PCF and the Greens were counting on one win or the other in this election, but certainly not on such an electoral and political landslide victory. Two years after the traumatic defeat of 21 April 2002, the PS got its revenge and gained control of a power which up to then had been mainly held by the right. The France of regions became a France of the Left, with the joint forces of the Socialist Party, the PCF and the Greens.

Finally, although impeded by the new electoral system and riddled by internal conflicts, the *Front National* achieved moderate yet respectable results. This was all the more remarkable as electoral participation was higher than expected and losses between the two rounds were relatively limited. We have not heard the last of the *Front National* in French elections.

NOTES

1. Since the terms for the electoral race were not the same for the overseas territories, we will only be dealing with *metropolitan* France.
2. Pascal Perrineau and Dominique Reynié (eds.), *Le vote incertain, les élections régionales de 1998*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999.
3. Pascal Perrineau (ed.), *Le vote de tous les refus, les élections présidentielle et législatives de 2002*. Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2003.
4. Nonna Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent FN*. Paris: Flammarion, 1999, p.248.