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# The French Voter

## Before and After the 2002 Elections

Edited by

Michael S. Lewis-Beck

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of Political Science, University of Iowa, USA*

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# Preface

Within France, the study of elections has a long and distinguished pedigree. Since André Siegfried in 1913, the electoral behavior of the French voter has been an object of serious research from French political scientists themselves. The interest of scholars from elsewhere gathered slowly, but by the 1960s leading political science departments in North America and Great Britain had given a firm place to the scientific examination of French elections. These French studies had arrived in the Anglo academies. But ideas were also flowing the other way. Ideas about party identification and the need for election surveys to test different theories crossed the Atlantic, to arrive on the French shore. Somewhat later, ideas about political economy and statistical tests on other kinds of data, besides surveys, began landing. Still later, ideas about rational choice disembarked. French political science accepted some of these ideas, rejected some, and of course made their own unique contributions to election study, such as the importance of left–right ideology, the strategic role of institutions, the changing place of social class, the evolution of religion and ethnicity as issues, the peculiar French dynamic of political participation.

At international political science meetings, in North America and Europe especially, French and non-French students of elections in the hexagon have been increasingly mingling, exchanging research notions and findings. The volume at hand, which sprang from an inquiry first broached by Robert Elgie and Palgrave press, is a sophisticated product, born of this vital transcontinental debate. We have political scientists from France, the United States, Great Britain, French Canada and Germany, all writing on the French elections, albeit from different points of view. What holds them together is the language of scientific discourse, and a passion for the subject. Officially, the text is English, but the French “feel” of the text often makes felicitous breakthroughs. What the reader holds is a collection of papers by world scholars, representing the very best contemporary political science work on French elections, and on the 2002 elections especially. The authors manage to explain French voters, though not in a way that renders them dull. It is risking little to say that these chapters, by heightening our understanding of French elections, will only further the fascination of scholars for the subject.

Michael S. Lewis-Beck