Policy Preferences Influence Vote Choice When the Party System is Upended: Evidence from the

2017 French Presidential Election

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Abstract

In models of policy representation, policy preferences influence vote choice, leading governments to adopt policies citizens want. However, scholars have long doubted whether policy preferences motivate vote choice. Most of their studies focus on contexts with stable parties with unchanging positions though, making it unlikely that policy preferences will influence vote choice. A recent study on the 2016 US presidential election showed that policy does matter when a party changes positions. No published work, however, has considered a context without stable parties. We leverage the context of the 2017 French presidential election in which a candidate lacking a long-standing party, Emmanuel Macron, rose to prominence and won. Using panel data, we find strong evidence that policy preferences led voters to support Macron. We also find that Macron influenced policy preferences. We conclude that when the party system is upended, policy does influence votes, but vote choice also influences policy preferences.

Keywords: voting behavior; issue voting; policy representation

Scholars conventionally see policy preferences as a key input to the voting decision process. Voters are expected to support candidates and parties who share their policy preferences, as stressed by spatial models of electoral competition (Downs 1957; Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). By doing so, candidates and parties who share their preferences end up in government and they also have an incentive to implement the policies people want (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999). Consequently, government policy reflects citizens' preferences (Pitkin 1967; Powell 2000).

However, there have long been doubts about the extent to which policy preferences influence vote choice (e.g. Campbell et al 1960; Converse 1964; Brody and Page 1972). There is also evidence that policy preferences are endogenous to party identification (e.g. Bullock 2011; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013) and vote choice (Lenz 2012). However, assessments of the relationship between policy and party preferences focus on contexts in which there is little reason for policy to influence vote choice. As studies beginning with Campbell el al. (1960) have shown, citizens have attachments to parties for which they vote most of the time. Moreover, as Downs (1957) argued, parties have a strong incentive to keep the same positions over time. Because parties usually propose policies that are consistent with their conventional positions, policy preferences should not lead to changes in vote choice most of the time.

Recent evidence suggests that policy preferences matter more when one of these factors stabilizing vote choice does not hold. Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck (2018) find evidence that policy preferences influenced vote choice in the 2016 American presidential election when Donald Trump took unconventional Republican positions. Another situation in which issues may matter is when the party system is upended and new parties rise to prominence with new bundles of

issue positions. Without partisanship to anchor vote choice and with new parties adopting novel positions, there is more room for policy preferences to influence votes. To our knowledge, no published work has considered this possibility. We assess the relationship between policy preferences and vote choice in such an exceptional context. As we discuss in the conclusion though, such a context has become less exceptional in recent elections in many democracies.

We analyze issue voting and candidate following in the most recent French presidential election. The 2017 election was particular as it saw the emergence of a new challenger, Emmanuel Macron, leader of the new movement *En Marche !* (On the Move!), who competed at the centre of the political space – a position which had not been successful in previous presidential contests. Also, the centre-left *Parti Socialiste* (Socialist Party) and the conservative party *Les Républicains* (Republicans) both nominated relatively polarizing candidates in primary elections (Mény 2017). This changed the balance of power among the main political parties and may have led many citizens to deviate from their traditional partisan attachments. In the end, neither mainstream party candidate gathered enough votes in the first round of the presidential election to qualify for the second round. In their place, the runoff opposed Emmanuel Macron to Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right *Front National* (National Front). As we will see, many supporters of the traditional mainstream parties abandoned their party and ended up voting for Macron. This unique context allows us to determine whether policy matters when parties do not stabilize vote choice.

We use data from the 2017 French Election Study, a panel study which started in late 2015, almost 18 months before the presidential election, and which allows us to observe changes in policy preferences and vote choice over time. An important advantage of this election study is

that citizens' attitudes and party preferences were first measured before Macron rose to political prominence and declared his presidential ambitions. Consequently, these policy preferences can be seen as largely exogenous to a vote choice for Macron. We focus on the first round because vote choices at that stage should better reflect citizens' sincere preferences among the entire set of presidential candidates (Blais 2003). We find that policy preferences were a major influence on votes in the exceptional context of the 2017 election. We also find evidence that Macron voters followed him by adjusting their policy preferences to reflect his positions. These results suggest that, in a context in which the party system is upended, policy preferences can powerfully influence vote choice but that new elites and parties also help citizens form their preferences.

Issues and Vote Choice

While the policy voting perspective that began with Downs (1957) argues that policy preferences influence citizens' votes, scholars in the Columbia and Michigan schools observed that vote choice, which they saw as rooted in, respectively, social groups and psychological attachments, is largely stable over time (Campbell et al. 1960; Lazarsfeld et al. 1948). Converse (1964) also showed that most citizens do not have policy preferences that fit into neat ideological bundles nor do they give consistent policy preferences over time, making it difficult for such preferences to influence vote choice. The Michigan authors further doubted that policy preferences could influence vote choice because they thought that citizens were unfamiliar with the major issues, that they lacked intense preferences on them, and that they failed to perceive differences between the parties' positions (Campbell et al. 1960, Chapter 8).

Later studies found correlations between policy preferences and vote choice (e.g. Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1976) even controlling for stable predispositions like partisanship (Miller and Shanks 1996). However, scholars have long been aware of the fact that correlations between vote choice and issue preferences can reflect either issue voting or persuasion, whereby citizens adopt their preferred party's position (Brody and Page 1972). Correlations do not necessarily imply the influence of issue preferences on vote choice but could reflect the opposite tendency whereby voters adjust their policy preferences to reflect their vote choice.

Controlling for partisanship is important. Campbell et al (1960) argued that party identification influences both political attitudes like policy preferences and vote choice. Numerous experimental studies support their argument that parties influence their identifiers' policy preferences (e.g., Cohen 2003; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). Thus, correlations between policy preferences and vote choice may be spurious.

However, a much more difficult problem is the earlier suggestion by Brody and Page (1972) that citizens' preferences might actually be influenced by the party they vote for. Lenz (2009, 2012) recently showed that this concern is justified. He replicated a number of prominent studies purportedly showing that policy preferences influenced vote choice. Using panel data to disentangle the temporal order between policy preferences and vote choice, he found that citizens rarely vote on the basis of their policy preferences but instead change their policy preferences to reflect their vote choice. He argues that, without using panel data, it is impossible to distinguish

these two possibilities.[1] Because policy preferences are influenced by vote choice, simply controlling for long-term variables like party identification, as suggested by Miller and Shanks (1996) is insufficient.

However, a major limitation to the analyses conducted by Lenz is that they focus on normal elections, that is, elections in which the major players are long-established parties with long-standing policy positions. As Downs (1957) argues, parties do not change their positions over time because doing so would lead voters to distrust them. Moreover, as Campbell et al. (1960) argued, voters have long-standing attachments to a particular party for which they normally vote. Thus, voters have no reason to change their vote choice during a particular election for policy (or even other) reasons because they vote for the same party election after election and that party keeps the same issue positions over time. That does not mean that policy is irrelevant. There is evidence that parties can successfully focus their campaigns on issues on which voters' policy preferences conflict with their prior vote choice (Hillygus and Shields 2009). More significantly, policy preferences may powerfully influence vote choice when an equilibrium in which partisanship and party positions are stable ends. If either one or more parties change their positions or partisanship ceases to anchor vote choice, policy preferences may have the opportunity to influence vote choice.

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[1] Note that other recent studies using panel data find a greater influence of policy preferences on vote choice. Matthews (2019) reanalyzes some of the cases considered by Lenz and finds some evidence of issue voting. Tesler (2015) also finds that, while citizens adapt their preferences on specific policy issues to their candidate preferences, they re-evaluate their candidate preferences to reflect their crystallized policy predispositions.

What happens when this normal election context does not hold? In other words, what happens when either a party (or its candidate) adopts unconventional policy positions or the major parties are not long-standing parties towards which citizens have attachments? Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck (2018) considered voting in the exceptional context of the 2016 American presidential election in which the Republican candidate Donald Trump took policy stances that sharply contrasted with his party's traditional positions. They found that policy preferences were a powerful influence on vote choice in that context. We still do not know what happens when citizens' voting behaviour is not strongly rooted in partisan attachments though.

Even if policy preferences do influence vote choice in such exceptional circumstances, elites may exercise considerable influence on policy preferences. Converse (1964) argued that political elites decide "what goes with what", that is, that they determine the bundles of policy preferences that constitute ideologies (212). Thus, even in exceptional contexts, parties and leaders may still influence policy preferences. Lenz (2012) found that, in addition to influencing their partisans' preferences, parties influence the preferences of their voters who rationalize their vote choice by adopting the positions of the party or candidate they vote for. Moreover, a recent study on the current US context finds that Donald Trump's unusual positions influence his supporters' preferences, regardless of their partisanship (Barber and Pope 2019). These findings reflect voters' broader tendency to rationalize their attitudes towards political figures (Lodge and Taber 2013). Thus, while we expect policy preferences to influence vote choice when a candidate representing a new party emerges, we also expect that candidate to influence policy preferences.

Background on the 2017 French Presidential Election

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Studying the 2017 French presidential election is an interesting complement to the analysis of Sides, Tesler, and Vavrek (2018) of the 2016 American election because it also constitutes a break from the normal pattern of electoral competition. This election was unusual as it was marked by a strong rejection of established parties. French politics had long been dominated by two mainstream parties: The Socialists on the left and the Republicans on the right. As the popularity of the incumbent Socialist President François Hollande had reached very low levels, many expected the election to be won by the Republican candidate. However, the election campaign took several unexpected turns and led to a very competitive race between five main contenders (from a total of eleven candidates). Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right *Front National*, the Socialist Benoît Hamon, the Republican François Fillon, as well as two outsiders: Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the far-left movement *La France Insoumise* (France Unbowed) and the centrist Emmanuel Macron of *En Marche !*.

Both the Socialist and Republican parties chose their candidates in open primary elections, organized jointly with other smaller parties. On the right, this primary election took place in November 2016 and resulted in the surprise victory of François Fillon, a former prime minister with very right-wing social and economic views. His candidacy was, however, strongly penalized by accusations of misuse of public funds, leading him later in the campaign to be placed under formal investigation.

On the left, the January 2017 primary election was won by Benoît Hamon, belonging to the left wing of the Socialist party. He faced strong competition from Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who campaigned on a populist left-wing platform and managed to gather the support of a large share of left-wing citizens, benefiting from the unpopularity of François Hollande and the more general

mood of defiance against established parties. In the centre of the political spectrum, Emmanuel

Macron went from an outsider position to being a key candidate, attracting votes from both left-

wing and right-wing voters. He campaigned on an innovative mix of policy positions, combining

liberal economic positions, strong support for European integration, and progressive positions on

socio-cultural issues. His standing in the polls increased steadily during the campaign. In the end,

Macron won the first round of the election with 24.0% of the vote, followed by Marine Le Pen at

21.3%. He also won a large victory in the second round, with 66.1%, against 33.9% for Le Pen.

What is particularly remarkable about the 2017 election is the strong presence of a

candidate representing a new party and the weak profile of the candidates of the established

parties. Macron was of course not unknown before his presidential bid. As a former minister of

economy and finance in the Hollande cabinet, his name was associated with a series of reforms

aimed at liberalizing the French economy and job market regulations, adopted in April 2015. It

was only later, however, that he emerged as a possible candidate in the 2017 election. He formed

the political movement *En Marche !* in April 2016, and resigned from the government four

months later. In November of that year, he officially announced his candidacy for the presidential

contest. Consequently, the 2017 French presidential election provides a unique opportunity to

study the influence of policy preferences on support for a candidate who is not linked to an

established party.

In our analyses, we consider all voters but we focus on those who switched from an

established party candidate at the beginning of the period for which we have data to Macron later

on. Many respondents made such a shift. More than half (51%) of respondents who in early 2016

intended to vote for Hollande, the presumable mainstream left candidate, voted for Macron.

Meanwhile, 33% of respondents who earlier intended to vote for the likely candidate of the mainstream right, Alain Juppé of *Les Républicains*, switched to Macron (see Table S1 in supporting information).[2] We focus on such switchers because they provide us a rare opportunity to observe changes in vote choice. We seek to determine whether they changed their vote choice to reflect their policy preferences and/or whether the change in their vote choice led them to change their policy preferences in the direction of their new preferred candidate's positions.

Data and Methods

To determine whether voters changed their vote choice to reflect their policy preferences and/or adjusted their policy preferences to reflect the change in their vote choice, we rely on survey data collected as part of the 2017 French Election Study. This is a panel study that started in late 2015 and ran for more than a year and a half, covering both the first and second rounds of the

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[2] Note that, while neither Hollande nor Juppé ended up as the official candidates of their party (the former decided not to compete for a second mandate; the latter was defeated in his party's primary election), they were largely seen as the most likely candidates in early 2016 (Mény 2017).

presidential election.[3] Our key variables are citizens' preferences on a number of policy issues, their first-round voting intentions and final vote choice. These were measured at various points during the survey, allowing us to investigate both how early issue preferences influenced later vote choices, and whether early vote intentions led to later changes in policy preferences. Table 1 presents a summary of the main types of variables used and indicates the waves in which they were measured.[4]

Table 1: Main variables used and timing of the panel waves

Panel wave	Timing	Variables
Wave 1	11/14-11/29/2015	Policy positions, battery 1
		Policy positions, battery 2
Wave 2	01/22-02/03/2016	Initial vote intention (Hollande or Juppé)
Wave 6	10/14-10/20/2016	Updated vote intention (including Macron) for models of following
Wave 7	10/14-10/20/2016	Policy positions, battery 1
Wave 12b	03/31-04/04/2017	Policy positions, battery 1

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[3] The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) on a representative sample of the national electorate. As is standard in France, the sample was based on quotas for gender, age, professional status, and was stratified by size of community and region (Ile de France, North-West, Northeast, South-West, South-East). The study was realized by the polling institute Ipsos Mori. The initial sample size was 24,369, of which 15,627 (64%) still took part in the first post-electoral wave (Wave 14).

[4] Note that we also use ideology from waves 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11b, 12, 12b, 13, 14, and 15 for Figure 1. Demographics and party identification are from wave 1.

Wave 14	04/30/2017-05/03/2017	First round vote choice
Wave 15	05/27/2017-06/02/2017	Policy positions, battery 2

As regards policy preferences, we rely on two batteries of questions as well as respondents' self-placements on the left-right scale. The first one confronted respondents with 15 policy issues (e.g., the minimum wage, the rights of homosexuals) and asked whether each of them should be strongly increased, somewhat increased, kept at the same level, somewhat decreased or strongly decreased. These questions were asked in November 2015 (Wave 1) and repeated in October 2016 (Wave 7) and early April 2017 (Wave 12b). The second battery asked respondents whether they strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with 12 statements (e.g., "With respect to social justice, society should take from the rich to give to the poor", "There are too many immigrants in France", see Table A1 in the Appendix for the full list of items for both series of questions). These questions were included in Wave 1 and in the wave that followed the presidential runoff (Wave 15). Distributions of all policy variables are in Figures S1 to S3 in the Supporting Information.

Using these data, we analyze both issue voting and issue following. For issue voting, we estimate whether policy preferences measured before the campaign have an impact on vote choice in the first round. We first estimate an overall model of voting for Macron in the first

round and then estimate models of changes in vote choice from the mainstream Socialist and

Republican candidates, on the one hand, to Macron, on the other hand.[5]

For issue following, we estimate whether an early vote intention for Macron explains

changes in citizens' policy preferences during the campaign. Note that the direction of the effects

is likely to differ between left-wing and right-wing respondents, as Macron was a centrist

candidate. For that reason, we estimate separate models for respondents who, at the outset of the

campaign, intended to vote for the most likely candidate of the Socialist Party (Hollande) or of

the Republican party (Juppé).

We first reduce the dimensionality of the policy preference variables via factor analysis.

We also do so using summative rating scales reflecting the two major dimensions of French

politics: economics and immigration (see Section S3 of the Supporting Information). To assess

the influence of policy preferences on vote choice, we then regress (using linear probability

models, as in Lenz 2012) a binary variable indicating a Macron vote in the first round on each of

the resulting factors, respondents' ideological self-placement and the square of these variables.

We added the squares of these variables to account or the possibility that Macron support comes

from more moderate voters. When they were not significant, the squared terms were dropped

though. We control for party identification by including a dummy variable indicating the

respondent identifies with one of the two mainstream parties (*Parti Socialiste* or *Les*

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[5] We compare voters who ended up voting for Macron to all other voters who initially intended

to vote for the Socialist or Republican candidates.

Républicains).[6] We include partisanship to ensure results are not due to a spurious relationship in which partisanship would influence both policy preferences and vote choice. As in previous research on French presidential elections (e.g., Ivaldi 2018; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Bélanger 2012), we also included the following demographic controls: age, gender, education, religion, income, economic sector, numbers of risky and non-risky assets.[7]

To determine the influence of candidate preferences on policy positions, we again run separate analyses for respondents who indicated a vote intention for the presumed candidate of the mainstream parties of the left and right. We are now interested in changes in policy preferences and whether these can be explained by an earlier change in voting intention for Macron. More precisely, we consider changes in the policy questions in the first battery, between wave 1 (October 2016) and 12b (April 2017) and in the second battery between waves 1 and 15.

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[6] Note that we include a dummy indicating identification with each mainstream party in our model of overall voting for Macron and a dummy indicating identification with respondents' initial party in models for respondents who initially intended to vote for either the presumed Socialist or Republican candidate.

[7] Age and income were included as continuous variables along with their square to allow for non-linear effects. Gender, education and economic sector are represented by dummy variables indicating the respondent is, respectively, female, has more than a baccalaureate (secondary school diploma), works in the public sector. Religion is represented by three dummies: Practicing Catholic, Other Religion, and No Religion (Non-Practicing Catholic is the reference category). Occupation is represented by dummies indicating the respondent is a manager, a blue-collar worker or does not work (white-collar worker is the reference category).

We regress policy preferences in the later wave on a dummy indicating an intention to vote for

Macron in wave 6 and on policy preferences measured in wave 1.[8] As in the models of issue

voting, we control for party identification and for demographics. The coefficients on the Macron

dummy variable thus shows how much more respondents who shifted to a Macron vote half way

through the panel changed their policy preferences in a given direction compared to those who

did not shift to Macron. We consider changes between waves 1, on the one hand, and waves 12b

and 15, on the other hand in the analyses presented in the paper. However, in the Supporting

Information, we also present results from battery 1 assessing changes between waves 7 and 12b.

We also consider changes in policy preferences among respondents who reported a vote for

Macron after the first round (rather than using earlier vote intentions). As explained below, each

of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages.

Issues and Dimensionality

We first consider whether the issues asked about in the French Election Study can be

summarized by a smaller number of dimensions. Doing so allows us to reduce measurement

error (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). It also allows us to assess the influence of more

general preferences rather than individual issues. We first determined the number of factors using

a scree plot (see Supporting Information, Figure S4). There is a clear elbow after three factors

and there are three eigenvalues greater than 1. We, therefore, decided that the appropriate number

of factors is three. We then tried running factor analyses with no rotation, with a varimax (i.e.

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[8] Note that Wave 6 is the first one in which Macron was included as a possible choice in the vote

intention questions.

orthogonal) rotation and with a promax (i.e. oblique) rotation. We opted for the promax rotation

because it led to the simplest factor structure (i.e. factors are most strongly associated with the

issue variables). Table 2 shows factor loadings and the proportion of variance explained by each

factor. We can see that the first factor is most strongly associated with items related to gay rights,

openness to immigrants and refugees, and European integration. We thus label it the Social

Factor. The second factor is most strongly associated with workers' rights, business freedom, and

with the size of the state. We thus label it the Economic Factor. Factor 3 is most strongly

associated with sentences for criminals as well as the resources available to surveillance services.

We thus label it the Law and Order Factor.

Together these factors account for about a third of the variance in issue preferences. The

social factor is by far the most important.[9] To facilitate interpretation of coefficients, we have re-

scaled all policy variables so that higher values indicate more right-wing positions (i.e. lower

social liberalism, more economic liberalization, and more law and order). We scaled these

variables, like all other policy variables, from 0 to 1. While our results point to a three-

dimensional solution, it should be noted that many authors have depicted the French political

space as two-dimensional (Bornschier and Lachat 2009; Gougou and Persico 2017; Grunberg

and Schweisguth 2009; Kriesi et al. 2008), with an economic left-right and a socio-cultural

conservative-progressive dimension. This broadly corresponds to the first two axes in our

representation of the political space. It is also very close to the two dimensions identified by

Gougou and Persico (2017) in their analysis of citizens' attitudes in France in 2017, based on a

different dataset. They did not, however, include items pertaining to law and order, which form a

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[9] See density plots of each factor in Figure S5 in the Supporting Information.

third dimension in our solution. We also reduced the dimensionality of policy preferences by

creating economic and immigration dimensions (see Section S3 of the Supporting Information).

Table 2: Factor Loadings from Factor Analysis with Promax Rotation

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Deficit	0.00	-0.22	-0.27
Gay Rights	0.50	-0.14	0.20
Voting Rights	0.68	-0.04	-0.19
Minimum Wage	0.01	-0.40	0.26
Layoffs	0.17	0.58	-0.03
Working Hours	0.04	0.43	0.17
Pollution Taxes	0.34	-0.03	0.25
Foreigners	0.67	0.06	-0.30
Expulsions	-0.25	0.03	0.38
Refugees	0.56	0.04	-0.18
Sentences	-0.11	-0.01	0.65
Surveillance	0.00	0.00	0.64
Imports	0.05	-0.04	0.31
EU	0.46	0.11	0.09
Civil Servants	-0.02	-0.69	0.02
Redistribution	0.06	-0.40	0.04
Death Penalty	-0.65	-0.07	0.08
Too Many Immigrants	-0.79	-0.02	0.20
Parents	-0.25	0.06	0.20
French First	-0.72	-0.08	0.10
Business Freedom	0.00	0.46	0.19
Homosexuality	0.42	-0.09	0.27
Immigrants French	0.69	0.03	0.08
Reduce Civil Service	0.02	0.71	0.00
Immigration	0.79	0.07	0.02
Strongman	-0.28	0.13	0.14
Islam Threat	-0.68	-0.03	0.11
Proportion of Variance	0.20	0.08	0.07

Did Voters Lead Macron?

Before estimating the models of issue voting and issue following outlined above, we first consider whether voters who moved from a mainstream left or right candidate towards Macron had distinct policy preferences before they made the switch. Figure 1 shows self-placements on the left-right dimension over time among respondents who initially intended to vote for either the mainstream left or right candidates (in wave 2). It distinguishes those who later decided to vote for Macron (in wave 14) from those who did not. If ideological positions motivated these voters to change their candidate support, we should find that those who ended up supporting Macron had different ideological positions from those who did not before they decided to support Macron. That is what we find. In the first wave of the survey, supporters of both the mainstream right and left candidates who later switched to Macron were considerably more centrist than those who did not, even before Macron was considered a possible candidate. Single-tailed t-tests show that both differences are significantly different from 0 ($p<0.001$ for both former left voters and former right voters). More details about the distributions of ideological self-placements are in figures S6 and S7 in the Supporting Information.

We then systematically assess the impact of ideology and of each of the policy dimensions created above on changes in vote choice by regressing first round vote choice (from wave 14) on ideological self-placement and factor scores (from 18 months earlier). Note that all policy variables and factors were rescaled from 0 to 1. We include each of the policy variables as well as its square to allow for the possibility that support for Macron is greatest among voters with moderate preferences. We also include controls as detailed above.

Figure 1: Ideological Self-Placements by Initial Vote Intentions and Final Vote Choice

Initial Vote Intention —— Republican Candidate ···· Socialist Candidate

Voted for Macron ●— Yes ●— No
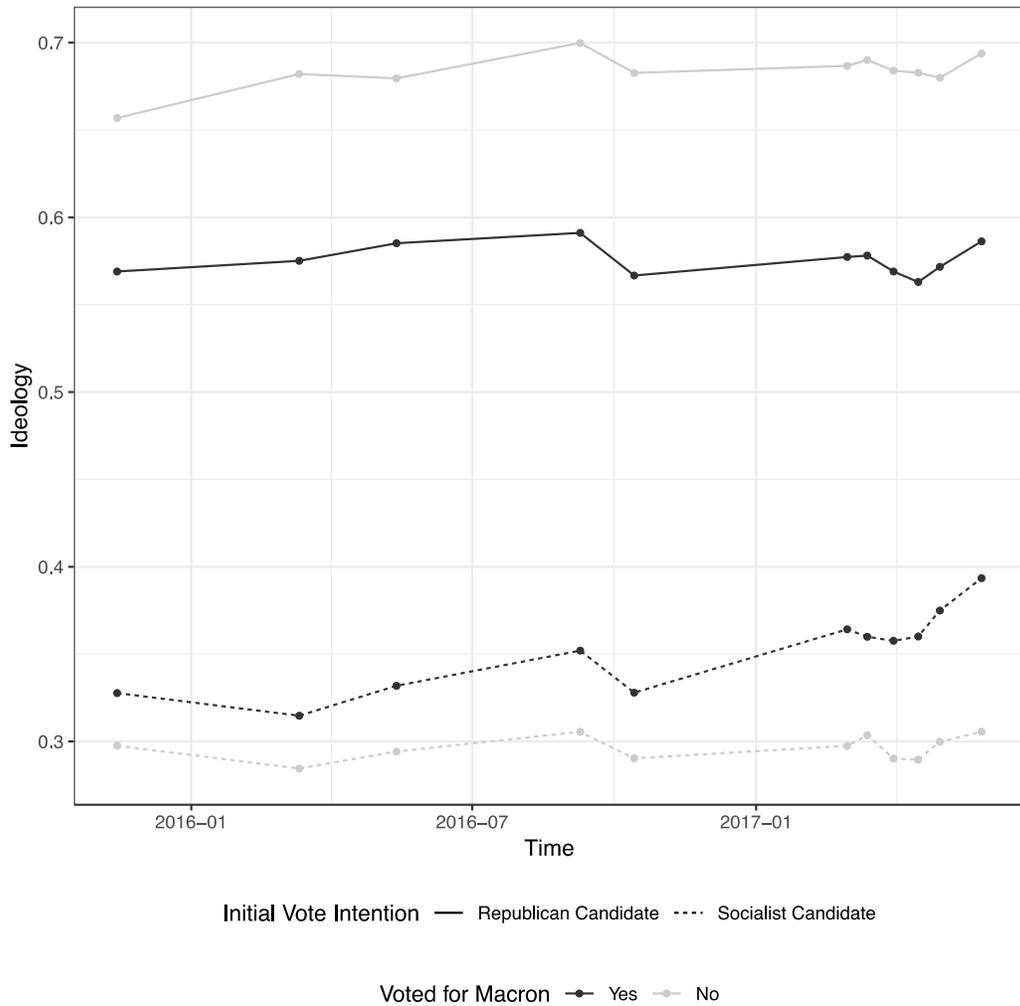
We first run a model including all respondents. This model tells us how policy preferences assessed a year and a half before the election influenced voting for Macron. The first column in Table 3 shows the coefficients on the policy variables. For each significant quadratic term, we test whether the relationship is curvilinear (i.e. U- or inverse U-shaped) as suggested by Simonsohn (2018). We find that Macron did best among respondents with moderate preferences. The coefficient on ideological self-placement is positive while that on the square of ideology is negative. Simonsohn's curvilinearity test confirms that support for Macron increases as ideology moves rightward but that the effect reverses as a respondent becomes more right-wing. The main

effect of the social factor is not significant, but the coefficient on the squared term is negative and significant. The curvilinearity test shows that the relationship is significantly negative for all but the highest values of the scale. In other words, citizens with more conservative social policy preferences were less likely to vote for Macron. The main effect of the economic factor is positive and significant while the coefficient on the squared term is negative and significant, showing that support for Macron increases as respondents become more economically right-wing but that this relation reverses as one shifts further right. The curvilinearity test confirms this finding. Thus, Macron did best among respondents with moderate economic preferences. The main effect of the law and order factor is weakly positive and significant, while the coefficient on the squared term is not, showing that support for Macron increases as respondents become more supportive of law and order policies. In sum, Macron did best among voters with centrist ideologies, moderate economic views, liberal social preferences and conservative law and order attitudes.

Table 3: Models of Voting for Macron

	All Respondents	Former Socialist Candidate Supporters	Former Republican Candidate Supporters
Intercept	-0.53* (0.07)	-0.64* (0.18)	0.09 (0.18)
Ideology	0.71* (0.07)	0.67* (0.21)	-0.22* (0.06)
Ideology^2	-0.67* (0.06)	-0.58* (0.29)	
Social Factor	-0.11 (0.11)	-0.17* (0.08)	-0.53* (0.06)

Social Factor^2	-0.37* (0.10)		
Economic Factor	2.06* (0.15)	0.91* (0.11)	2.17* (0.45)
Economic Factor^2	-1.63* (0.14)		-1.90* (0.36)
Law and Order Factor	0.10* (0.04)	0.26* (0.10)	0.13 (0.08)
Law and Order Factor^2			
N	10136	1890	2817
Adjusted R^2	0.19	0.11	0.15
Standard errors in parentheses. *: $p<0.05$. Models control for party identification and demographic variables.			

While these results show how prior policy preferences relate to support for Macron on the day of the first round of the election, they do not allow us to assess the influence of policy on changes in vote choice. To do that, we consider the two largest sources of Macron support, former Socialist and Republican candidate voters, and run separate models among voters who initially indicated support for each of those candidates. These models thus allow us to explain change from a vote for each of the two mainstream party candidates to Macron.

The second column of Table 3 shows coefficients on each policy variable among respondents who initially intended to vote for the Socialist candidate. The coefficients on both Ideology and Ideology Squared are significant and the former is positive while the latter is negative. However, the curvilinearity test fails to show that the relationship becomes negative for right-wing ideologies. However, this may be due to the small number of former Socialist candidate supporters with such positions. Figure S6 in the Supporting Information shows that

majorities of former Socialist respondents who placed themselves between 3 and 8 on the left-right scale voted for Macron, while majorities of respondents with more extreme placements did not vote for him. The significant negative coefficient on the social factor shows that former Socialist candidate supporters with more socially conservative preferences were slightly less likely to switch to Macron. The significant positive coefficient on the economic factor shows that those with more right-wing economic views though were much more likely to move to the centrist candidate. The significant coefficient on the law and order factor further shows that those with more conservative law and order positions were also more likely to switch to Macron. In short, former Socialist candidate supporters with positions that conflicted with those of their former party on the ideological, economic, and law and order dimensions were more likely to switch to Macron. Switching to Macron support was associated with social liberalism though.[10]

The third column of Table 3 shows the influence of ideology and of each of the factors on the probability to vote for Macron among former supporters of the Republican candidate. The coefficient on ideology is negative and significant, showing that former Republican candidate supporters who were more left-wing were more likely to switch to Macron. Figure S7 in the Online Appendix shows that Macron only received a majority of votes among former *Les Républicains* candidate voters who placed themselves at 3 or 4 on the ideological scale. We can also see that the social factor is negatively related to support for Macron, showing that more socially left-wing former Republican candidate supporters were more likely to switch to Macron. The main effect of the economic factor is positive while the coefficient on the squared term is

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[10] Figures S8 and S9 in the Supporting Information compare the distributions on each factor among former Hollande and Juppé voters who voted for Macron.

negative, showing that support for Macron is highest among former Republican candidate supporters with moderately right-wing economic views. The curvilinearity test confirms that the relationship between the economic factor and support for Macron changes signs around the centre of the scale. The law and order factor is not associated with support for Macron in this group of voters though. Once again, these results show that former supporters of a mainstream party whose views were distant from their party's ended up voting for Macron. Former supporters of the presumed Republican candidate who placed themselves more to the left, had socially progressive views, and moderately right-wing economic views were more likely to end up voting for Macron. As already mentioned, we ran similar analyses using scales representing the two major dimensions of French political conflict. Results are similar and are in Section S3 of the Supporting Information.

Did Voters Lead Macron on Individual Issues?

We saw above that overall ideological self-placements as well as summary measures of policy preferences are associated with changes in support for conventional left- and right-wing candidates. In this section, to grasp which specific policy items led voters to support Macron, we run additional regression models with each of the policy issues. These models control for ideology, ideology squared, and party identification but omit factor scores. They thus allow us to see how preferences on each issue led voters to switch to Macron.

Figure 2 shows coefficients on each of the issue preference variables from models with respondents who initially intended to vote for the Socialist candidate. It shows 95% confidence intervals and shows significant coefficients in black and non-significant coefficients in grey.

Note that we multiply all p-values by the total number of tests to control for multiple hypothesis testing. We also adjust the confidence intervals for multiple testing (Fox 2008). We can see that preferences on six of the issues led to changes in vote choice. Former Hollande supporters who wanted to strongly increase the minimum wage were 32 percentage points less likely to switch to Macron than those who wanted to strongly reduce it. Similarly, those who wanted to strongly increase businesses' ability to lay off workers were 31 percentage points more likely to switch to Macron than those who wanted to strongly reduce businesses' ability to do so. Respondents who initially supported Hollande and favored strongly increasing expulsions of illegal immigrants were 11 percentage points more likely to switch to Macron than those who wanted to strongly decrease expulsions. Those who wanted to strongly increase the number of civil servants were 8 percentage points less likely to change their vote choice to Macron than those who wanted to strongly decrease the size of the bureaucracy.

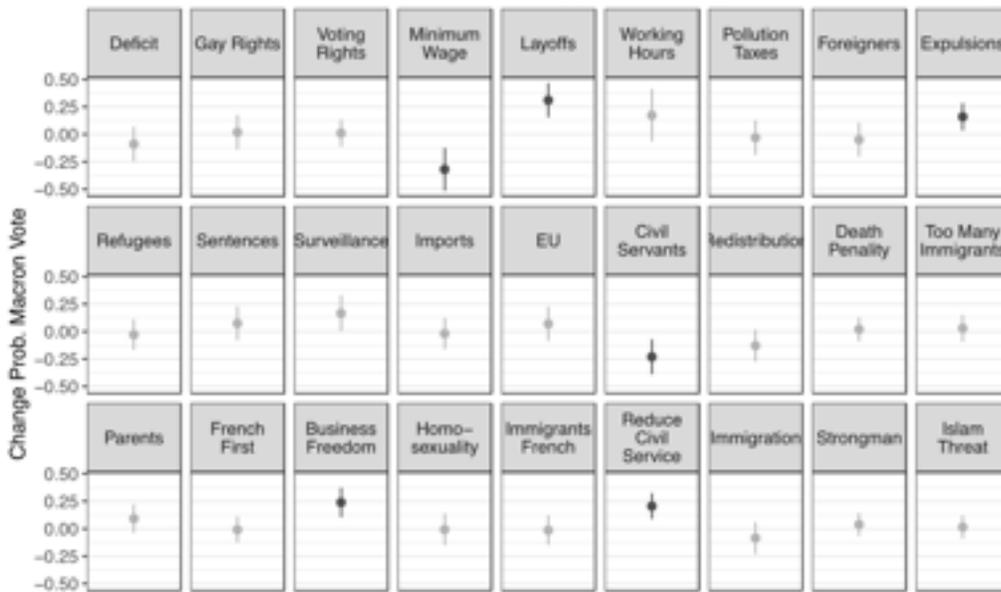Figure 2: Influence of Policy Items on Macron Support Among Former Socialist Supporters

Figure 3 shows analogous coefficients for respondents who initially intended to vote for the *Républicains* candidate, Juppé. We can see that former conservative candidate supporters who supported strongly increasing the budget deficit, gay rights, voting rights for documented immigrants, pollution taxes, the number of foreigners allowed to live in France, the number of refugees allowed in France, and France's participation in the European Union were, respectively, 18, 28, 25, 11, 21, 13, and 16 percentage points more likely to switch to Macron than those who wanted to strongly decrease each item. Initial Juppé supporters who strongly disagreed with re-establishing the death penalty, with the statement that there are too many immigrants in France, with the statement that parents have lost their moral authority over children, with giving priority to French applicants over immigrants for jobs, with replacing French democracy with a strongman, and that Islam is a threat were, respectively, 12, 19, 17, 11, 9, and 10 percentage points more likely to change their vote to Macron than those who strongly agreed with those items. Those who strongly agreed that homosexuality is an acceptable way to live one's sexuality, that the children of immigrants are French, and that immigration is a source of cultural enrichment, were, respectively, 18, 14, and 20 percentage points more likely to change their votes to Macron than those who strongly disagreed with those items.[11] As we can see, movement from support for the Republican candidate to Macron was largely driven by liberal preferences on social issues.

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[11] See Figures S10 to S13 in the Supporting Information for proportions of initial Socialist and Republican voters with each policy preference who voted for Macron.

Figure 3: Influence of Policy Items on Macron Support Among Former Republican Supporters
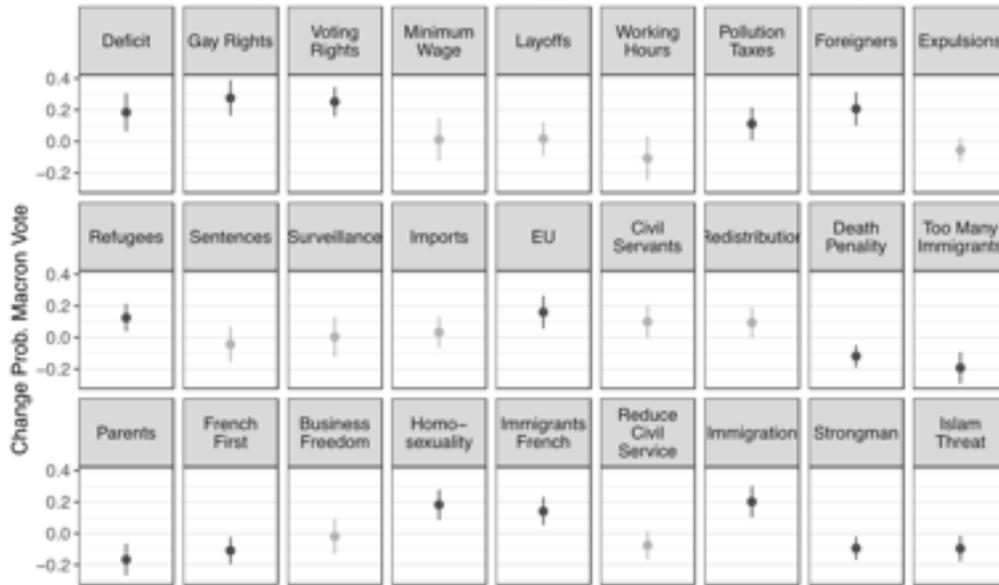
Did Macron Voters Follow?

We consider whether respondents adopted Macron's policy positions by regressing later measures of each preference on an earlier measure of that preference, a dummy variable indicating a vote intention for Macron, as well as controls for party identification and demographics. We consider all individual policy issues as well as ideology. We do not consider changes in factor scores because factors created on the basis of issue preferences at different points in time would not be comparable. In order to assess the mutual influence of policy scales and vote choice, as mentioned above, we also create two policy scales: an immigration scale and economic scale. See Section S3 of the Supporting Information.

For each battery of policy questions, several contrasts between panel waves are possible, each of which has advantages and disadvantages. Most of them point in the same direction. The simplest approach is to regress the last measure of each policy preference (wave 12b for the first

battery and wave 15 for the second) on a dummy indicating an intention to vote for Macron in the first wave in which a question was asked about him (wave 6), the first measure of each policy preference, and the same set of control variables as above. The Macron vote dummy shows by how much policy preferences change in a given direction among former Socialist and Republican candidate supporters who ended up supporting Macron compared to those who did not. The initial policy preferences make these models of changes in preferences and control for regression to the mean.

The advantages of using these waves are that this approach works for both issue batteries, we can capture changes in policy preferences from the first to the last measure for each issue, and, most significantly, the baseline measure of policy preferences is pre-treatment (before the decision to vote for Macron). Otherwise, our estimated coefficients would be biased (Angrist and Pischke 2008). The disadvantages though are that it does not pick up all Macron voters (those who decided to vote for Macron between September 2016 (wave 6) and the first round (April 2017). Moreover, because the baseline is before the measure of Macron vote choice, some of the change in policy preferences may have taken place prior to the decision to support Macron. We again limit analyses to respondents who initially intended to vote for either the mainstream left or right candidate.

Figures 4 and 5 show the coefficients on the Macron vote intention dummies of former supporters of the Socialist and Republican candidates, respectively. These show the differences in changes in policy preferences between those who decided to vote for Macron and those who did not. Because the policy variables were rescaled from 0 to 1, multiplying the coefficients by 100 gives us the change in respondents' preferences as a result of deciding to vote for Macron,

expressed as a percentage of each policy scale. We can see that former Socialist candidate

supporters who decided to vote for Macron moved eight percent of the range of the ideological

scale to the right.[12] They also became more supportive of allowing businesses to lay off workers

(by 7%), of increasing working hours (3%), of French participation in the European Union (4%),

of increasing business freedom (9%), of reducing the civil service (7%), and of France being

ruled by a strongman (7%), while they became less supportive of redistribution (3%). In short,

Macron influenced the preferences of former Socialist candidate supporters who ended up

supporting him, and that influence was mostly on economic issues.

Figure 4: Difference Between Changes in Policy Preferences Among Former Socialist Candidate Voters Who Switched to Macron and Those Who Did Not

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Figure 5 shows that former Republican candidate supporters who voted for Macron moved four percent more of the ideological scale to the left than those who did not. They also became less supportive of expelling illegal immigrants (by 6%), of severe sentences for criminals (3%), of the death penalty (4%), of the statements that there are too many immigrants in France (7%) and that parents have no more authority (3%), of prioritizing French citizens for jobs (7%), and of the statement that Islam is a threat (6%). On the other hand, these voters became more supportive of refugees (6%), of French participation in the EU (5%), of business freedom (3%), of the notion that immigration is a source of cultural enrichment (6%), and more accepting of homosexuality (3%) and of considering the children of immigrants born in France French (5%). Thus, Macron also influenced the preferences of former Republican candidate preferences, but his influence was mostly on social issues.

Figure 5: Difference Between Changes in Policy Preferences Among Former Republican Candidate Voters Who Switched to Macron and Those Who Did Not
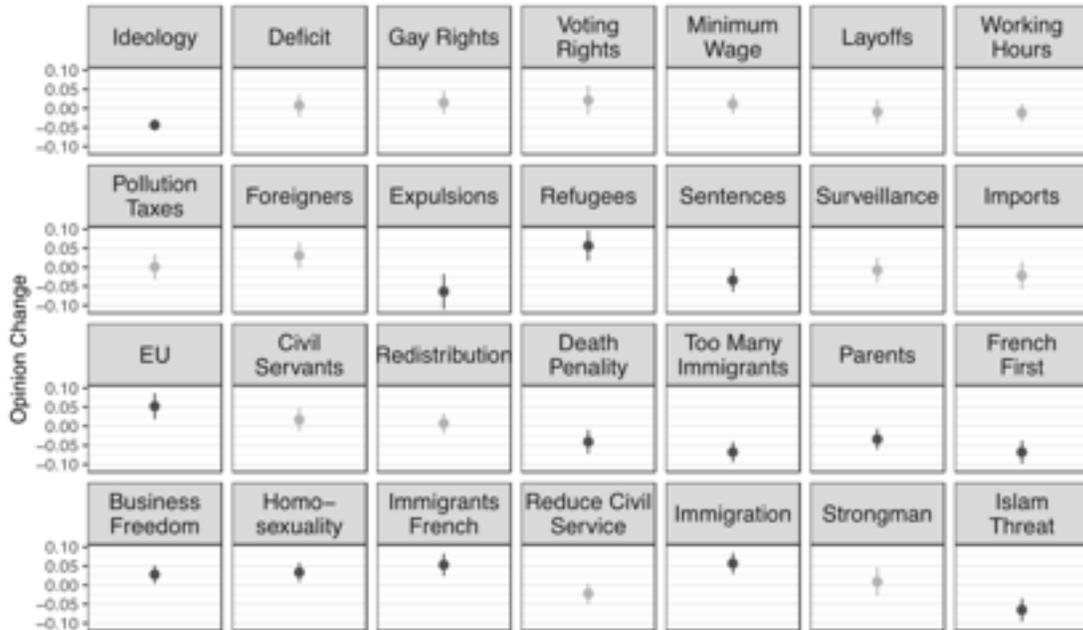
The other approaches to assessing issue following mostly point to similar results. For the first issue battery, we have assessed changes in policy preferences between waves 7 and 12b, comparing those who intended to vote for Macron in wave 6 to those who did not. The advantage of this approach is that all measures of policy preferences are from waves that are subsequent to vote choice. The disadvantage is that these models control for a post-treatment variable (preferences in wave 7). Thus, coefficients on vote choice in these models are biased (Angrist and Pischke 2008). Moreover, they may miss the influence Macron had on preferences if such influence took place earlier or later. We have also run models using wave 1 policy preferences as the baseline but first round vote choice (rather than wave 6 vote intentions). While this approach reduces our confidence that changes in policy preferences occurred following the decision to vote for Macron, it does ensure that we pick up all voters who decided to back Macron in the first round. Results of these alternative models are in Figures S14 to S17 in the Supporting

Information. Results using wave 14 vote choice with wave 1 as the baseline are nearly identical

to those using wave 6 vote intentions also setting wave 1 as the baseline. However, we find no

influence of Macron voting on policy issues when assessing changes between waves 7 and 12b

in first-battery preferences.[13] We do, however, find that former Socialist candidate supporters

who decided to vote for Macron significantly shifted their ideologies to the right.

As explained above, we also ran both issue voting and following analyses with

immigration and economic policy scales (section S3 of the Supporting Information). In addition

to finding similar evidence of issue voting to that reported above, we found that former Socialist

candidate supporters who switched to Macron moved to the right on the economic scales, while

former Republican candidate supporters shifted to the left on the immigration scales.

Readers may doubt that it is appropriate to use causal language like influence to describe our

findings. By comparing changes in vote choice among respondents with different initial policy

preferences and changes in policy preferences among respondents who decided to vote for

Macron or not, we implicitly adopt a differences-in-differences design. The major assumption to

use causal language in that design is the parallel trends assumption (Angrist and Pischke 2009,

171). While impossible to test, Figure 1 strongly suggests that, prior to the emergence of Macron

as a candidate, former Socialist and Republican candidate supporters who later decided to vote

for him moved in parallel with those who did not. We are thus justified to discuss the causal

effect of vote choice on policy preferences. We provide similar evidence that respondents who

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[13] We have also included graphs of mean policy preferences for all waves in which they are

measured for initial Socialist and Republican candidate voters who later decided to vote for

Macron in Figures S18 and S19.

initially intended to vote for each mainstream party candidate with ideologies on each side of the

median in that group of supporters moved in parallel in Section S4 of the Supporting

Information, thus supporting the use of causal language when describing the influence of policy

preferences on vote choice.

In our analyses, we have found strong evidence that policy mattered to vote choice.

However, policy preferences are far from exogenous to vote choice. Lenz (2012) was thus

correct to warn scholars of voting behavior not to assume that policy preference variables

necessarily cause vote choice and not the reverse. The influence of vote choice on policy

preferences was modest though, especially compared to other studies of the influence of parties

on issue preferences (see an early review assessing magnitudes in Bullock 2011). However, the

relationship between policy preferences and vote choice seems to reflect a combination of the

policy-oriented and leader-oriented perspectives. In the absence of an established party, policy

influences vote choice. Voting for a candidate with a given set of positions also reinforces those

positions among their supporters.

Conclusion

We follow up on the long-running debate about whether policy preferences influence vote choice

and the more recent discussion about whether voters adopt the positions of their preferred

candidate or party as their own. We assess the impact of policy preferences on vote choice and

vice versa in a context in which the usual constraints of party identification and stable party

positions are not there to depress the influence of policy on voting behaviour.

We assess issue voting and candidate following in the context of the 2017 French presidential election in which Emmanuel Macron rose to prominence and won the election without representing an established party. We found that policy preferences strongly influenced vote choice. Right-wing economic and law and order preferences strongly led former Socialist candidate supporters to shift to Macron, while left-wing social-policy preferences along with moderately right-wing economic preferences led former Republican candidate supporters to change to Macron. We also found evidence that Macron's voters followed him by moving their policy preferences in the direction of his issue positions. The clearest influence we found is that former Socialist candidate supporters who switched to Macron shifted their ideologies rightward.

Our findings have major implications for citizens' ability to lead government. The earlier claims of the Columbia and Michigan schools about the long-term stability of vote choice along with the provocative findings in recent work by Lenz (2012) that policy preferences rarely influence vote choice suggest that citizens are incapable of getting government to do what they want. However, we show that, when considering the influence of policy preferences on vote choice in a context where there is considerable room for change, policy preferences do influence voting behaviour. Voters can thus signal to government their positions on policy issues. Policy preferences are nevertheless partly endogenous to vote choice. Therefore, scholars should heed Lenz' warning about assuming rather than testing the direction of causality between policy and vote choice.

A possible limitation of our study is that we consider a unique candidate who does not represent an established party. However, if we consider recent developments in politics in advanced democracies, new parties are clearly far from being exceptional. They have played

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major roles in recent elections in Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. We focused

on the Macron case both because it reflects an increasingly common phenomenon and because of

the exceptional quality of the data available. We, therefore, strongly believe that the insights

from the Macron case can greatly help observers of politics in a variety of democracies make

sense of current developments.

Appendix

Table A1: List of Issues

Battery	Issue	Wording	Waves
1	Deficit	The state's budget deficit.	1, 7, 12b
1	Gay Rights	The rights of homosexuals.	1, 7, 12b
1	Voting Rights	The opportunity for documented immigrants to participate in French elections.	1, 7, 12b
1	Minimum Wage	The minimum wage.	1, 7, 12b
1	Layoffs	The ability of businesses to lay off workers.	1, 7, 12b
1	Working Hours	Legal working hours for employees.	1, 7, 12b
1	Pollution Taxes	Taxes on activities that cause pollution.	1, 7, 12b
1	Foreigners	The number of foreigners authorized to live in France.	1, 7, 12b
1	Expulsions	The number of expulsions of illegal immigrants.	1, 7, 12b
1	Refugees	The number of refugees and asylum seekers allowed into France.	1, 7, 12b
1	Sentencing	The severity of sentences for offenders.	1, 7, 12b
1	Surveillance	The means of surveillance of intelligence services.	1, 7, 12b
1	Imports	Barriers to imports into France of products made outside Europe.	1, 7, 12b
1	EU	The participation of France in the European Union.	1, 7, 12b
1	Civil Servants	The number of civil servants.	1, 7, 12b
2	Redistribution	With respect to social justice, society should take from the rich to give to the poor.	1, 15
2	Death Penalty	The death penalty should be re-established.	1, 15
2	Too Many Immigrants	There are too many immigrants in France	1, 15
2	Parents	These days, parents have no more authority.	1, 15

2	French First	With respect to work, a French citizen should be prioritized over an immigrant.	1, 15
2	Business Freedom	To deal with economic difficulties, the state should have confidence in businesses and give them more freedom.	1, 15
2	Homosexuality	Homosexuality is an acceptable way to live one's sexuality.	1, 15
2	Immigrants French	Children of immigrants born in France are French like everyone else.	1, 15
2	Reduce Civil Service	The number of civil servants should be reduced.	1, 15
2	Immigration	Immigration is a source of cultural enrichment.	1, 15
2	Strongman	France should be led by a strongman who does not have to worry about parliament or elections	1, 15
2	Islam Threat	Islam is a threat for the West.	1, 15

Battery 1 questions were about raising, maintaining or reducing each item. Respondents were given five options: strongly reduce, somewhat reduce, maintain, somewhat increase, strongly increase.

Battery 2 questions asked respondents to indicate whether they strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each statement.

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