

Forecasting the FN vote in Second-Order elections ¹

Jocelyn Evans, Gilles Ivaldi

This model is based upon the core popularity model (Lewis-Beck and Tien, 2010). It exploits the relative stability of sub-national election performance by building in an endogenous predictor, i.e. FN vote at the previous election of the same type, as well as what would in a ‘pure’ forecast model be regarded as a trivial popularity estimator, namely the last poll prior to the sub-national elections (normally two to three weeks before). Given the importance of timing of sub-national elections in the electoral cycle (Schmitt, 2005) and their consequent shifting role as protest elections – clearly important in the FN case – a third predictor is included, namely the percentage of time elapsed within the first-order election cycle ². Lastly, we include simple dummy controls for regional and European elections, to control for election type effects.

Regression model of FN voting in second-order elections (1984–2011)

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>VIF</i>
Constant	–8.95	1.57	
per cent vote FN in previous election ^a	0.36	0.08	1.33
FN popularity ^b	1.38	0.13	1.04
per cent time elapsed in first-order cycle	0.02	0.01	1.04
Regional election ^c	1.05	0.68	1.50
European election ^c	–1.22	0.58	1.18
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²		0.87	
SE		1.24	
MAE		1.31	
<i>N</i>		19	

^aElection of the same ‘type’, excluding all first regional (1986), European (1979) and cantonal (1982) ballots; all election scores as per cent of valid vote cast.

^bTNS-SOFRES series, last survey conducted before election day. FN popularity was not measured before the 1984 European election.

^cDummy variable.

¹ This model was first published in our paper “Forecasting the FN presidential vote in 2012”, *French Politics*, 2012, 10(1): 44-67 (<http://www.palgrave-journals.com/fp/journal/v10/n1/abs/fp201121a.html>)

² On average the 19 second-order elections considered for the analysis took place near mid-term (41.5 per cent of the national election cycle elapsed) when government popularity usually reaches a nadir. As would be anticipated, a negative correlation was also found between the temporal location of the second-order election and Prime Ministerial popularity as measured in the TNS-SOFRES series since the late 1970s ($r = -0.56$ $p = 0.006$ $n = 19$).

As shown in the table, the second-order model is accurate (MAE=1.3) and not entirely unparsimonious ($k=5$, $n=19$). Across all second-order elections since 1984, the model allows a prediction of the FN vote to within never more than 2 per cent of the result, and in half the cases within 1 per cent. Moreover, even though we are interested in the model simply in terms of predictive fit, all parameters make sense in explanatory terms, being in the right direction and fitting a general ‘protest vote’ model.

Forecasting the FN vote in May 2014

<http://500signatures.net/index.php?id=26>

The following values were used to estimate the FN vote in the 2014 EP elections, yielding a **19.7** per cent forecast (as of 28 January 2014).

	Coeff.	Value	
Constant	-8.95		
Previous election of the same type	0.36	6.34	FN national score in the 2009 EP election
FN popularity*	1.38	19.4	TNS-SOFRES Popularity Series
% elapsed in national election cycle	0.02	40.0	24 out of 60 months
Regional election dummy	1.05	0.0	Type of election
European election dummy	-1.22	1	Type of election

*Estimated from Marine Le Pen’s popularity as of January 2014 (http://www.tns-sofres.com/dataviz?type=2&code_nom=lepenmarine)