

Who are the candidates and substitute candidates in the French legislative elections?

Statistical note on the 2007 elections.

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Abstract: this note is intended to provide a description of the candidates and substitute candidates in the 2007 French legislative elections. It is divided into two parts: the main traits of the two groups (gender, age, other elected office) are first presented and compared; the pairing of candidates and their substitutes is then also analyzed on the basis of the above traits.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive note is to present the main characteristics of the candidates for election to the *Assemblée Nationale* (AN), the lower house of the French Parliament, in the 2007 general elections. It thus adds to previous descriptions and analyses of the members of the National Assembly (Costa and Kerrouche, 2007) and of the candidate groups and the circumstances in which they were elected in 2002 (Sineau and Tiberi, 2007). Its main contribution is to relate the profile of the candidates to that of the substitute candidates¹. There are two main arguments into account for taking the substitutes and their partnership with the candidates.

First of all, the substitute candidate has a potentially important electoral role, depending on his or her involvement in the campaign and personal characteristics. Secondly, the substitutes' role has been modified considerably since the 2008 amendment to the Constitution. Deputies who must leave their seat in order to hold ministerial office or fulfil other non-permanent missions, particularly at the request of the executive, will continue to be replaced by their substitutes in the National Assembly. What is new, however, is that they can regain their seat without being re-elected, since their substitutes will in turn vacate the seats for them. This change is intended to facilitate flexibility in the role of members of the Assembly. In consequence, we can expect an increase in the number of “missions” conferred on members of the Assembly, which will ultimately strengthen both the presence of substitutes in the National Assembly and their political and electoral role.

It is interesting to understand more clearly the attributes of the candidates and substitutes in general elections. Here, we propose two levels of analysis. On the one hand, we will describe both groups of candidates. On the other, we will consider the pairing of the candidates and substitute candidates in order to examine whether the pairs' attributes are convergent or complementary.

2. Characteristics of the candidates and substitutes in the 2007 parliamentary elections

In identifying the characteristics of the substitute candidates and comparing them with those of the candidates, we will rely on data collected by the Ministry of the Interior. The data are complete (that is, identical for each observation), despite the limited information provided. The data concern the 7,634 candidates, together with their substitutes, who campaigned in the 577 constituencies (see table 1).

¹ Each candidate for election to the AN appoints a “substitute candidate” with whom he or she campaigns, who will replace him or her in the AN if the candidate is nominated to government or cannot fulfil his or her duties (resignation, death, illness...).

The high number of candidates² is partly explained by financial factors, since the rules on public funding of political parties encourage political parties to put up several candidates (François, 2003). In other words, only a few of these candidates actually seek to be elected as members of the Assembly. In order to analyse this group of candidates more clearly, we will narrow the sample, first defining the candidates from the main political parties or groupings (the Communist Party (*PC*), the Socialist Party (*PS*), the *Radicaux de gauche*, *UDF-Modem* (centre), the *UMP* (centre-right) and the *FN* (far right)), and then the incumbent candidates.

Using the information collected, we will compare the candidates and substitute candidates on the basis of their political affiliation, gender, age and the holding of other elected office.

Table 1

The party affiliations of candidates and substitutes clearly reflect the considerable increase in candidacies, noted above. For instance, we see that the far left, which brings together three main parties (the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (*LCR*), *Lutte Ouvrière* (*LO*) et le *Parti des Travailleurs* (*PT*)) has more than 1,350 candidates, representing more than 17% of candidates. If we compare the political affiliation of the candidates and substitute candidates, the proportion per party barely differs, although there are some divergences.

For instance, the *UMP* put up 546 candidates (that is, 7.2% of the candidates) and 520 substitutes (6.8% of the substitutes). In contrast, the Socialist Party has more substitute candidates (523) than candidates (521). These divergences lead to the conclusion that there must be a certain crossover between candidates and substitutes from other political parties.

We note a higher number of men (see table 2) both as candidates and substitute candidates in this sub-sample, although the proportion of women is slightly lower amongst the substitutes. The proportion gap between both groups is around 2.5 percent, which may appear narrow but is nevertheless significant, given the number of observations. The difference in distribution between the two groups (candidates and substitutes) can be explained by the effect of the French law on gender parity. This law takes into consideration only candidates, and not substitutes, in the procedure for calculating any related penalties (Tolini, 2007).

Table 2

Nonetheless, this comparison hides important disparities, depending on the parties and position. Firstly, the proportions vary considerably from one political party to another. Whereas men are over-represented among the candidates from the Right and the *UMP* (83% and 73% respectively),

² For the 555 French metropolitan constituencies, there were 2,788 candidates in 1988; 5,193 in 1993; 6,214 in 1997 and 8,234 in 2002.

parties such as the Greens, the *MPF* (a conservative party) and the *CPNT* (an agrarian party which defends the traditional values of rural France) include a high proportion of women (50% of the candidates for these three parties). Secondly, the proportion of men among the incumbent candidates is considerably higher, as they account for 86.4% of the data submissions in this group. Nonetheless, their proportion among substitutes is smaller: men make up 63.1% of the substitutes for incumbent candidates.

We find the same overall similarity between candidates and substitute candidates with regard to age (see table 3). The average age in the two groups is similar, around 50 years. Equally, the standard deviations are very nearby.

Table 3

If we consider only candidates from the six main parties (see table 4), we realize, firstly, that the average age is slightly higher, 51 in contrast to 50 for the candidates as a whole, and, secondly, that within the sub-sample there is no difference between candidates and the substitute candidates. However, there are differences in average age by party, although the gap remains small. Equally, substitutes are on average older than the candidates for the *FN*, the *Radicaux de gauche* and *UDF-Modem*, while the substitutes for the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the *UMP* are, on average, younger.

Table 4

The final aspect concerns the other electoral offices held by the candidates. Firstly, 27 out of 7,634 substitute candidates are incumbent members of the National Assembly; that is, they sat in the Assembly at the last parliamentary session of the previous legislature³.

Two-thirds of these incumbent deputies (that is, 18 deputies) who are substitute candidates in the 2007 elections were already substitute candidates at the time of the 2002 elections; they became members of the National Assembly when the sitting member was appointed to a post in government. When the National Assembly was re-elected in 2007, they regained their position and status as substitutes. The remaining one-third are former deputies who are not running in the 2007 elections and who agreed to be substitute candidates for new candidates.

Secondly, the holding of more than one elected office is less frequent among substitute candidates than among candidates themselves. If we consider local executives, there are only three presidents

³ The distribution of candidates by political party is as follows: 1 substitute candidate represents the “various left”, 1 represents the Socialist Party, 3 represent the “various right” and 22 represent the UMP.

of General Councils (*département* level) among the substitute candidates, while there are 11 mayors, 26 presidents of General Councils and 11 presidents of Regional Councils among the candidates. Turning to other legislative mandates, there is only one French member of the European Parliament among the substitute candidates, in contrast to 23 MEPs and eight senators among the candidates.

In conclusion, it appears that the substitute candidates do not differ from the candidates when it comes to age or gender. However, fewer substitute candidates than candidates hold more than one elected office. However, these similarities comprise differentiated pairing strategies between candidates and substitute candidates.

3. Candidates and substitute candidates: what kind of pairings?

In describing the pairings, we will again compare and contrast the traits of the candidates and substitute candidates: gender, age and political affiliation. The purpose is to identify whether the candidates and the substitute candidates are similar, or whether there has been an attempt to introduce differences in the hope that complementary traits could present an electoral advantage.

Pairings on the basis of the candidates' and substitutes' gender offer several outcomes (see table 5). Firstly, the most frequent case is that of a female candidate and a male substitute (32% of observed pairs); the second most frequent model is a male candidate with a female substitute, then a male candidate with a male substitute (around 29% in both cases). It follows that the pairing of two women candidates is the least frequent model.

Secondly, the gender distribution of substitutes according to the gender of the candidates offers an interesting contrast. Where the candidate is a male, the distribution is reasonably balanced, since the proportion of male substitutes (50.4%) is virtually equivalent to that of female substitutes (49.6%). In contrast, where the candidate is a woman her substitute, in 80% of cases, is a man.

Thirdly, the distribution of the candidate pairs changes when the sample group under study is reduced. When we focus on the candidates from the main parties, we observe that the selection of a male substitute for a female candidate increases – i.e., frequency rises by nearly 10 percentage points. However, the distribution of substitutes for male candidates does not change significantly. Narrowing down the sample again to the incumbent candidates, the pairing of a man as a substitute to a female candidate is even more frequent, since this is the case for 92% of incumbent candidates. Likewise, male substitutes are more frequent for male candidates (more than 58%).

Table 5

It would thus appear that the prevalent strategy governing the gender of pairs of candidates is that, where a woman is selected by a party, her substitute, in the overwhelming majority of cases, is a man. This strategy is particularly significant where the chances of election are high. Where the candidate is a man, the tendency is to pair him with a female substitute, although this strategy is less likely where the chances of election are high.

The pairing of candidates and substitutes also concerns their relative age. Of all the candidates (see table 6), a slight majority of the candidates are younger than their substitutes (about 52%). The difference in age is similar in both groups and is approximately twelve years. This proportion remains stable if we reduce the sample to the candidates from the six main political parties.

Table 6

Nevertheless, this hides significant disparities between the main parties. The majority of candidates for the *FN* (far right) and the *UDF-Modem* are younger than their substitutes (55% and 53% respectively). In contrast, the majority of candidates put forward by the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the *UMP* (centre-right) are older than their substitutes (55%, 53% and 55% respectively). The distribution is identical for the candidates from the *Radicaux de gauche*.

Thus, it is the parties with incumbent candidates which have candidates who are older than their substitutes. Indeed, if we focus on the incumbent candidates, the proportion is even higher, more than 62%, and the average age gap changes, since it increases where the substitute is younger and decreases where the substitute is older.

Finally, the last form of pairing concerns political affiliation. It appears that the electoral option of selecting a substitute from another grouping or political party in order to widen one's electorate is barely used (see table 7). With the exception of the radical Left, for whom substitutes from another group or political party amount to a third of the substitute candidates, the proportions are relatively small for the other parties.

Table 7

Table 8 indicates the distribution of the crossovers between the various parties and groups. Unsurprisingly, pairings between candidates and substitute candidates occur mainly within electoral coalitions and for political parties and groups that are closest to each other, such as the radical Left and the Socialist Party, or the *UMP* and representatives of the presidential majority.

Table 8

4. Conclusion

Several lessons emerge from this description of the main traits of the candidates and their substitutes in the French parliamentary elections of 2007. Firstly, it is clear that the candidates and substitute candidates are relatively similar in terms of gender and age, although differences exist and are more significant for incumbent candidates and candidates from the main political parties. Secondly, the candidates are more likely than their substitutes to hold more than one elected office. Thirdly, gender pairing between the candidates and their substitutes indicates that where the candidate is a woman her substitute is very often a man, and that this is particularly frequent where the candidate's chances of election are high. Fourthly, age pairing shows that candidates tend to be older than their substitutes, a trend that increases where the candidate is an incumbent.

Finally, it is very rare for the candidate and his or her substitute not to belong to the same political party. These descriptive results demonstrate the need to take into account the role of the substitute in the campaigns and election of members of the French National Assembly.

5. References

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Table 1 : Distribution of candidates by political affiliation

	Candidates		Substitute-candidates	
	No.	%	No.	%
CPNT	245	3.2	245	3.2
Miscellaneous	883	11.6	900	11.8
Various right	291	3.8	337	4.4
Various left	208	2.7	224	2.9
Ecologists	408	5.3	412	5.4
Far right	390	5.1	395	5.2
Far left	1,352	17.7	1,350	17.7
FN	557	7.3	551	7.2
The Greens	531	7.0	522	6.8
<i>Majorité présidentielle</i>	100	1.3	100	1.3
MPF	414	5.4	395	5.2
PC	512	6.7	504	6.6
PS	521	6.8	523	6.9
<i>Radicaux de gauche</i>	66	0.9	49	0.6
Regionalists	86	1.1	90	1.2
UDF Modem	524	6.9	517	6.8
UMP	546	7.2	520	6.8
Total	7,634	100	7,634	100,0

Table 2 : Distribution of Candidates and substitute-candidates by gender

	Candidates		Substitute-candidates	
	male	female	male	female
No. (%)	4,454 (58.3)	3,180 (41.7)	4,642 (60.8)	2,992 (39.2)
All proportions are significantly different by 50% (binomial test).				

Table 3 : Candidates and substitute-candidates by age

	Candidates	Substitute-candidates
Average Age	50 years and 3 months	50 years
Standard deviation	11.4	13.1
minimum	23	23
maximum	86	100
Neither average value differs significantly from the threshold value of 10% (P=0,2)		

Table 4 : Average age of candidates and substitute-candidates from the main parties

	Candidates	Substitute-candidates	Probability
FN	53	56	0.02
PC	51	49	0.01
PS	52	51	0.21
Radicaux de gauche	49	51	0.94
UDF Modem	48	49	0.45
UMP	53	52	0.02
Total	51	51	0.50
The last column indicates the probability of error to accept the hypothesis that the average ages between the two groups are statistically different			

Table 5: Pairing by gender of the candidates and substitute-candidates ...

... among all the candidates			
Gender of the candidate \ Gender of the substitute candidate	Female	Male	Both
Female	749 (23.55 %)	2,243 (50.36 %)	2,992 (39.19 %)
Male	2,431 (76.45 %)	2,211 (49.64 %)	4,642 (60.81 %)
Both	3,180 (100 %)	4,454 (100 %)	7,634 (100 %)
Chi2 (chi-square) test between both characteristics : $\chi^2=559,4$ and $P<0,001$			
...among candidates from the PC, PS, Radicaux de gauche, UDF-Modem, UMP, FN			
Gender of the candidate \ Gender of the substitute candidate	Female	Male	Both
Female	152 (13.64 %)	794 (49.26 %)	946 (34.7 %)
Male	962 (86.36 %)	818 (50.74 %)	1,780 (65.3 %)
Both	1,114 (100 %)	1,612 (100 %)	2,726 (100 %)
Chi2 (chi-square) test between both characteristics : $\chi^2=368,7$ and $P<0,001$			
...among incumbent candidates			
Gender of the candidate \ Gender of the substitute candidate	Female	Male	Both
Female	5 (7.81 %)	169 (41.42 %)	174 (36.86 %)
Male	59 (92.19 %)	239 (58.58 %)	298 (63.14 %)
Both	64 (100 %)	408 (100 %)	472 (100 %)
Chi2 (chi-square) text between both characteristics : $\chi^2=26,8$ and $P<0,001$			

Table 6 : Pairing by age of the candidates and substitute-candidates

	The substitute-candidate is ...		
	... older than the candidate	... younger than the candidate	
	% of cases (average deviation of age)		Probability
Total Candidates	48.2 % (12.5)	51.8 % (12.2)	0.002
Candidates from six main parties	48.9 % (12.3)	51.1 % (12.2)	0.27
Incumbent candidates	37.9 % (8.8)	62.1 % (12.8)	0.000
The last column indicates the probability of error to accept the hypothesis that the density is statistically different to 50% (binomial test)			

Table 7 : Ratio of substitute-candidates who belong to another party or political group

	Number of external substitutes	% of substitutes
CPNT	0	0.00
Various right	22	7.56
Various left	19	9.13
Miscellaneous	11	1.25
Ecologists	5	1.23
Far right	3	0.77
Far left	12	0.89
FN	7	1.26
The Greens	16	3.01
Governing Party	13	13.00
MPF	19	4.59
PC	12	2.34
PS	20	3.84
Radical Left	21	31.82
Regionalists	1	1.16
UDF Modem	13	2.48
UMP	46	8.42

Tableau 8 : Pairing of candidates and substitute-candidates by political affiliation

Candidates	Substitutes																	Together
	PC	CPNT	Var.	Var. R	Var. L	Eco.	Far R	Far L	FN	MAJ	MPF	RDG	Reg.	PS	UDF M	UMP	The Greens	
PC	500		3		5			4										512
CPNT		245																245
Various			872	4	1	4									2			883
Various right			3	269	1					4					2	12		291
Various left	3		4	3	189	1		3						4			1	208
Ecologists			5			403												408
Far right				2			387		1									390
Far left	1				9		2	1 340										1 352
FN							6	1	550									557
MAJ			5	2						87						6		100
MPF				17							395				1		1	414
RDG					6							45		14	1			66
Regionalists													85				1	86
PS			2		10			1				4		501			3	521
UDFModem			4	4	1	1									511	2	1	524
UMP			1	36						9						500		546
The Greens			1		2	3		1					5	4			515	531
Together	504	245	900	337	224	412	395	1 350	551	100	395	49	90	523	517	520	522	7 634