

Loud on Facebook: French Party Pages and the Vote, 2016 to 2020

Tristan Hotham*

2026

Preprint, not peer reviewed

Abstract

Between 2016 and 2019 the French party system was redrawn. En Marche won the presidency and a majority within two years of its founding, La France insoumise overtook the Socialists, Marine Le Pen reached the 2017 runoff and her party's list came first at the 2019 European election. I use 54,226 posts from the Facebook pages of 17 French parties between January 2016 and September 2020, collected through CrowdTangle, to ask how closely each party's share of engagement on these pages matched its share of the vote at the first rounds of the 2017 presidential and legislative elections and at the 2019 European election. The Front National/Rassemblement National page drew between 0.95 and 1.20 times its vote share. La France insoumise drew more than its vote share at all three elections, and the presidential majority's pages drew less. The largest gap was for the Union populaire républicaine, a small party campaigning to leave the EU: it drew 13% of party-page interactions in the month before the 2017 presidential first round, when its candidate won 0.9% of the vote, and 9% before the 2019 European election, when its list won 1.2%. That gap was not the product of a few viral posts. Its typical post drew about as many interactions as those of much larger parties, from a page with a fifth of the Rassemblement National's page likes. During the gilets jaunes protests, the far left and the Union populaire républicaine posted most about the movement, while the Rassemblement National mentioned it in under 2% of its posts. Engagement on party pages did not track the vote evenly, and the gaps were largest for small, highly engaged parties.

1 Introduction

The 2017 elections broke the French party system that had alternated between a centre-left and a centre-right party for decades ([Gougou and Persico 2017](#)). Emmanuel Macron, whose movement En Marche was a year old, won the presidency. Marine Le Pen reached the second round. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France insoumise, launched in 2016, came within two points of the runoff, while the Socialist candidate won 6%. A month later En Marche won a large majority in the National Assembly on a low turnout ([Evans and Ivaldi 2017](#)). Two years later, the Greens came third in the European election and the Republicans fell to 8.5%.

Parties now use Facebook continuously, not only at elections ([Larsson 2016](#)), and social media let politicians reach audiences without passing through established media ([Stier et al. 2018](#)). Populists

*Independent researcher. ORCID 0000-0003-4931-9349. Correspondence: contact@tristanhotham.com. The views expressed are the author's own and do not represent those of any employer.

in particular have been described as having an “elective affinity” with social media (Gerbaudo 2018). France offers a test: did the new and anti-system parties draw more engagement on their party pages than their votes would suggest, and did the old parties draw less? This paper asks three descriptive questions. How did the shares of engagement on French party pages change from 2016 to 2020? How closely did those shares match the vote at the three national elections of the period? And which parties posted about the gilets jaunes, the protest movement that began in November 2018?

The paper is one of a series using the same CrowdTangle export, collected during my doctoral research (Hotham 2021). It complements a study of the engagement premium of populist parties across Europe (Hotham 2026a) and studies of the radical right in the Nordic countries (Hotham 2026b) and of party leaders in Britain (Hotham 2026c).

2 Data and methods

2.1 Pages and posts

The data are all posts from a CrowdTangle list of French party pages, exported on 28 October 2020 (CrowdTangle Team 2020). The list contains 18 pages for 17 parties: the Rassemblement National has its own page and the page of the Rassemblement Bleu Marine, the alliance Marine Le Pen led from 2012, which I count together. The party was the Front National until it was renamed Rassemblement National on 1 June 2018, and I use “Rassemblement National” or RN for the page throughout. I keep posts from 1 January 2016 to 30 September 2020. After removing 327 duplicate posts (same page, time and text) from the full export, the sample is 54,226 posts with 25.0 million interactions (Table 1). Interactions are the sum of reactions, comments and shares. En Marche’s page begins in April 2016 and La France insoumise’s in February 2016, so 2016 is a partial year for both. The “From” dates in Table 1 are the first posts in the export, not the dates the pages were created. Timestamps are in UK time, an hour behind Paris, which moves the window edges slightly.

The list contains party pages only. It does not include the personal pages of Macron, Le Pen, Mélenchon, Fillon or any other candidate, which in a presidential system carry much of the online campaign. The effect is unlikely to be the same for every party: Macron, Le Pen and Mélenchon had very large personal pages, while smaller parties such as the UPR, the Communists or the NPA probably ran more of their activity through the party page. Leaving out personal pages is therefore likely to lower the ratios for the parties with prominent leaders. The results describe party pages, not the parties’ whole presence on Facebook.

2.2 Elections

I compare each party page’s share of interactions in the 30 days before an election with its share of the vote among the lists compared (Conseil constitutionnel 2017; Ministère de l’Intérieur 2017, 2019). The elections are the first round of the presidential election on 23 April 2017, the first round of the legislative elections on 11 June 2017 and the European election of 26 May 2019. The main window is 30 days because the presidential and legislative elections were seven weeks apart. As checks, I use 14 and 60 days. For the legislative election, the 60-day window starts on 8 May 2017, the day after the presidential runoff.

For the presidential election, I assign each candidate to their party’s page: Macron to En Marche, Le Pen

Table 1. Pages in the sample, January 2016 to September 2020.

Page	From	Posts	Interactions (m)	Median per post
Rassemblement National (incl. Rassemblement Bleu Marine) (RN)	Jan 2016	9,056	7.93	443
La France insoumise (LFI)	Feb 2016	2,712	4.39	612
La République en marche (En Marche) (LREM)	Apr 2016	4,083	3.58	445
Les Républicains (LR)	Jan 2016	3,850	2.59	473
Union populaire républicaine (UPR)	Jan 2016	3,247	2.28	512
Parti communiste français (PCF)	Jan 2016	3,537	1.65	246
Parti socialiste (PS)	Jan 2016	4,072	0.66	109
Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA)	Jan 2016	8,171	0.42	18
Génération.s (G.s)	Jun 2017	1,214	0.39	200
Debout la France (DLF)	Mar 2016	1,832	0.27	48
Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV)	Jan 2016	1,673	0.26	79
Lutte ouvrière (LO)	Jan 2016	5,843	0.25	32
Union des démocrates musulmans français (UDMF)	Jan 2016	1,040	0.14	91
Mouvement démocrate (MoDem)	Jan 2016	1,254	0.06	35
Agir (Agir)	Nov 2017	1,325	0.06	35
Mouvement radical (MRSL)	Dec 2017	977	0.05	38
Le Nouveau Centre (NC)	Jan 2016	340	0.02	38
Total		54,226	25.0	

to the Rassemblement National, François Fillon to the Republicans, Mélenchon to La France insoumise, Benoît Hamon to the Socialists, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan to Debout la France, Philippe Poutou to the NPA, François Asselineau to the UPR and Nathalie Arthaud to Lutte ouvrière. Jean Lassalle and Jacques Cheminade had no party page in the list and are left out. As a check, I add the pages of parties that backed a candidate: the MoDem for Macron, the Greens for Hamon and the Communists for Mélenchon. For the 2019 European election, the Renaissance list combines the pages of En Marche, the MoDem, Agir and the Mouvement radical. The Republicans' list ran with Les Centristes, whose page (under its old name, Le Nouveau Centre) posted once in the window, so I leave it out. The Socialist list included Place publique, which has no page. I leave out the UDI and the other lists without a page. The Greens are left out of the legislative comparison because the official results group all ecologist candidates together. Vote shares are renormalised among the lists compared, and the ratio of the Facebook share to the vote share is the main quantity reported, alongside the gap in percentage points, since ratios are unstable for very small vote shares. As a further check, I exclude shares from the interaction count, because the share of interactions that were shares rose sharply between 2017 and 2018 on several pages (from 3% to 29% on the Rassemblement National's page), which suggests CrowdTangle recorded shares differently for earlier posts.

2.3 Audience and concentration

To see whether a large share of interactions came from a few viral posts, I report the share of each page's interactions in the election window that came from its five most-engaged posts. To compare pages of different sizes, I divide each page's median interactions per post in each year by its median number of page likes at the time of posting, using only years in which the page-like count is recorded for at least 90% of posts. This is a ratio of medians and says nothing about how many people did the engaging.

2.4 The gilets jaunes

I flag a post as mentioning the gilets jaunes if its text or link title contains “gilet jaune” or “gilets jaunes” in any spacing or as a hashtag. Because this is an exact phrase, I did not validate it against a sample beyond reading 30 flagged posts, all of which mentioned the movement, though some only in passing. I report the share of posts that mention the movement between 1 November 2018, two weeks before the first protests on 17 November, and 30 June 2019, and compare the mean interactions of those posts with the page’s other posts in the same period.

3 Results

3.1 Shares of engagement

Figure 1 shows each party’s share of the interactions on all 18 pages by year. In 2016 the Rassemblement National’s pages drew half of all interactions and the Republicans 17%. From 2017 the two new movements took a large share: En Marche drew 24% in 2017 and 20% in 2018 before falling to 10% in 2019 and 7% in 2020, while La France insoumise drew between 18% and 24% in every year from 2017. The Rassemblement National stayed the largest, with between 24% and 31%. The Socialists’ share never exceeded 5% and was between 1% and 3% from 2017. Two small parties drew large shares: the UPR between 6% and 10% each year, and the Communists, whose share rose from about 2.5% to 12%.

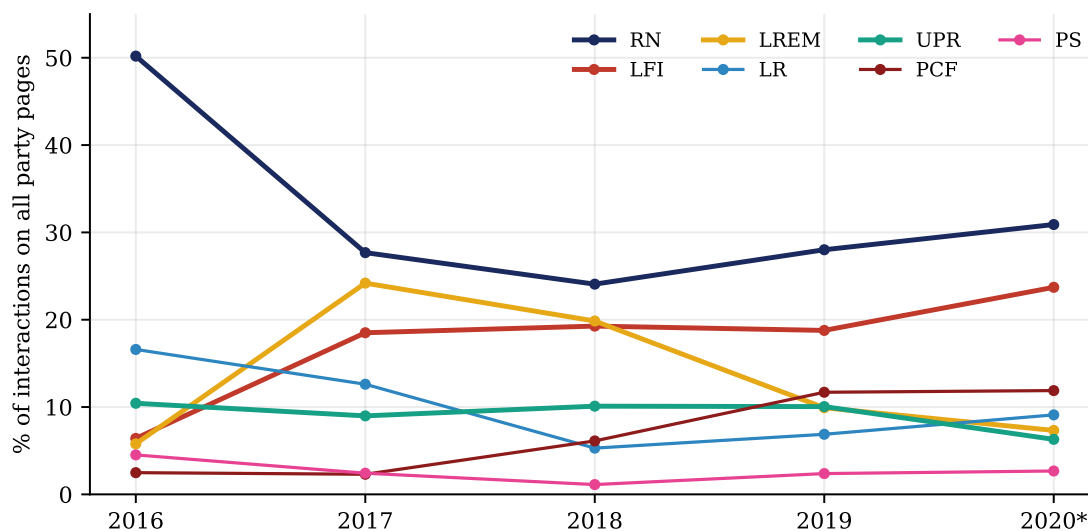


Figure 1. Share of interactions on all party pages in the sample, by year. *2020 runs to September. En Marche’s and La France insoumise’s pages begin in 2016.

3.2 Engagement and the vote

Figure 2 and Table 2 compare Facebook and vote shares. The Rassemblement National’s page drew 1.20 times its vote share before the presidential first round, 1.17 times before the legislative election and 0.95 times before the European election. La France insoumise drew more than its vote share at all three elections: 1.19, 2.40 and 1.66 times. En Marche drew less: 0.85 and 0.81 times in 2017, and the Renaissance list’s pages 0.53 times in 2019. The Socialists drew between 0.28 and 0.72 times their

vote share. The Republicans drew 0.62 times before the presidential election and 1.32 times before the European election, when their vote collapsed. The Greens drew a third of their vote share in 2019, when they came third with 13.5%. These patterns mostly hold with windows of 14 and 60 days, when supporting parties are added and when shares are excluded (Table 3). The exceptions are in degree: the Rassemblement National's ratio before the legislative election rises to 1.48 with a 14-day window, the Greens' ratio in 2019 ranges from 0.20 to 0.50, and the Communists' in 2019 falls from 5.25 to 3.78 without shares.

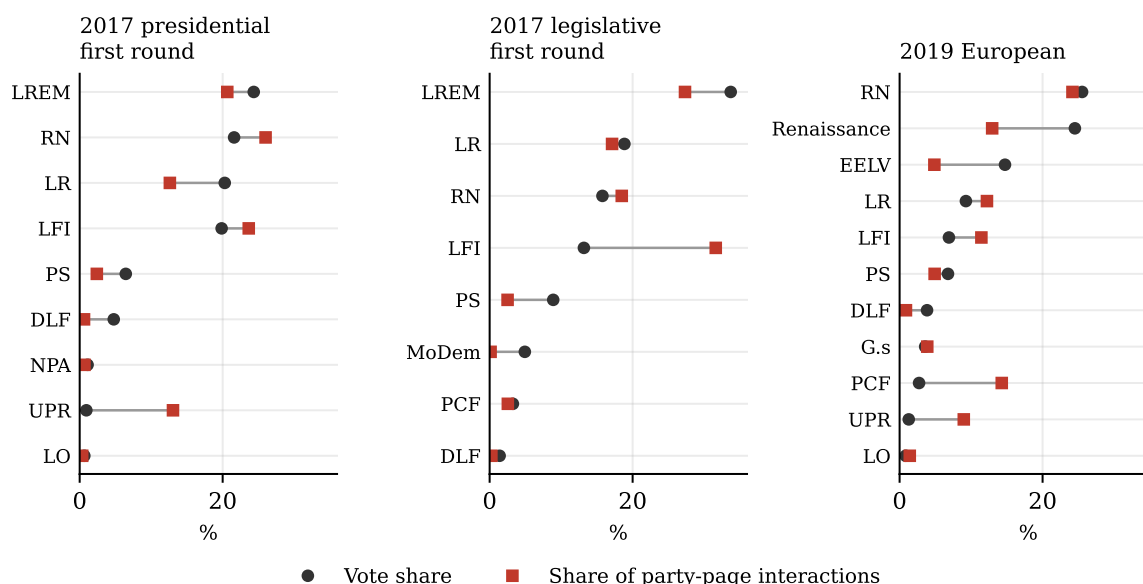


Figure 2. Share of party-page interactions in the 30 days before each election and vote share, among the lists compared. Vote shares are renormalised among the lists shown.

The largest gaps were for two small parties. The UPR drew 13.0% of party-page interactions in the month before the presidential first round, when Asselineau won 0.92% of the vote: a gap of 12 points and a ratio of 14. Before the 2019 European election it drew 9.0% when its list won 1.17%, a gap of 8 points. The Communists' page drew 14.3% of interactions before the European election, when their list won 2.49%.

3.3 Why the UPR was so loud

The UPR's share was not driven by a few viral posts. Its five most-engaged posts accounted for 15% of its interactions in the month before the presidential first round and 15% before the European election, similar to the Rassemblement National, La France insoumise, En Marche and the Republicans (9% to 28%). The Socialists' and Greens' smaller totals were more concentrated. Instead, its typical post drew about as much as the larger parties' from a page with far fewer likes. Before the presidential first round, its median post drew 906 interactions, against 966 for the Rassemblement National, 985 for En Marche and 1,062 for La France insoumise, from a page with 81,000 likes against the Rassemblement National's 452,000 and En Marche's 115,000. Across the whole period, the UPR's median post drew between 5 and 8 interactions per 1,000 page likes, against about 1 for the Rassemblement National before 2020 and about 1 for the Socialists (Table 4). La France insoumise and, from 2019, the Communists also drew far more engagement per page like than the governing party or the old parties. Shares made up 48% of the Communists' interactions before the 2019 election, against 19% for the Rassemblement National.

Table 2. Facebook and vote shares in the 30 days before each election. Posts are those on the party pages in the window. Facebook % is the share of interactions among the lists compared. Vote % is the vote share renormalised among the same lists. Ratio is Facebook % divided by vote %.

Election	List	Posts	Facebook %	Vote %	Gap (points)	Ratio
2017 presidential, first round	LREM	186	20.6	24.3	-3.7	0.85
	RN	262	26.0	21.6	+4.4	1.20
	LR	206	12.6	20.3	-7.7	0.62
	LFI	196	23.6	19.9	+3.8	1.19
	PS	110	2.4	6.4	-4.0	0.37
	DLF	78	0.6	4.8	-4.2	0.13
	NPA	249	0.7	1.1	-0.4	0.61
	UPR	138	13.1	0.9	+12.1	13.99
	LO	124	0.4	0.6	-0.3	0.55
2017 legislative, first round	LREM	120	27.3	33.7	-6.4	0.81
	LR	120	17.1	18.9	-1.7	0.91
	RN	196	18.5	15.8	+2.7	1.17
	LFI	174	31.6	13.2	+18.4	2.40
	PS	75	2.5	8.9	-6.4	0.28
	MoDem	9	0.1	4.9	-4.8	0.03
	PCF	59	2.5	3.3	-0.7	0.78
	DLF	19	0.2	1.4	-1.2	0.18
2019 European	Renaissance	364	12.9	24.5	-11.6	0.53
	RN	223	24.2	25.5	-1.3	0.95
	EELV	257	4.9	14.7	-9.9	0.33
	LR	98	12.2	9.3	+2.9	1.32
	LFI	82	11.4	6.9	+4.5	1.66
	PS	207	4.9	6.8	-1.9	0.72
	DLF	99	0.9	3.8	-2.9	0.23
	G.s	106	3.9	3.6	+0.3	1.08
	PCF	150	14.3	2.7	+11.6	5.25
	UPR	106	9.0	1.3	+7.7	7.02
	LO	142	1.4	0.9	+0.6	1.67

3.4 The gilets jaunes

The parties that posted most about the gilets jaunes between November 2018 and June 2019 were on the far left and the sovereigntist fringe (Figure 3): the NPA (18% of posts), Lutte ouvrière (14%), the UPR (13%), Debout la France (7%) and La France insoumise (7%). La France insoumise's attention was concentrated: 32% of its posts in December 2018 mentioned the movement. The Rassemblement National mentioned the gilets jaunes in 1.9% of its posts, fewer than the Republicans (2.3%) and only slightly more than En Marche (1.4%). The Socialists and Génération.s barely mentioned the movement.

Table 5 compares posts naming the movement with the same page's other posts in the same period, for the eight pages with at least 10 such posts. On all eight, those posts drew more interactions on average and at the median, but the Communists' interval includes 1. The ratios for the NPA and La France insoumise are large but very imprecise, and La France insoumise's median ratio is only 1.6. These intervals treat posts as independent and are too narrow, and several counts are small.

Table 3. Ratio of Facebook share to vote share under alternative windows, for the larger lists and the two outliers. For the legislative election, the 60-day window starts on 8 May 2017. Adding supporting parties changes only the presidential election.

Election	List	30 days			With supporting parties	Excluding shares
		(main)	14 days	60 days		
2017 presidential, first round	LREM	0.85	0.92	0.72	0.84	0.78
	RN	1.20	1.29	1.29	1.19	1.34
	LR	0.62	0.55	0.75	0.62	0.68
	LFI	1.19	1.22	1.07	1.22	1.13
	PS	0.37	0.29	0.41	0.38	0.39
	UPR	13.99	11.65	14.93	13.85	12.95
2017 legislative, first round	LREM	0.81	0.74	0.86	0.81	0.81
	RN	1.17	1.48	1.14	1.17	1.37
	LR	0.91	0.82	0.91	0.91	0.85
	LFI	2.40	2.30	2.31	2.40	2.32
	PS	0.28	0.24	0.26	0.28	0.25
	PCF	0.78	1.00	0.85	0.78	0.54
2019 European	RN	0.95	1.00	0.92	0.95	1.06
	LR	1.32	1.39	1.10	1.32	1.39
	LFI	1.66	1.79	2.01	1.66	1.45
	PS	0.72	0.52	0.51	0.72	0.79
	UPR	7.02	6.83	8.76	7.02	7.69
	PCF	5.25	4.58	5.73	5.25	3.78
	Renaissance	0.53	0.49	0.55	0.53	0.62
	EELV	0.33	0.50	0.20	0.33	0.26

Table 4. Median interactions per post divided by median page likes, per 1,000 page likes, by year. Dashes mark years in which the page-like count is missing for more than 10% of posts.

Page	Page likes, 2019 (thousands)	Median interactions per post per 1,000 page likes				
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
UPR	98	–	7.5	5.2	5.2	5.8
LFI	138	–	–	4.0	6.2	10.5
PCF	63	2.1	3.2	2.6	5.5	8.3
LREM	236	7.2	3.3	2.3	1.3	1.8
LR	196	2.3	2.5	3.2	3.0	2.7
RN	457	–	–	0.6	0.9	3.3
EELV	52	–	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.9
PS	133	0.6	0.9	1.0	0.9	1.1

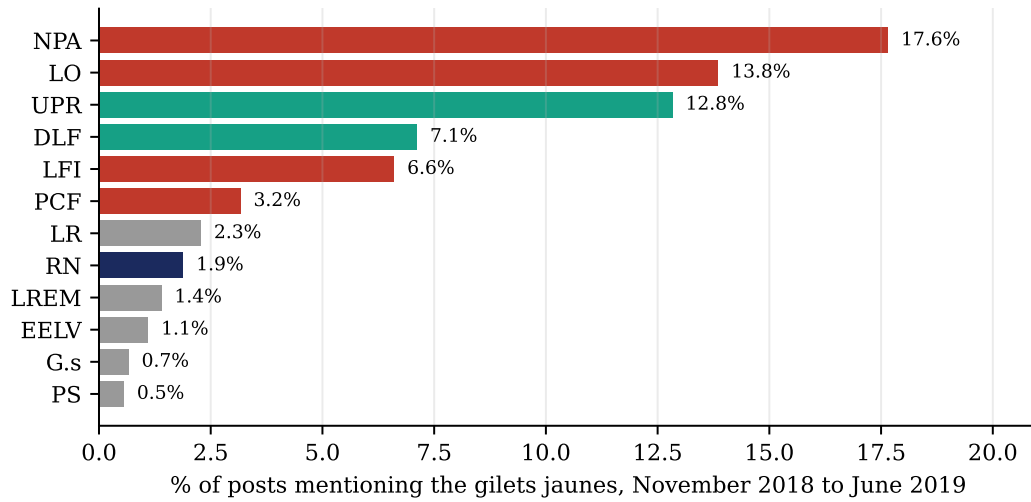


Figure 3. Share of posts mentioning the gilets jaunes, November 2018 to June 2019, by party page.

Table 5. Posts naming the gilets jaunes, 1 November 2018 to 30 June 2019, for pages with at least 10 such posts. Ratios compare the interactions of these posts with the same page's other posts in the period.

Page	Posts naming the movement	Share of posts (%)	Ratio of means	95% bootstrap interval	Ratio of medians
NPA	159	17.6	4.66	1.50–10.91	1.87
LO	140	13.8	1.17	1.03–1.32	1.20
UPR	79	12.8	2.20	1.80–2.69	2.14
DLF	42	7.1	1.77	1.21–2.55	2.81
LFI	25	6.6	5.12	1.16–14.00	1.64
PCF	27	3.2	1.36	0.68–2.45	1.21
RN	27	1.9	1.57	1.10–2.18	2.47
LREM	11	1.4	1.97	1.19–2.91	2.34

4 Discussion

Facebook engagement on French party pages did not track the vote evenly. It was closest for the Rassemblement National, which drew close to its vote share at all three elections (0.95 to 1.20 times) despite having by far the largest audience. It was higher than the vote for La France insoumise and for small anti-system parties, especially the UPR, and lower for the presidential majority, the Socialists and, in 2019, the Greens. The pattern fits the idea that social media suit parties outside the mainstream (Gerbaudo 2018), but only for some of them: the new centrist movement that won the presidency drew less than its vote on its party page, and the Rassemblement National drew only somewhat more.

The UPR case shows what can produce such a gap. Its page was not much bigger than the Communists' and far smaller than the Rassemblement National's, but it drew high engagement per page like. That is consistent with a small, committed and very active audience, though the data cannot rule out a few accounts engaging repeatedly or coordinated sharing. Either way, a small page can produce a share of engagement many times a party's share of the vote. Anyone reading Facebook engagement as a sign of electoral strength should look first at how many people are doing the engaging, which CrowdTangle data cannot show.

The gilets jaunes results show the same split. The parties that posted most about the movement were small parties of the far left and the anti-EU right. The Rassemblement National rarely named the movement on its party page. The data do not say why. They are consistent with a party choosing not to be seen to claim a movement that rejected parties, but other explanations are possible.

5 Limitations

The sample contains party pages only, and in a presidential system the candidates' own pages carry much of the campaign. The comparison is therefore between party pages, not parties. The list does not include the UDI, Les Patriotes, the Animalist Party or other lists that stood in 2019. CrowdTangle's historical coverage is not guaranteed to be complete, and I cannot check it against another source. Interactions are not support: they include engagement from opponents and from people who cannot vote in France, and they may include engagement from paid promotion. Page-like counts are missing for some pages in some years, and the share of interactions that were shares jumps between 2017 and 2018 on several pages, which suggests a change in how CrowdTangle recorded shares. Some pages, including the Republicans and the Socialists in early 2018, post much less in some quarters, and I cannot tell whether that reflects their activity or CrowdTangle's coverage. The gilets jaunes flag finds only posts that name the movement, not those that discuss its demands without naming it. Three elections are too few to say whether any of the ratios is stable.

6 Conclusion

On French party pages, engagement did not track the vote evenly. La France insoumise and especially the UPR drew engagement out of proportion to their votes, the presidential majority drew less, and the Rassemblement National drew roughly its share. The UPR's gap came from high engagement per page like rather than viral posts. For reading Facebook data as a guide to elections, the French case suggests a simple rule: ask how many people are behind the engagement before asking how much there is.

Provenance and AI use

The data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020 for my doctoral research. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis (Hotham 2021). The analysis and writing were completed in 2026.

I wrote the text, with drafting and editing assistance from Claude (Anthropic), which also helped prepare the analysis code and review drafts. I checked the analysis and the text and take responsibility for both.

Ethics and data

The data are public posts by political parties. In line with CrowdTangle’s terms, I do not publish post-level data and I do not quote posts. Aggregated data are available from the author: yearly and quarterly interactions by page, the election comparisons, the audience measures and the gilets jaunes counts.

References

- Conseil constitutionnel (2017). Déclaration du 26 avril 2017 relative aux résultats du premier tour de scrutin de l’élection du président de la république. Paris.
- CrowdTangle Team (2020). CrowdTangle. Facebook, Menlo Park, CA.
- Evans, J. and Ivaldi, G. (2017). An atypical ‘honeymoon’ election? Contextual and strategic opportunities in the 2017 French legislative elections. *French Politics*, 15(3):322–339.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2018). Social media and populism: An elective affinity? *Media, Culture & Society*, 40(5):745–753.
- Gougou, F. and Persico, S. (2017). A new party system in the making? The 2017 French presidential election. *French Politics*, 15(3):303–321.
- Hotham, T. (2021). *How Do Political Parties Use Facebook and What Does It Offer to Their Campaigns*. PhD thesis, University of Bath. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23300282>.
- Hotham, T. (2026a). Do populists win on Facebook? The engagement premium of populist parties in Europe, 2010 to 2020. Preprint, Zenodo, version 2, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23303266>.
- Hotham, T. (2026b). Not a forecast: The radical right on Facebook in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, 2014 to 2020. Preprint, Zenodo, version 2, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23303335>.
- Hotham, T. (2026c). Who carries the party on Facebook? Leaders, party pages and the polls in Britain, 2010 to 2020. Preprint, Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23263764>.
- Larsson, A. O. (2016). Online, all the time? A quantitative assessment of the permanent campaign on Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 18(2):274–292.
- Ministère de l’Intérieur (2017). Résultats des élections législatives 2017, premier tour. Paris.
- Ministère de l’Intérieur (2019). Résultats des élections européennes 2019. Paris.

Stier, S., Bleier, A., Lietz, H., and Strohmaier, M. (2018). Election campaigning on social media: Politicians, audiences, and the mediation of political communication on Facebook and Twitter. *Political Communication*, 35(1):50–74.