



E-Governance: Enabling the French Web 2.0 Revolution?

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ABSTRACT

Mature democracies increasingly confront the dilemma of apathetic citizens who have become disenchanted with traditional channels of participation in democratic governance procedures. In representative democracies in particular, this apathy is exemplified by falling voter turnouts, party memberships and participation in community association. To counter apathy, e-governance techniques including e-voting which is a crucial process in democracies, have been deployed by varied governments in mature democracies, leveraging the pervasive power of the Internet, particularly during elections. In this paper, the significant success story of French Presidential Elections in early 2007 is narrated and examined through the historiographical lens. Specifically, the process of this election, seemingly orchestrated via the Internet, is appraised as a valid benchmarking anti-apathy approach of e-governance, to enable better citizen participation, in this representative democracy.

Keywords: E-governance, Representative Democracy, France, Elections, E-voting, Blogs, Second Life

1. Introduction

In developed representative democracies, a major issue confronting the governance is the apathy of average citizens to engage in the democratic procedures of the State. In recent years, e-governance, orchestrated through the Internet in the elections, is ostensibly becoming a valid *anti apathy approach*. Specifically, influential work that guides the principles of progressive democracies (Norris, 2003) asserts that the election process in representative democracies is crucial for its very existence. Based on such tenets, democratic governments worldwide appear to have envisaged the process of re-engaging apathetic citizens in the election procedures, leveraging the pervasive power of the Internet. Conversely, socially driven by the diffusion of the Internet – an open forum which has spurred the freedom of expressing opinion – a right which has been neglected otherwise, citizens in some developed democracies appear to have reengaged themselves in democratic procedures, by voicing any type of opinion – may it be honest, ethical or relevant. Furthermore, citizen activity on the Internet seem to peak during the elections, a significant recent example being the case of French Presidential elections held in 2007, which is the focal theme of this research.

As Headstar (2007) recounts, there was “...a staggering turnout of 85% ...after the apathy in these elections ...years ago leading to the nationalist candidate getting in the final run after a low and divided vote among the other candidates”. The high turnout in the French Presidential Elections is being credited to the campaigns on the Web (Carvajal, 2007). “All the main candidates for the election have constructed ‘Islands’ on Second life...an interactive forum that allows inhabitants to engage in debates, attend political

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rallies and take part in protests in a multidimensional world” (Moore, 2007:1). For example, “A satirical site commonly known as *Disco Sarko* featured the Sarkozy on a dance floor and capable of handling few dance moves. Segolene Royal invited people to help create campaign graphics and videos as a way to harness the creativity of her support base” (Canning: 1-2). The French political campaigners seem to be open to new technologies and creative with their uses (Headstar, 2007). As Moore (2007:2) expands, ‘increasingly politicians in France and across Europe are discovering what businesses have already recognised. If they build a virtual headquarters in Cyberspace, real people will come’. These words, in essence, captures the underlying expectation of the anti apathy approach.

Conversely, there have also been backlashes of the approach as voters in France expressed high concerns regarding the use of e-voting machines. In April 2007, before the elections, a suit was filed to prevent the use of electronic voting machines in the forthcoming election, as the machines did not meet the legal requirements set out by the French Constitutional Council (Sayer, 2007). Several political parties demanded the withdrawal of e-voting machines for the second round of the presidential election (Sailhan, 2007), as the first round of pilot test in 82 localities ended in long queues, equipment shutdowns and dropouts in many towns (EDRI, 2007). The older generation of voters in particular, were unhappy due to problems with the e-voting machines as they expected the computerised systems as capable of keeping their vote anonymous (Sailhan, 2007) and the tests proved otherwise. Further, post elections saw protests from young left wing demonstrators who were sceptical of the economic and social reforms promised by the right wing president – Sarkozy (Bon, 2007). Of particular significance was the ardent demonstrations held by students who protested against Sarkozy’s envisaged plans to make higher education more focused on vocational courses, empowering universities to hire and fire staff and providing more scope to expel under-performing students. Can e-governance, as an anti-apathy approach, seemingly facilitated via Internet, help these young demonstrators to channel their activities to take control of their destiny?

This paper raises some questions regarding the validity of the anti apathy approach that sought to improve the voter participation and has perhaps achieved a desirable outcome, in the representative democracy of France. Specifically we raise these questions: *Has e-governance empowered the citizens in this democracy? Is the anti-apathy approach to engage the citizens equitable? Is it widening the gap between old and the young rather than creating an equal participatory base? Is e-governance creating more divisions?* We explore these questions through the *historiographical* lens, focusing on the recent Presidential Elections, as the election process is viewed as a major facilitator of representative democracies. In particular, we present the successful synopsis of the use of Web 2.0 and the Internet which was orchestrated efficiently and perhaps set a new benchmark, as anti-apathy tool in this democracy.

This paper is structured as follows. This section has established our research motivations. The next section provides the research framework. Section 3 with its varied subsections provides philosophical dimensions and lends itself to contextualising the dilemma of mature democracies – apathy and the technological tools that are known to address this through e-governance, an anti-apathy paradigm. Section 4 focuses on the research theme, exploring relevant events in French Elections examined through the framework of philosophies and techniques synthesised in section 3. In the last section, we open the forum for debate that leads to some future research.

2. Research Framework -Historiography

Historical research or *historiography* is an examination of elements from history (Berg, 2004) which strategically attempts to collect information from the past, reconstruct and weave them into a meaningful set of explanations. The justification for historiography is deeply rooted in the acuity that advances made in knowledge, policies, science or technologies cannot be fully appreciated, evaluated or leveraged without understanding the circumstances within which these developments have occurred (Salkind, 1996).

Specifically, it is rooted in the belief that the knowledge of the past provides sufficient information to be used in the present, in order to determine the future. Sarnecky (1990) noted an increased interest in this method, recently, that can be ascribed to the move away from traditional focus on objective positivism, towards a broader perspective that is supportive of the knowledge obtainable by this method.

Berg (2004) collated myriad reasons for using historiography: uncovering the unknown, answering questions; seeking implications or relationship of events from the past and their connections with the present; assessing past activities and accomplishments of individuals, agencies or institutions; help our understanding of human culture; and so forth. He argues that historical analysis can increase appreciation and understanding of contemporary issues ranging from business trends to socio-political or technical realms. In this research, we have used this method for several reasons. First, we have attempted to trace the shifting connotations of democracy and e-governance in the context of representative democracies of the first world. Then we have attempted to draw meanings from e-governance techniques deployed, especially using ICTs, in particular the Internet and Web 2.0 – Blogs, Second Life and YouTube, which has perhaps given a second lease of life to democratic governance. Historiography, we preserve, has helped us in tracing the impact on the society, based on the current context of elections, which may be used as a predictor for future.

As Marshall and Rossman (1999) argued, while undertaking historiographical research, care must be taken to avoid imposition of modern thoughts of understanding when considering information regarding the past. Researchers have to understand both literal and latent meanings of documents and other historical sources within their historical time frames, as connotations of terms change over time. The sources of data used by historiographers are classified into primary and secondary sources. *Primary sources* involve oral or written testimony of eyewitnesses including original artefacts, documents, items related to the direct outcome of an event or an experience (Salkind, 1996). *Secondary sources* involve the oral or written testimony of people not immediately present at the time of a given event. These are documents or objects created by others that relate to the specifics of the research being undertaken or will answer the research questions. Examples are texts, oral histories of individuals, journal articles, news stories, encyclopaedias and so forth (Leedy, 1999). As prescribed (Berg, 2004), a combination of source materials have been used for this research, although the dependence on secondary sources have been significant due to the currency of the issue and to answer the research questions.

3. Democracy Orchestrated by the Internet

3.1 Democracies, Citizen Participation and e-governance

According to Dahrendorf (2004:1):

“Democracy is an ensemble of institutions aimed at giving legitimacy to the exercise of political power by providing a coherent response to three questions:

- *How can we achieve change in our society without violence?*
- *How can we, through a system of checks and balances, control those who are in power in a way that gives us assurance that they will not abuse it?*
- *How can the people – all the citizens – have a voice in the exercise of power?”...*

... Democracy is the voice of the people which creates institutions and these institutions in turn control the government and make it possible to change it without violence. In this sense, the demos, the people, are the sovereign that gives legitimacy to the institutions of democracy”.

This definition indirectly emphasises the role of *demos* or people in democracies. However, as King (2006) argues, the concept of democracy has been reshaping by social, ideological, political, religious influences

and lately technological evolutions that are diffusing rapidly into societies worldwide. Yet, democracy remains a popular form of governance, than can either foster a cohesive political structure by engaging/empowering the citizens, or destabilise societies in transition by dissolving consensus and fuelling differences (Hay, 2005). Norris (2003), a seminal allusion in modern democratic governance, emphasised that the focus of representative democracies is to function through free/fair elections. “*The main process in representative democracies entails citizens electing representatives in a free and fair electoral system, to make policies for them and ensure continued leadership* (Reapinc, 2006)”. Theoretically, as contended by Fraunholz and Unnithan (2007), the election process allows citizens to choose from alternative candidates and parties to represent them in government, by exercising their informed choices while casting a vote in the elections. Specifically, an opportunity is given to citizens to have their preferences weighted equally in the conduct of government. It is popular belief that the government is thus kept accountable, which makes representative democratic governance, the most widely practised in the world.

However, “the term democracy itself is not synonymous with a collective understanding of the objectives sought from a democratic government. There seems to be hope that e-governance can reinvigorate involvement in the public sphere (King, 2006:18)”. Norris (2003:4) emphasises the role of e-governance in strengthening democracies, particularly highlighting the role of e-voting in representative democracies. King (2006:22) acquiesce that e-governance is often expressed through the use of technologies to provide new avenues for voting. When e-governance initiatives (including e-voting) was being piloted in early 2001, the Commonwealth Centre of e-governance, Australia (CCE, 2001) articulated that its role is to provide citizens with choices. Specifically, “...*e-governance is really about choice. It is about providing citizens with the ability to choose the manner in which they wish to interact with their governments. And it is about the choices governments make about how information and communication technologies will be deployed to support citizen choices*”. Democracies today are transforming themselves into *e-democracies* which have more to do with the usage of ICTs to strengthen and improve democratic processes. Engaging citizens in public policy-making via e-Forums, e-Consultations, e-Referenda, e-Voting, and other forms of e-Participation, is regarded good governance (Gupta, 2006). The use of electronic communications, primarily the Internet, is emphasised for typical enhancements such as making processes more accessible, extending citizen participation in public policy making so that the broader influence will result in smarter policies, increasing accountability and political legitimacy. E-voting remains a crucial process even through the transformation into *cyberdemocracies*.

There is increasing advocacy for *participatory democracy*, a process which emphasises the broader participation of constituents in the governance operations (Kramer, 1972). While etymological roots imply that any democracy relies on participation of citizens, most traditional representative democracies tend to limit the participation to voting, which no doubt is a crucial process, leaving the actual governance entirely to political candidates. Advocates of participatory democracy strive to create opportunities for all members in a political group to make equal and meaningful contributions to decision making. Technology tools that enable community narratives and result in accretion of knowledge are therefore important forces in leading this empowerment. As Gaynor (1996a:1) purport “...*many 'cyberutopians' believe that new technologies can eliminate the institutional form of democracy with which so people are dissatisfied. The Internet, they say, will allow for a true participatory democracy in which citizens can govern themselves without the interference of bureaucrats and legislators*”. In contrast to mass media, electronic networks facilitate interaction of people; on the information they are presented. Citizens can have real time conversations, in virtual spaces with their political representatives about legislation or voice opinions to others on a democratic process – such as elections. “*The ritualistic capability for expression increases the participatory nature of democracy in cyberspace...individuals play a more direct role in their own governance, through the power of citizen-to-citizen (lateral) communications which benefit both themselves and their communities*” (Gaynor, 1996b:1).

In his *Short History of Future*, emphasising the tremendous potential of historiography, Jacques Attali (2007) the French futurist refers to *hyperdemocracy*, which will develop a common good creating collective intelligence. He purports historically democracies have evolved from the collective communities, towards a mercantile order of market democracies, based on individual freedom and free markets. The cultural demand for individual freedom and mobility has been satisfied by mass production of services that enhance the power and pleasure of that free individual in the form of itinerant objects which may be anything from PCs to mobile phones, iPods, YouTube and MySpace. Specifically, he posits, wherever a creative class masters a key innovation, a nucleus of the mercantile order is formed and in these times, the nucleus has moved from steam engines, on to information revolution. He comments that if globalisation and markets are allowed to grow in a controlled environment, it would enable hyperdemocracies where every person will benefit from the “...*incredible possibilities offered by future technologies, to enjoy the benefits of commercial creativity on a fair and equitable basis...*”.

Conversely, there is the current philosophy of *third way*, which seeks to adapt progressive values to the new challenges of the information age (DLC, 1998) and rests on three principles: government must promote equal opportunities in representative democracies; it should have the ethic of mutual responsibility that equally rejects the politics of entitlement and the politics of social abandonment and bring forth a new approach that empowers citizens to act for themselves. The third way approach emphasises technological innovation, competitive enterprise and education rather than *laissez faire* or top down redistribution. While honouring social values, it resists attempts to impose them on others and favours enabling governance, expanding choices for citizens and encouraging civic institutions to play a larger role (DLC, 1998). The current approach of *third way* and the futuristic perspective of *hyperdemocracies*, both are advocates of using ICTs in citizen empowerment. We noted the influence of these philosophies on the French election candidates and their political parties and hence, presented them as a precursor to our speculative discussions later. Furthermore, it is relevant to take a closer look at the evolution of tools that has made Internet, the real hero of French elections (World Democracy Forum, 2007).

3.2 The Mature Democracy Dilemma

According to King (2006:17), “*today’s democracy is... limited by safety nets intended to assure economic security, social stability and constancy and reflecting market concept of citizens as consumers. Gradually, it seems, the active role of individuals has been ‘de-emphasised’ and citizens have retreated from their civic involvement apparently accepting what Henry Kariel has referred to as ‘survival through apathy’.*” This research is set in this context i.e. of growing apathy among citizens, particularly in developed democracies and considering anti-apathy approaches. We focus on *representative democracy*, based on the fundamental principle of popular sovereignty by the people representatives. Specifically, elected representatives are provided enough authority to exercise their initiative in changing circumstances, to take decisions that are in the best interest of the people, perhaps, in some cases, against the wish of some social groups. As Norris (2003:7) emphasised: “*In established democracies many believe that the growth of e-governance can serve to modernize and deepen democracy where the public has become more disenchanted with the traditional channels of participation in representative democracy, exemplified by falling levels of voting turnout, party membership, and community associations*”. A worldwide survey conducted in developed nations (MORI, 2005) revealed the gradual decline in the number of voters over the years. For example, Wiebe (2006) comments that Canadian citizens have almost abandoned their responsibilities in a representative democracy, becoming complacent, but yet complain when a decision is made against their wishes by elected representatives.

The effective use of the Internet can be leveraged to improve the quality of information available to a citizen to make an informed judgement in electing the correct representative. Corrado (2000) commented that the number of political websites, including mass media, interest groups, parties, unmediated information and so on could prove to be information sources on performance of government, record of

candidates and legislative debates. The use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) could enable efficient electoral administration, facilitating vote counting and dissemination of results. The potential of e-voting is in reducing costs and strengthening electoral turnout due to the convenience. *“Ideally to strengthen representative democracy governments should introduce a variety of e-registration and e-voting facilities (Norris, 2003:4)”*.

The *Internet* which has begun playing a key communicator role in e-governance requires a closer examination in the context. Chen and Wellman (2004) observe that with the proliferation of the Internet in developed countries, the digital divide remains substantial within most democracies and continues to widen. The reason, they argue is that even as the number and percentage of Internet users increase, the newcomers are demographically similar to those already online. Therefore, *“people and social groups...on the wrong side of the digital divide may be increasingly excluded from knowledge-based societies and economies”* (Chen and Wellman, 2004:1). The authors had classified Internet users using socio-economic status, gender, life stage and region, in developed democracies in their seminal survey. Their findings suggest that:

- Internet users are more likely to be well-off and better educated than non -users in all eight countries surveyed. In general, the lower the Internet penetrations rate in a country, the more elite the online population.
- Men are more likely than women both to access and to use the Internet. With the exception of the U.S., the share of female Internet users is lower than their share in the general population in each of the countries surveyed.
- Internet penetration rate among younger people is substantially higher than that among older people. Students who can get online via school connections make up a big share of Internet users in developing countries.
- Geographic location also affects access to and use of the Internet, with more affluent regions having higher Internet penetration rates than poorer ones. (Chen and Wellman, 2004: 42)

To counter the effects of apathy, many developed democracies such as Australia, Austria, Canada and USA have pioneered electronic voting (Ace, 2006), as part of e-governance techniques and for citizen empowerment. The US Census Bureau reported that 64% percent of U.S. citizens age 18 and over voted in the 2004 presidential election. It is interesting to note that the youngest group 18-24 year old, had the lowest voting rate of 47% while those aged 45 and older held 70% of the turnout. The turnout rate for citizens with a bachelor’s degree or higher was greater at 80% than the rate of people with a high school diploma at 56%. Citizens older than 65 had the highest registration rate of 79% (US Census, 2005).

Wiebe (2006) however reproves the use of ICTs in governance, especially in the growing context of apathy in developed nations. Commenting on the Canadian context, Wiebe (2006) observes that western societies and technological gadgets have made it easier for citizens to become apathetic. Today, *‘...people fork out big money to put gas in the tanks of their cars because it is so much easier than bicycling or walking. Instead of making the effort to change CDs, people buy 60 GB MP3 players that can hold a lot of music in one place’*. In this background, municipalities in Canada envisage online voting as an anti-apathy approach, to bring the polling station to the home of the voter. Wiebe questions the validity of this approach in the context where people are bored and perhaps becoming lazier. According to Wiebe, *‘Developing the Internet wasn't enough; it had to be faster to keep up with easily bored minds...because it is the laziness facilitated by ICTs that has made people apathetic towards voting (Wiebe, 2006)’*

3.3 Technological Facilitation of E-governance

E-voting no doubt, is considered a crucial process in developed democracies. In the US, Diebold AccuVote-TS and its later version the AccuVote-TSx together were widely deployed e-voting platforms in

the midterm elections held in 2006 (Feldman, Haldermann & Felten, 2006) in 357 counties, representing nearly 10% registered voters. Post elections there were uprising nationwide, regarding irregularities, e-voting frauds and vulnerabilities. For example, there were allegations of *vote flipping* i.e. votes intended for one candidate being recorded for another. Another was security vulnerabilities found on the machines. Specifically, the access panel door on a Diebold AccuVote-TS voting machine – the door that protects the memory card that stores the votes, which was the main barrier to the injection of the virus – could be opened with a standard key widely available on the Internet (Feldman et al. 2006). In a latest study (Bishop, 2007) the security of three electronic voting systems were reviewed. Three red teams were to try and compromise the accuracy, security and integrity of the voting systems without making assumptions about compensation controls or procedural mitigation vendors may have adopted. The results suggest that all three systems (which are being used currently) could be compromised.

Nevertheless, e-voting seems to have been successful in developed democracies such as Australia, which piloted the system in some states in 2006 (Timson, 2006). While the scepticism remains on the vulnerability and security risks, worldwide, nations seem to pioneer and legalise e-voting as an anti-apathy instrument. It has to be noted that the predecessor of French Presidential Elections are the US presidential elections where concerns were raised regarding various aspects of the voting process: was e-voting accessible to every entitled citizen; were votes cast correctly counted and whether these irregularities decisively affected the final selection of the president. Amidst these controversies was the use of the Internet and Blogs (Rice, 2005).

Blogs are the shortened version of Web Logs – perhaps best described as a form of micro publishing (Williams and Jacobs, 2004). Due to the ease of use from any Internet connection point, Blogs have become an established web based communication tool. Blogging began as a concept to publish simple online diaries. Today, it has the power and capacity to engage to engage people in collaborative activity, debates and sharing knowledge. Many Blog clusters have formed links according to common interests. Among these, political Blogs seem to be the fastest growing in the past few years. The term *Blogosphere* is often used to denote the collection of Blogs, as they exist in communities. In the 2004 presidential campaign in the US, the leading candidate in the blogging revolution was Howard Dean, who, through a network of websites and blogs, created a dedicated Internet. He had specifically created a blog targeting younger voters. It is reported that the readership of his blog went up from 3000 to 30,000, per day, after the introduction of the blog targeting young voters (Rice, 2005). It is interesting to note that while other candidates distanced themselves from unofficial campaign blogs, Dean had embraced through numerous links. Another candidate, John Kerry, had taken on more interactive approaches.

Second Life is a 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its residents (Second Life, 2007). Since 2003 when it opened Second Life has grown explosively and today is inhabited by a total of 8,280,808 Residents from around the globe (Second Life, 2007). It is an Internet based virtual interactive forum, which can provide residents (or participants) with an avatar (or appearance) according to their wish to interact with others. Communities or individuals can buy space, or *Islands*, to build their own environment. Essentially Islands in Second Life were bought by political campaigners or for huge projects. In the French presidential elections, all candidates had their own projects on second life.

YouTube is a company founded in February 2005 (YouTube, 2007) which has become the world leader in online video provision, and the premier destination to watch and share original videos worldwide through the web. It allows easy upload and sharing of video clips on www.YouTube.com and across the Internet through linked websites, mobile devices such as the iPhone, blogs, and email. The highlights of this venture are that it enables presentation of first hand accounts of current events and sharing of quirky/unusual video clips. It empowers people to become broadcasters, involving them in events. In November 2006, YouTube

was purchased by Google Inc. and has since developed numerous partnership deals with content providers such as CBS, BBC, Universal Music Group, Sony Music Group, Warner Music Group, NBA, etc. (YouTube.com, 2007).

4. The French Revolution goes Second Life

4.1 Broadband Penetration as an Infrastructure for e-governance

The essential infrastructure for e-governance is the diffusion of Internet and ICTs into the societies. In 2002, the Internet penetration in France was still at a stage where it had not reached out to majority citizens. As a result, most people had neglected its use (OECD, 2004). In addition, the traditional press had scorned the use of Internet and dismissed it as a valid approach to empowering citizens (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007). In January 2005, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2005) released new statistics on global broadband penetration per 100 inhabitants. Many economies moved up in their ranking from 2004 and France was one among the economies which had gone up fast in the ranking. This is also reflected in the use of following 2007 elections where the citizens, the Press and political campaigners have all leveraged the effective use of Internet and its tools.

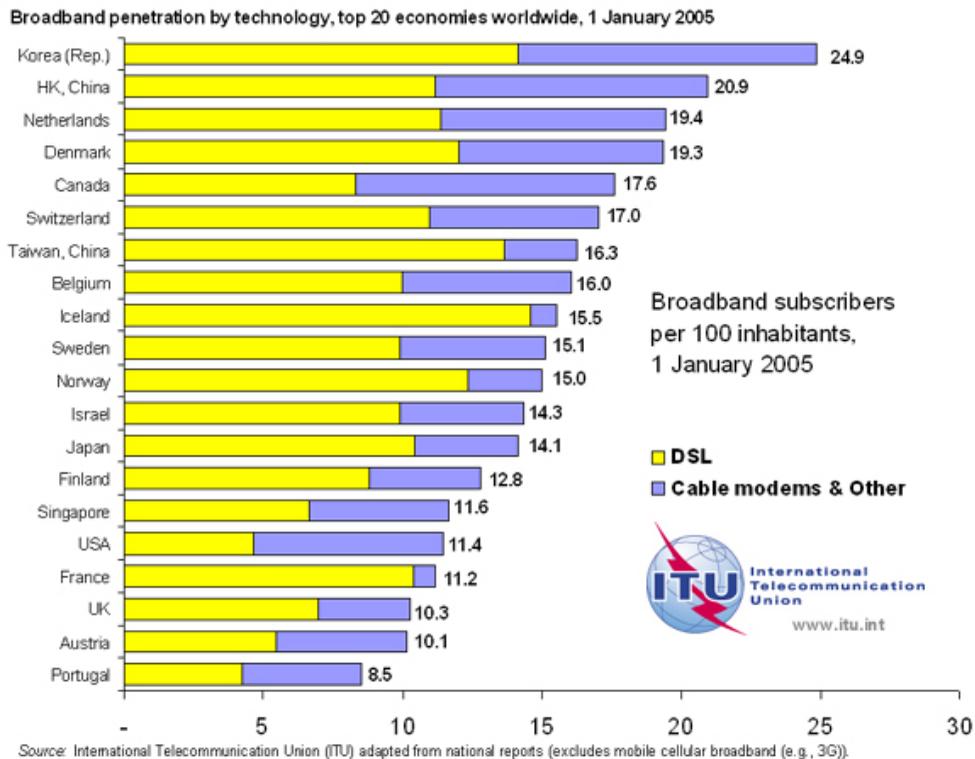


Figure 1: Global Broadband Penetration – January 2005

4.2 E-voting sets new records

E-voting was legalised in France in 2004 (IDABC, 2007). Up to 1.5 million of the 43 million eligible voters, for the first time, used the e-voting to elect their new president. It has been a controversial issue during the elections with the petition against e-voting with doubts over machine error, human error and malicious hacker attacks. In the first round of e-voting pilots conducted in 82 localities, endless queues, equipment shutdowns and dropouts resulted in political parties condemning e-voting a catastrophe (Sailhan,

2007). Two points of criticism were the loss of control by citizens with the risk of untraceable fraud and humiliation of a great number of electors as 5-10% were not comfortable with the systems. The e-voting machines were also deemed as discriminatory to the sight impaired and 25% of the electors ran the risk of mistaking their candidate or not finalising their votes (EDRI, 2007).

Sayer (2007) reported that campaigners filed a suit to prevent the use of e-voting machines. French elections are conducted via a secret ballot. Traditionally, electors enter a polling booth and place a slip of paper printed with the name of their chosen candidate in an unmarked envelope. The next step is clear: they then place the envelope in a transparent ballot box. This allows observers to ensure that the ballot box was empty at the start of the election, and for voters to ensure that the ballot has been received. However, electronic voting machines do not allow lay observers to ensure that the ballot box was empty at the start of the election, and for voters to ensure that the ballot has been received (Sayer, 2007). Nevertheless, amidst scepticism and pre-election protests, e-voting did succeed.

In February 2007, the UMP party made a history by setting a new world record for total Internet based voters on a single day (UMP, 2007). On January 3, a total of 31,800 members voted in UMP's primary candidate to select its presidential candidate for the 2007 French Presidential election. This was regarded as a pioneer due to varied reasons. After World War II, it was the first time that a political party in France had reached such high number of members and high levels of participation from an internal election. Further, this was the first time in the world that an Internet based vote gathered such high number of voters. Out of a total 338,558 UMP members, a total 233,779 voted, representing 69.1% of the party memberships and out of this voting, 98.1% selected the Nicolas Sarkozy as the presidential candidate.

The UMP press release reported the process. *“The election was organised by Election-Europe, the leading global Internet elections company and overseen by Mr Yves-Henri PUAUX, Justice Bailiff, a court appointed official. More than 750 polling stations were equipped with Internet enabled touch screen kiosks. Each day, thousands of ballots were registered among the 107 electronic ballot boxes corresponding to the different county federations and stored on servers hosted in a secured and controlled environment. Each member received at home a voter card with their confidential PIN and password. Several reminders to vote were sent by SMS, emails or phone. An external and independent hot line centre was available every day to deliver lost PINs to the members, once that member had been authenticated as a UMP member. The overseeing of the elections was performed by the Electoral Commission with the support of the centralised administration tools provided by the Election-Europe voting system. It took less than 20 minutes to decrypt and tally all of the 233,779 ballots stored in the 107 ballot boxes, without any issue or electoral fraud complaint; this allowed the Commission to announce the official results immediately after the closing of the voting period, live in front of 100,000 UMP members gathered for their Primary Convention”*. Since its inception in 2002, UMP had regularly used e-voting to run their elections. The high mobilisation of members is regarded as the success of the inclusive approach launched by Sarkozy (UMP, 2007).

4.3 Web 2.0 – The Winner of the Presidential Elections?

“Never before, Internet has been so active in a European election campaign. Online videos, reactive Blogs, participative debates, satirical or idolized websites, virtual world and viral rumours, Internet became the stage of a new kind of presidential campaign” (World e-Democracy Forum, 2007).

The 2007 elections seem to be an antithesis of the 2002 version when majority of the French citizens ignored the Internet (World e-democracy forum, 2007). *So what caused this transformation?* Compared to 2002, many French citizens are well connected via broadband to the Internet (see previous section). Most citizens are online *savoir-faire*, able to gain access to sufficient information via the Internet, synthesise, and react to it – whether it is to challenge it or empathise with it. While citizens who are interested as such in political participation could obtain information and forge their own opinion without assistance, there have

also been significant attempts by candidates of the elections, to reach out to apathetic citizens via net campaigns.

Conversely, until this election campaign, the Internet and Blogs were often derelict, or treated with derision by traditional media such as the television, radio or newspapers. However, during 2007 elections, the Press apparently had begun reading the Blogs for relaying better analysed information. Indubitably, the Internet became part of the media landscape in the elections. *Why did this transpire?* Purportedly, the Internet provided greater transparency and a means to access to all information. Citizens interested in political life could get information and forge their own opinion without any assistance. The exceptional feature in the 2007 elections was the explosion of websites created by common citizens, often from the communication sector. One significant example is the iPOL which proposed a weekly video report on the campaigns (iPOL, 2007). And for apathetic citizens, there were engaging official websites and interactive forums created on *Second Life* by campaigners.

4.4 The French Election Blogosphere

The use of Blogs has been significant, for the first time in a European election campaign – the only precedent being the 2004 American presidential elections. The country had the largest number of recorded Blogs in history, perhaps ascribed to the cultural inclination of French citizens to debates. It is interesting to note that most of the Blogs have been held by teenagers, who were not expected to have an impact on political processes. *It is questionable then as to how much these teenagers have been able to influence their elders?*

Parallel to these developments was the emergence of *influential Bloggers*, who sometimes became spokespersons of Internet citizens, impelled by traditional media (World e-democracy Forum, 2007). They were seen moving from television shows, into radio stations, explaining to French people what web users were thinking. Conversely, traditional journalists began writing on Blogs (Canning, 2007). Some significant examples are Christophe Barbier and Jean-Michel Apathie whose writings are acclaimed in France to reveal the political backstage. Famous television journalists such as Karl Zéro and John Paul Lepers, envisioned the Web as an ideal, yet alternative path for journalism (Magniant, 2007). Famous writers such as Alexandre Jardin animated a website entitled “How can we do”, where candidate proposals were published and French citizens were asked to imagine how they would apply them (Moore, 2007). Equally, opponents launched a web site dedicated to debates (Debat, 2007). Gurus of political communication namely Jacques Séguéla and Thierry Saussez, together held a weekly video chronicle online to share their analyses with web users (World e-democracy Forum, 2007). Perhaps, it is not incorrect to suggest that the French Internet had transformed into a true political repository. *However, was this due to the interest of the French people for this campaign or did Internet play a catalytic role?*

In March 2007, a Médiamétrie report indicated that more than 5 millions web users had consulted websites and Blogs related to the election campaign as compared to the 1.5 million in October 2006 (World e-democracy forum, 2006). The amount of information on the campaign (including text, videos and sound) was so voluminous that it would have taken hours to consult them every day. According to World e-democracy Forum (2006), it is the limit of the Internet aligned with the force of television, which was able to gather more than 20 millions French for the *great debate* between the two main presidential candidates. There were suggestions during the campaign to control the Internet – through similar councils as the Audiovisual Superior Council – CSA. *“This was triggered by attempts by some citizens to mask themselves, barded with false addresses and remain anonymous, so as to enable them through invectives, fallacious reasons and deliberated polluted wires during discussions under cover. These people are often known as Trolls who affect the quality of debate”.* However, Tim O’Reilly’s proposal of a code of good control on Blogosphere remains polemic (O’reilly, 2005).

The observable fact of the net-campaign was *Daily Motion*, a French version of “YouTube” (Dailymotion, 2007). Videos published on Dailymotion discomfited Ségolène Royal with respect to teachers, leading to the journalist, Alain Duhamel being deposed for having taken position for a candidate. However, the journalist denounced a form of permanent monitoring that the web could create by decreeing himself the victim of the Net. The videos on the Internet played a significant role in edifying the truth: when a former socialist minister, Jack Lang, announced to have been acclaimed by many people in a Festival, hundreds of web users contradicted him. A green Party’s leader, Noël Mamère, proudly announced to have come to an interview on his bicycle. Few hours later, a video on Daily Motion showed him getting out of his car.

The experience of the American elections demonstrated that a successful online campaign depends on the implication of most citizens. This was visible during the campaign of the socialist primary elections, with the proliferation of websites supporting the official website known as *Desires for the future*. It was apparent in the power exhibited by the site of the Sarkozy supporters who had laid down an objective of 500,000 French registered in all France (Supporters NS, 2007). Conversely, Ségolène Royal, had *a new way of militating online* with 500,000 e-militants, a *marketing 2.0* and the densest network of political Blogs. Furthermore, for the mobilisation of François Bayrou’s partisans, the third candidate of this campaign, the weight of the centrist party’s Blogs was more critical, as the candidate expected to become a *French Howard Dean* as indicated by the website (Bayrou, 2007). He was successful in obtaining more than 18% of the votes to the first round of the campaigns.

Perhaps, this is the birth of the new type of netizens, who have become the activists of the Web, who are more involved in the governance. To forge an opinion, these citizens take a voluntary step to seek information and to confront his opinion with others. According to Joël de Rosnay (2007) in his book, the *La Revolte du Pronetariat*, the citizens are inventing a new democracy, based on the *media of the masses*, as opposite to the *mass media*. Among other exceptional facts of the campaign was the commitment expressed by all candidates to implement an e-petition system, a debate launched by the World e-democracy Forum in 2005 and relayed since by the French website NetPolitique (2007), which shows a crucial step towards e-participation. Another important debate of the campaign concerned the voting machines used for the first time in a presidential election by 1.5 million voters. Although far from the hyperdemocracy purported by Attali (2007), France no doubt, sees to be at the wake of an inescapable movement, comparable to French revolution on the Internet.

4.4 Second Life and YouTube

Historically, France is a country where (Carvajal, 2007) political advertising on television is banned. Therefore, the zealous political battles went to explode on user-generated sites such as Dailymotion and YouTube. The presidential candidates and their respective parties seem to have successfully orchestrated the Internet for their campaigns, despite the warning set by the American elections precedent that official websites are often consulted only by mutants and sympathisers, while the true campaign is run somewhere else (Moore, 2007). Political campaigners have spent money and creativity on their websites. We now examine these more closely. The confrontation in Second Life, which is a parallel online universe where players cloak their alter egos into cartoon like bodies, demonstrated the rising impact of the newest cyber venue for politicians trying to promote real-world campaigns. All the four major candidates in the presidential elections had opened virtual headquarters in Second Life, which is an interactive forum that allows inhabitants, known as avatars, to engage in debates, attend political rallies and take part in protests (Moore, 2007) The political battles began in January when protesters attacked the headquarters of extremist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, in the popular 3D fantasy word site.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the presidential candidate of UMP, is estimated to have spent one million Euros on the election campaign. However, there were cynical allegations that the official website presented itself more as a web based television than a forum for debates (Carvajal, 2007). *On the web, the Sarkozy campaign created*

a satirical site *Disco Sarko* taking the mick out of their own candidate for courting the youth vote (Carvajal, 2007). People were able to put him on a dance floor and give him a range of moves with various backing tunes. It was unusual as e-campaigns are usually aimed at opponents. In an effort to create a viral buzz among youth and sign them up to their own The difference in this campaign was that satirical e-campaigns which are usually aimed at opponents *Sarkonautes* email lists, the Sarkozy campaign utilized their own candidate, instead of targeting the opponent. A five minute video known as the human bomb has perhaps contributed to an unlikely backstage role in the election victory of Sarkozy (Sarkozy Human Bomb, 2007). In this video, *Sarkozy was demonized in the sprawling and chaotic blogosphere...it drew more than 450,000 viewers, seemingly attracted by an old chapter from Sarkozy's life: brash suburban mayor personally negotiates with the human bomb, a deranged man who seized kindergarten students as hostages in 1993.* The use of the pensive sound track music from the *Gladiator*, 'Honour Him', sent out the subtle message effectively during the last ten days of the presidential campaign. The video presented *an emotional view of Sarkozy, who was otherwise attacked by rival videos such as La France d'apres, which imagined a bleak new France under Sarkozy with riot police, burning cars and suburbs engulfed in violence* (Carvajal, 2007). While the campaigners in the party worried about the video demonising their candidate, they were also optimistic that it will have an enormous viral effect among the citizens.

Ségolène Royal, the presidential candidate from the Socialist Party, is estimated to have spent approximately 2 million Euros (10% of its campaign budget) towards her Internet strategy. There was a feature on her site inviting people to help create campaign graphics and videos - a way to harness the creativity of her support base, much as Cadbury's has invited people to send in video clips with their own homemade ads for Creme egg (Moore, 2007). There were others such as the Jose Bove game where citizens had to destroy GM maize and mad cows in honour of the campaigner against McDonalds and globalisation (Carvajal, 2007).

5. Concluding Remarks

It appears that French political campaigners are more open to new technologies, and more creative with their uses, than their US counterparts. Heastart (2007) attributes this to the big turnouts, which in itself signals widespread engagement with and interest in political engagement. *"France generally seems gripped by political debate, a live grappling between ideas of the right and left of the sort that has not happened here since New Labour intentionally blurred the boundaries between the main parties. This means both sides have had to pull out all the campaigning stops to try to secure an advantage...Or perhaps it is something cultural: as they showed with the Pompidou Centre in Paris, opened in the 1970s, some 30-odd years before our own Tate Modern, the French are always quick to embrace the avant garde into the mainstream* (Headstar, 2007)".

Even at the time the backstage presidential campaigns were being written, American campaign strategists had travelled to France to witness new political rituals (Carvajal, 2007). Michael Murphy, the advisor to the Californian Governor, pronounced the techniques *one click ahead*. According to the co-founder of Netpolitique.net, a leading French online political communication site and Blog, both presidential candidates were uploading and testing videos generated from pure propaganda to footage of public speeches (Magniant, 2007). Videometre, a French website that tracks audiences, estimated more than 1,500 new political videos posted in the critical stages of the presidential campaign, i.e. after April 22nd 2007 (Carvajal, 2007). According to Magniant (2007), *"I think the Internet won this campaign...they clearly bet on the farm on videos and this was very much like the Dailymotion elections for us. They just flooded those sites day in and day out...What is interesting now is how they will continue to use these techniques to govern...they understand now that public opinion is now online"*.

In 2002, reportedly, 50% of the voters in France voted for probably corrupt and far right candidates, both not considered suitable in democratic governance (thbz, 2002). The Internet was then more or less ignored;

perhaps voter apathy was at its peak. By contrast, with the pervasiveness of the Internet, leveraged by candidates, political parties and media – France has been able to stimulate a significant portion of voters – who were until then uninvolved. Did this stimulation involve those voters who tipped the balance to the right? Was Sarkozy and UMP activating those marginal voters required for their victory? Perhaps, it is relevant then to look at the typical profile of Internet users in mature democracies.

As pointed out by Chen and Wellman (2004) the average Internet user is affluent, with a higher income level, higher educated, male and young population. Students with free Internet access, especially in higher education (universities) seem to use the Internet more frequently. If we take the penetration of Broadband Internet in France, which is high and the current left oriented education system, which enables free access to students – who are a large Internet user group – it seems that the eligible voters who were activated by the Second Life and Blog based campaigns were mainly youth. Perhaps, Sarkozy did succeed in tipping the balance to the right number of voters required for his victory. However, as Button (2007) reported, he did not achieve the right wing tidal wave, because the UMP advance was perhaps checked by voter discontent with a planned value added tax to finance payroll tax cuts for business, along with tax cuts for the wealthy. Nevertheless, Sarkozy had won over a significant number of left tipped voters, increasingly, the young working male population, who worked the 35 hour working week in France, by promising tax breaks (Euroactiv, 2007).

An interesting questions remains, which is if voters were aware of the political direction their vote would take and critically assessed the policies behind the Blogs and Second Life interfaces? For example post the elections, when Sarkozy was elected, on 9th of May 2007, Reuters reported that the French police arrested more than 100 demonstrators and hundreds of students who went on strike at a Paris University (Bon, 2007). While the left wing protestors were mainly youth, who claimed Sarkozy being a Fascist, the significant event was the strike at the Paris University by students who staged the protest at Sarkozy's plans to reform France's higher education system and blocked access to an annexe of the Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne University. Sarkozy had promised to make higher education reform a priority and wanted to introduce a law before the end of the summer, to hand universities power to hire and fire staff, set salaries and manage their assets. He had suggested that Universities should focus on more vocational courses, be encourage seeking outside finances and given more scope to expel under-performing students. The student protesters were cautioning citizens that the envisaged program will run right over them (Bon, 2007). Conversely, there was some scepticism regarding discrimination of voters based on sight impairment and inability to finalise votes from older voters.

Did all this have an impact on the election results and perhaps, on society at large? We are at present not able to determine if the involvement of the Internet has activated marginal voters in the middle classes that traditionally vote more conservatively or if the 'hip' nature of the campaign has motivated younger voters to vote or vote differently. Nor can we conclude that the youth in the satellite cities of Paris did not get involved in the campaign due to their lack of access to the Internet. However, we can conclude that the involvement of Web 2.0 technologies has clearly increased the interest in the campaign and resulted in greater voter turnout at the ballot box (e-voting systems).

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