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## DÉCISION 2007: FRENCH BOBOS AND OTHER IMMEASURABLES.

### Franc Assessment

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**T**he last speeches have been given, the last polls taken. Saturday, by law, is a day of rest for the French presidential campaign before the first round of voting on Sunday. It is also a day for the French to mull over two questions: First, and most obviously, what will the large number of undecided voters do? Second, and more interestingly, who has been lying to the pollsters?

For the past quarter century, one particular lie told to pollsters has had a very large effect on French politics: "I am not voting for Jean-Marie Le Pen." With his coarseness, anti-Arab racism, homophobia, and long history of Jew-baiting, Le Pen well deserves his "beyond the pale" reputation. But, if you spend long enough in France, you will meet plenty of people who tell you privately that Le Pen "has the right idea about the immigrant problem" and that he's "saying things that need to be said." The number includes some French Jews who share his views of Muslims and even some **French Muslims** who share his views of homosexuals. They just won't admit their choice to the pollsters. And so election after election has produced an entirely predictable "Le Pen Surprise." In 2002, the final pre-election polls put him around 14 percent, but, in the first round voting, he scored nearly 3 percent higher--enough to move past Socialist Lionel Jospin into the second round.

Will it happen again? The last round of 2007 polls put Le Pen anywhere between 12 and 16 percent. Mainstream conservative Nicolas Sarkozy has diligently tried to pick off National Front voters by emphasizing themes of law and order and "national identity," and he has done well enough to get Le Pen himself decidedly agitated. In the last few days, the 78-year-old former paratrooper has started deriding the half-Hungarian Sarkozy as "not French enough" and dropped broad hints about new trouble in the famously turbulent Sarkozy marriage (in 2005, *Madame* ran off to New York with a publicist before staging a distinctly Clintonesque reconciliation with *Monsieur* last year). Still, past precedent suggests that Le Pen will get a "surprise" boost of at least 2.5 percent--quite possibly enough to knock centrist François Bayrou out of third place. Even a second-place showing is not entirely out of the question.

**W**hether *that* happens or not, however, depends on whether another group has been lying to the pollsters: the men and women who go by the name of "bobos," or "*les bourgeois bohèmes*."

American readers, of course, associate the term "bobos" with current *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, who coined it in his 2000 book *Bobos in Paradise*. It was a sharp, witty dissection of the lifestyles of those "bourgeois Bohemian" Americans who remained faithful to counter-culture values even after successive waves of economic exuberance had lifted them high into the middle class. Despite

the book's well-deserved success, "bobo" never quite managed to supplant "yuppie" in the American lexicon. But, in France, where the term "bohemian" first arose, the book struck more of a nerve, and "bobo" has become a familiar piece of journalistic slang (most readers do not even know of its American origins). It has a somewhat altered set of associations in France, though. French bobos are not as wealthy as their American counterparts, but politically, where American bobos mostly remain within the liberal mainstream, French ones find it hard to resist the lure of the far left: the Greens, the Trotskyites, or the anti-globalization candidate José Bové (who first made his reputation bulldozing a French McDonald's). It is a French tradition to "vote with your heart in the first round and your head in the second," and, in 2002, enough bobos did so to help shoot down the dull, mainstream Jospin.

To judge by the polls, they will not do the same thing with this year's Socialist candidate, Ségolène Royal. On Friday, the combined far left was hovering around 11 percent, or less than half its score in 2002. But what if the bobos are lying? Given what happened in 2002, it has been particularly hard this year to admit an open preference for longtime fringe candidates like Workers' Struggle Party leader Arlette Laguiller--whose platform calls for a ban on all layoffs by profit-making companies and whose financial disclosure statement claims she owns nothing of value except a seven year-old Renault Clio. Accordingly, Friday's polls put her at no more than 2 percent. But, in 2002, she got nearly 6 percent. So what will the bobos do in the privacy of the voting booth? Will they overcome their instinctive distaste and vote for the controlled, well-heeled, and well-packaged "Ségo"? I think enough of them will do so to keep her in the race. But, in France, never count on the head winning out over the heart.

My predictions for Sunday:

Union for a Popular Front - Nicolas Sarkozy: 28 percent  
 Socialist Party - Ségolène Royal: 19 percent  
 National Front - Jean-Marie Le Pen: 16 percent  
 Union for French Democracy - François Bayrou: 15 percent  
 The combined far left: 16 percent  
 Other: 6 percent.

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