

The left-wing forces come out ahead in the French legislative elections but there is no absolute majority

The 2nd round of legislative elections on 7 July came as a big surprise and a clear relief to many: the Rassemblement National (RN), the radical right-wing party chaired by Jordan Bardella, was largely outstripped by the left-wing forces of the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) and the presidential majority coalition, Ensemble. The RN obtained 32.05% of the vote and 125 elected members, 36 more than in the previous legislative elections on 12 and 19 June 2022. The forces of the New Popular Front, a left-wing coalition that brings together La France insoumise (LFI), the Socialist Party (PS), the Communist Party (PCF), the Ecologists (Greens), the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPa), Public Square (PP) and the Independent Workers' Party (POI), won 25.68% of the vote and 178 seats (+ 47). Within this group, LFI made little headway, unlike the PS.

Ensemble! a coalition of Emmanuel Macron's presidential majority led by Prime Minister Gabriel Attal (Renaissance (RE), Horizons, led by former Prime Minister (2017-2020) Edouard Philippe and François Bayrou's Mouvement démocrate (MoDem)), won 23.15% of the vote and 150 MPs (-95).

The Republicans (LR) were severely compromised after their president Eric Ciotti's decision to form an alliance with the RN. They obtained 5.41% of the vote (excluding dissidents who joined the ranks of the radical right) and 39 MPs (down 22).

Emmanuel Macron's gamble on dissolution following the European elections on 9 June was lost, but to a lesser extent than might have been expected on the evening of the first round on 30 June. The Republican front once again deprived the RN of victory. Between the two rounds of voting, more than 200 candidates from the forces of the left and the presidential majority withdrew to avoid triangular elections that would have favoured the election of RN MPs.

The result of the legislative elections of 30 June and 7 July, which divided France into three parts, is unprecedented. With these results no force is in a position to achieve an absolute majority in government. It is therefore very difficult to say with any certainty what will happen, but one thing is clear: politicians will have to invent a new way of running the country. As Anne-Charlène Bezzina, a researcher in public law at the University of Rouen, predicted a few days ago, "*On 8 July, we will probably be entering a we have never seen before*".

The French turned out in force for this election: the total of 66.63%, reflected an increase of 20.43 points compared with the 2nd round on 19 June 2022. This was the highest turnout since the legislative elections of 25 May and 1 June 1997.

General election in France

7nd July 2024

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Results of the legislative elections of 30 June and 7 July 2024 in France

Turnout: 64.99% (1st round) and 66.63% (2nd round)

Political Parties	1st round			2nd round			Total number of seats
	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats	
Rassemblement national (RN)	9 379 092	29.26	37	8 745 076	32.05	88	125
Nouveau Front populaire	8 995 226	28.06	32	7 005 503	25.68	146	178
Ensemble !	6 425 707	20.04	2	6 314 523	23.15	148	150
Les Républicains (Rep)	2 106 166	6.57	1	1 474 722	5.41	38	39
Union de l'extrême droite	1 268 822	3.96	1	1 364 946	5.00	16	17
Various right	1 154 785	3,60	2	980 547	3.59	25	27
Various gauche	490 898	1.53	0	401 063	1.47	12	12
Various centre	391 423	1.22	0	177 164	0.65	6	6
Far left	366 594	1,14	0				0
Regionalists	310 727	0.97	0	288 201	1.06	9	9
Reconquête	238 934	0.75	0				0
Horizons	231 667	0.72	0	258 139	0.95	6	6
Ecologists	182 478	0.57	0	37 808	0.14	1	1
Union des démocrates et indépendants (UDI)	163 072	0.51	0	119 672	0.44	3	3
Various	142 871	0.45	0	38 025	0.14	1	1
Sovereignist Right	90 110	0.28	0	18 672	0.07	0	0
Far right	59 679	0.19	1	23 216	0.09	0	1
Parti socialiste (PS)	29 242	0.09	0	26 343	0.10	2	2

Source : https://www.resultats-elections.interieur.gouv.fr/legislatives2024/ensemble_geographique/index.html

As a result, the RN saw the victory it thought certain on 30 June slip from its grasp. *"We've already seen this phenomenon at work several times in France. In the 1st round, we vote for those we want to see in power. In the second round, people especially point to those they don't want to see in power. It's clear that the majority of French people don't want an RN government"*, said Frederik Dhondt, a historian at the Free Flemish University of Brussels (UVB). While the party achieved *"the biggest breakthrough in its history"* according to Jordan Bardella, it was denied victory by a successful barrage created by the Republican front. *"The alliance of dishonour and the dangerous electoral arrangements made by Emmanuel Macron and Gabriel Attal with far-left formations deprive the French tonight of a policy of recovery,"* he further stated. Marine Le Pen said that her party's victory was only "postponed". She sees *"tomorrow's victory germinating"*.

The RN once again made gains in this legislative election, even though the majority voting system still prevents it from winning. *"The Rassemblement National did not win the election, but it is getting closer and closer to the majority (...) The "glass ceiling" recedes with each election. And this rule has been confirmed once again this time. The only problem is that the results are misleading because of the strong amplification of the balance of power resulting from the majority vote,"* wrote Jean-Yves Dormagen, professor of political science at the University of Montpellier, adding that many RN candidates narrowly missed out on victory.

Created in a matter of days and intended primarily to prevent a RN victory, the New Popular Front fulfilled its mission. The forces of the left, which nevertheless represent barely a third of the MPs, will now have to talk to each other, negotiate and agree on how they see their future. *"This is a huge relief for the overwhelming majority of people in our country (...) These people felt terribly threatened. Rest assured, they have won,"* said the founder of La France insoumise, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who was the first to speak publicly on 7 July, after the results were announced. *"The President*

of the Republic has a duty to call on the New Popular Front to govern," he said. LFI has ruled out taking part in a government that refuses to implement the core of the New Popular Front's programme, i.e. the repeal of the 2023 pension reform (which increased the retirement age to 64 gradually over the next few years) and the unemployment insurance reform, the increase in the minimum wage to €1,600 net per month, the freezing of basic food and energy prices and the indexation of wages to inflation. Manuel Bompard, who heads the LFI party, also said that LFI *"will only govern to apply their programme. Nothing but their programme"*.

Head of State Emmanuel Macron is preparing for a period of cohabitation, since the rule is that the prime minister must come from the ranks of the majority group in the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament. In the presidential majority camp, some are calling for an alliance of their forces with some of the forces on the left. Edouard Philippe (Horizons) called on the *"central political forces, i.e. all the formations excluding the Rassemblement national and the France insoumise, to unite"*. The former president of the National Assembly (2022-2024) Yaël Braun-Pivet (Renaissance) has called for the formation of a new coalition, *"a large central, republican, progressive bloc"*. *"I have always said that we really need to be allied with people who share our values and who share our objectives. This is neither the case with La France insoumise nor the Rassemblement national"*, she stressed, adding *"The French are once again asking us to work together"*.

Some on the left are not opposed to this and are calling for this proposed alliance to be examined. A union between left-wing and centrist forces would also make the Rassemblement National the main opposition party. Similarly, a split in the left-wing forces followed by a possible crisis in the system could make the RN an element of political stability in the country. It should be noted that some Republicans (LR) would also not be hostile to their party's participation in a broad coalition that would bring together some of the left-wing forces and members of the presidential majority.

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"If the early legislative ballot were to result in the electoral coalition led by the Rassemblement National or the Nouveau Front Populaire obtaining a majority of MP seats, whether relative or absolute, we would be entering a totally unknown phase for our institutions, beyond simple cohabitation. Each political institution would be controlled by three different political forces: Renaissance for the Presidency of the Republic, Les Républicains for the Senate and Rassemblement National or Nouveau Front Populaire for the National Assembly. France would thus be moving from a partisan tripolarisation, in place in the outgoing legislature, to an unprecedented institutional tripolarisation" write Julien Arnoult and Antoine Faye in an article published by Telos. "What's more, the government elected on 7 July could be in a minority (...) cohabiting with a minority government would be a first".

Only one thing is certain: there can be no electoral process for another year. Article 12 of the French Constitution states that "a new dissolution may not be carried out in the year following these elections". This is why, if the system comes to a standstill, the possibility of ending the crisis with a new presidential election might re-emerge.

Outgoing Prime Minister Gabriel Attal tendered his resignation to Emmanuel Macron on 8 July. His resignation was rejected by the President of the Republic, who asked him to stay "for the time being" in order to "ensure the stability of the country".

The new legislature of the National Assembly begins on 18 July, when its inaugural session will be held.

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