



## Understanding the results the day after June 9<sup>th</sup> 2024

### **A deficit in French public opinion on European integration**

*Bruno Cautrès, CNRS researcher at CEVIPOF*

The sweeping victory of the *Rassemblement national* in last week's European elections - their third consecutive victory since 2014 - was nonetheless a considerable shock in political terms. Their victory is all the more spectacular as they beat the majority by almost 17 points whereas the presidential party campaigned on "their" main theme - Europe.



What do these results say about the relationship between France and European integration?

Before the election on June 9<sup>th</sup>, we had analysed the huge complexity of this relationship together with its contradictions. France is one of the EU countries *most* favourable to European integration, and at the same time, one of the two or three countries that are *least* favourable to broadening the European Union. The country nonetheless elected Emmanuel Macron as President on two occasions, albeit against Marine Le Pen.

The RN's victory is a strong reminder of such tendencies in French public opinion. While the "protest vote" dimension against Emmanuel Macron was of course clearly expressed yesterday, it cannot be ignored that this vote speaks volumes about the relationship between the French and the European Union. The dramatic tone adopted by the presidential list during the campaign ("Europe in danger of dying", the "return to 1938") did not manage to stem the RN's vibrancy. And yet, in spite of some changes to its position on European questions, the RN remains clearly identifiable as unfavourable to any further European integration. In essence, the results of the 2024 European elections in France show that our European democracies are being shaped by a paradox that has powerful political repercussions. We live in a world that is more and more integrated both at global and European level. However, this world of generalised interdependence and economic integration, of borders that are more and more open, has once again placed the question of borders and identities at the heart of political debate. This is precisely what the RN's victory expresses in a country headed by a presidency that is among the most committed in Europe to the question of European integration. This is an unbelievable paradox just a few short weeks after a second Sorbonne speech which garnered great attention throughout Europe and was barely heard in France.

### **Dissolution: the unbelievable result of the European elections**

*Pascal Perrineau, Full Professor*



On June 9<sup>th</sup>, the RN obtained 31.4% of the vote reaching a level that was more than twice as high as the presidential majority at 14.6%. Just a few short minutes after the announcement of the predicted result which foresaw the victory of the RN, the French president declared that he was evoking Article 12 of the constitution which gives him the power to pronounce the dissolution of the National Assembly after consultation with assembly presidents. Article 12 also prescribes that a legislative election must take place within a minimum period of 20 and a maximum of 40 days. The first round of the election will take place on June 30 and the second on

July 7. The shortest interval was chosen, thereby leading to a general impression of haste and hurry.

Nothing forced the president to act in this way. No French President has ever acted in such a manner on the very evening of the European election even when the majority in place had been defeated (the 1999 European election for the UMP, the 2014 election for the Socialist Party). Dissolution has occurred on six occasions in the 5th Republic. However, until now it was used to harmonise presidential and legislative majorities in the wake of a presidential victory (1981 and 1988 for François Mitterrand), to give a voice to the people following a major social and political crisis (1968) or to respond to a victorious motion of no confidence in the government in situ (1962). To different degrees, each of these dissolutions led to a victory for the presidential majority in place. As early as 1997, the use of dissolution had changed moving towards a type of opportunist dissolution. President Jacques Chirac used it to reinforce the legislative majority that was already favourable to him in order to achieve the opposite result: the victory of the Left-wing opposition and the setting up of a five-year period of cohabitation\*. On this present occasion, the President is heading a seriously weakened majority. The opposing *Rassemblement national* has been progressing consistently and strongly for years and, more especially, over the past several months. Emmanuel Macron is therefore taking a major political risk given that it is highly unlikely that he will manage to head a united “republican front” against the *Rassemblement national*. Neither the Right nor the Left-wing opposition parties will take up the challenge. The most likely hypothesis is a victory for the *Rassemblement national* and a *cohabitation* where a President who has withdrawn into his own territory (diplomacy and defence) will await the hypothetical disintegration of an RN that has so far been little exposed to the rigours of government culture.

However, another even more chaotic result is also: the RN is not assured of an absolute majority of seats and could find itself in a situation where it would largely be powerless just as the presidential camp is today. Is the addition of chaos to chaos a reasonable perspective for a weakened, indebted and threatened France? Let it not be forgotten that no dissolution is possible in the year following a dissolution. Deadlock is therefore entirely possible and, should that happen, a crisis of regime would certainly follow the current political crisis.

\*In France, *cohabitation* designates a political situation where the President of the country and the majority of Deputies are on opposite political sides.

## **Sanctioning Emmanuel Macron: the major issue in the 2024 European election**

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While the issues at the heart of a campaign are often believed to structure a vote, the European election broke a few electoral rules. French voters decided that the priorities for which they wanted political answers were purchasing power (20%), immigration (18%) and the environment (11%). However, the candidates heading the lists adopted strategies which were not congruent with this hierarchy of priorities for public action. There was no surprise when the le RN and *Reconquête* oriented their campaign towards migration and security issues while *Renaissance* and *Place Publique-PS* attempted rather to introduce issues on the risks of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict being extended to the European Union and the role that France should play as a European power into their campaign. Finally, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict featured in the LFI campaign which adopted a pro-Palestinian position based on the logic that that this stance would attract voters in areas where communitarianism is particularly present. However, paradoxically, the European campaign did not crystallise around either a favourable or a critical vision of the European Union but rather on national considerations.



Among these the protest vote against Emmanuel Macron and his government proved to be the strongest unifying factor for opponents to the list headed by Valérie Hayer. And while the RN profited from the protest vote against Macron, where they truly shined was in their success with efforts to make the party more credible and institutional in the national arena. Given that the RN is judged by French voters to be the most credible party on the issues of immigration and purchasing power (a credibility shared with LFI and *Place Publique*), it is not surprising that the party gained a historic victory at the polling station. The time is long gone when the RN's reputed incompetence prevented the party from imagining itself exercising power in government.

### **The vote and abstention as an expression of underlying anger**

*Anne Muxel, Deputy Director at the CEVIPOF and CNRS emeritus senior research fellow*



All sections of the French electorate are filled with concern for two main reasons. The first of these is the deepening of the crisis in political representation which has been palpable in the country for several years. The second is the huge perplexity and indeed dismay felt by ordinary people as they face the issues-at-stake in a world in transition that is harder and harder to understand, together with a national situation whose governance is called into question by more and more citizens.

However, many voters have expressed anger above anything else. Indeed, after a certain feeling of weariness, anger is one of the sentiments most strongly felt among French voters to define their state of mind as they approached this election - either to vote or to abstain. The protest vote was strong and was used in massive numbers at the two extremes of the political spectrum: 60% of Jordan Bardella's voters and 66% of those who voted for Manon Aubry said they identified with an angry and protest-dominated France. And even more radically, 36% of first-time and 35% of second-time voters went as far as to say they were "revolted".

Abstention was also quite broadly used to express anger, even if the rate was slightly lower than in 2019 (-1.4). While the main reasons put forward for abstention was the feeling that this type of vote serves no purpose together with a sentiment of political powerlessness, almost one in two abstainers (47%) mention their dissatisfaction as much towards the French government as towards the European Union. However, above all, four out of six of them express their anger (42%) or their revolt (44%) in light of the political situation of the country.

The sudden and unexpected decision made by Emmanuel Macron to dissolve the National Assembly may well be in some way a reaction to this vast sentiment of anger. No-one knows what the result of all these types of anger mixed up together will be. Twenty-four million French citizens did not vote last Sunday, e.g. (48,5%), and given their sociological and political profile nothing suggest that the country is moving towards any kind of appeasement.

### **Hugely unequal performances for the Extreme-right in Europe**

*Gilles Ivaldi, CNRS researcher at CEVIPOF*

The results of the European election have confirmed the growth of the extreme Right as forecast. Their performance reflects an increasing process of normalisation for such movements throughout the continent. While many of these parties have registered an increase in number of votes, this wave cannot be described as a groundswell. Furthermore, the scale of success is variable depending on the country concerned.



In total, looking at all groups together, extreme-right parties now have 174 seats, equalling 24% of the 720 parliamentary seats compared to a little more than a fifth in 2019.

There are also a number of major distorting effects at work, due to the relative weight of the member states. They alone - the RN (30 seats) in France, the *Fratelli d'Italia* (24), the Polish PiS (20), the German AfD (15) and Viktor Orban's *Fidesz* in Hungary (11) - represent close to 60% of extreme-right elected politicians.

This new growth of the European extreme-right is also far from being uniform. On the evening of June 9, these parties took the lead in France, in Italy, in Hungary and in Austria. In Belgium, the *Vlaams Belang* also took first place in the Flemish college. In France, the RN + *Reconquête* extreme-right block alone totalled 37% of votes cast. In Italy, the success of Giorgia Meloni's party with 28.8% of the vote and 24 seats mostly reflects the re-shaping at work on the political Right and the severe decline of the *Lega de Matteo Salvini*. The extreme-right has also advanced in Bulgaria and in Romania. On the other hand, these parties did only moderately well in Portugal, in Spain, in Sweden and in Estonia.

Finally, even though it remains strong in Hungary and in Poland, the extreme right is losing ground. It is also losing ground in Finland. In Germany, the AfD has reached a ceiling of 16% of the vote, behind the social democrats of the SPD, having been victims of several polemics during the campaign. While the main pro-European forces are still a majority, changes in the balance of power and the increasing normalisation of extreme-right players constitute basic tendencies which will necessarily weigh on the balance to come in the new European parliament, and even more so in a number of EU member states.

More than ever, the extreme right now finds itself faced with the challenge of unity and its ability to bring together forces that remain divided in the European Parliament. The great manoeuvres have already begun.

### **Electoral Macronism: from monumental failure to major risk**

*Jérôme Jaffré, Associated researcher at CEVIPOF*



When he announced the dissolution of the National Assembly on the evening of, June 9<sup>th</sup>, Emmanuel Macron undoubtedly took the greatest risk ever known to the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic. Not only did he decimate a large proportion of his own Deputies, he also made it possible for the *Rassemblement national* to come into power with an absolute majority of seats. It would be an understatement to say that the presidential majorities will approach the vote on June 30<sup>th</sup> and July 7<sup>th</sup> in a difficult

position. Since 2017, Macronism has occupied the position of a central block both in electoral terms and in terms of the partisan system. His role consisted of occupying a sufficiently large political space to bring a powerful base together and to attract reinforcements in electoral second rounds. His base was formed by the three types of centre: left of centre, the centre itself and right of centre. His social basis was original in that it brought together large numbers of high-income voters who traditionally voted for the moderate right and the most highly educated voters who would usually support social democracy.

On June 9<sup>th</sup>, the vote was an electoral failure but more profoundly, it constituted a break with what Bruno Cautrès and Anne Muxel called "an electoral revolution" in 2017. With 14,6% of votes cast, Valérie Hayer's list was both weaker than the Left - confined to the Socialists and the Greens (20% between them) and very far from the *Rassemblement national* (31,4%). By way of comparison, - and to take the measure of the changes - in the 2019 European election, the majority and the UDI lists (who today have merged into one party) won 25% of the vote, the socialist Left and the Greens were already at 20% and the RN had to settle for 23% of votes cast. The balance of power was ensured, it no longer is. Furthermore, the social basis of Macronism has shrunk, including among its peak populations of the France of the well-educated and the France of the wealthy, the addition

of which defined its originality and its strength. According to the Ipsos survey carried out on the eve of the election, Hayer's list obtained just 17% of the vote of high school graduates with three years or more of further education, barely two and a half points above his national average. He also obtained 17% of high-income votes. The gap between the low-income and high-income vote stood at nine points in 2019. In 2024, it was just four points which shows the decline of the Macron vote among the French bourgeoisie. By way of example, Neuilly-sur-Seine, a town that is synonymous with wealth, endorsed the Macron list in 2019, giving it 47,2% of the vote. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the vote here reached just 25%. We are not witnessing a change in the June 9<sup>th</sup> vote, we are witnessing a major upheaval. The Centre block has plummeted. It has just three short weeks to succeed in reversing the situation.

### **The dynamic of the vote in favour of the Raphaël Glucksmann list**

*Luc Rouban, Senior research fellow CNRS at CEVIPOF*

The success of the PS-PP list headed by Raphaël Glucksmann, who obtained 13.8% of votes cast compared to 6.2% in 2019, is the only piece of good news for the Left. The result is part of a two-fold movement towards electoral transformation. The first of these relates to the failures of lists on the Left that are in competition with each other. The relative failure of the LFI which was determined to promote a radicalised and Eurosceptical Left and the more pronounced failure of the EELV ecologists who remain incapable of drawing voters to their side. The second is linked to the failure of Macronism which has been slipping towards the Right since the reform of retirement policy in 2023 and the introduction of the 2024 law on immigration. These changes resulted in the decay of his electorate, with socialist voters returning to their original roots. However, this dynamic is not only residual. Raphaël Glucksmann took up the torch of an intellectual and bourgeois Left (23% of *higher social categories* compared to 26% *Renaissance* electorate and 14% in the LFI electorate) attempting to cast socialism in a new light that brings together social advances, ecology and European integration. This is hugely ambitious as it is as much about redesigning a modern socialist party as proposing a realistic ecological solution by transforming the EU the main actor in the struggle against climate warming.



Does this necessarily mean that the Glucksmann dynamic will be capable of stabilising a new social-democratic offer in the French political landscape capable of succeeding Macronism on the Left by ousting the LFI? Nothing is less certain as his electorate is composite in nature. When measured at the end of May 2024, 39% of this electorate had voted for the radical Left in the 2022, 17% identified as socialist voters and Green (EELV) voters 30% Were Macron voters. In other words, they represent a significant ideological diversity which will be difficult to synthesize in the forthcoming battle against RN.

### **The Ecologists: just barely...**

*Daniel Boy, Emeritus senior research fellow*



The polls had clearly predicted that the Ecologists were in danger of disappearing from the European Parliament, as their predicted score was close to the fatal threshold of elimination: 5%. In fact, with 5.5% of votes cast, the Ecologists narrowly cleared the hurdle. But this result, the worst in twenty years at a European election, was far from a victory. Compared to the result obtained by Yannick Jadot's list in 2019, 13.5%, the failure is obvious. To what do we attribute this failure? Political ecology, in France as in other countries of the European Union, is undoubtedly suffering the backlash of a

rise in far-right or populist parties. Today, fear of the consequences of supposedly uncontrolled immigration is leading many voters in the European Union to choose parties whose top priority is to tighten immigration conditions. On this issue, however, the Ecologists are seen as promoting relatively tolerant policies. They are now paying for this choice. Finally, the decline in purchasing power has always hindered the choice of environmental policies and, even today, it prevents the Ecologists from convincing the working classes of the urgency of environmental issues.

In the European Union, these conditions have led several ecologist parties to lose a large proportion of their electorate, even though in some countries (Netherlands, Denmark) pink-green coalitions achieved excellent results. However, in France, the failure of the Ecologists seems more severe than elsewhere. This is undoubtedly a sign that the handicap of an unconvincing campaign was added to the factors that effected all European countries.