

## Understanding the results the day after July 7th 2024

Eight CEVIPOF researchers offer an analysis of the results of the second round of the 2024 legislative elections:

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### **Map and Graphs After the Second Round of the July 2024 Legislative Election**

*Pierre-Henri Bono, Econometrician, specialised in the evaluation of public policy in the field of urbanism*

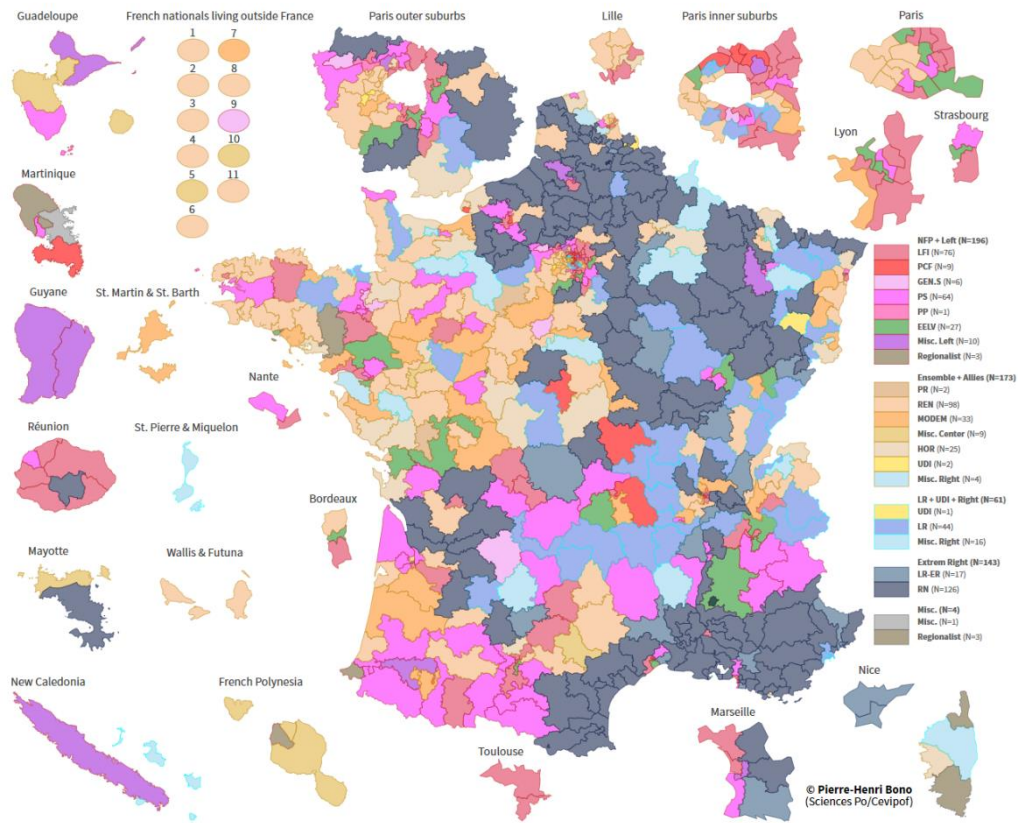


#### 1/ Map of results

This map shows the total number of deputies elected in the 577 French constituencies. The following highlights can be noted:

- No coalition has obtained an absolute majority
- 423 incumbents (i.e. those elected in June 2022 or following a by-election between June 2022 and July 2024) were re-elected (73%)
- Of the 154 new deputies, 141 have never sat in the National Assembly,
- Of the 409 duels in the second round, 60% (242) were won by the candidate who came first
- Of the 89 triangular contests, 92% (82) were won by the candidate who came first in the first round
- Two quadrangles were won by the candidate who came first

**Figure 1: Results Following the Second Round**

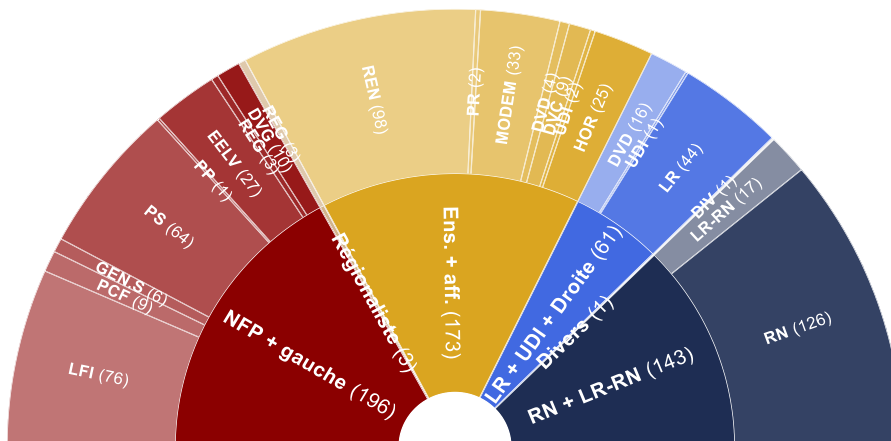


Sources: French Ministry of the Internal Affairs

2/ The 577 deputies according to coalition

The graph below shows the composition of the National Assembly according to the major coalitions and party affiliation of elected members. The decision to put a candidate in one coalition rather than another depends on the nomination or support of a party in the coalition.

**Figure 2: Composition of the National Assembly**



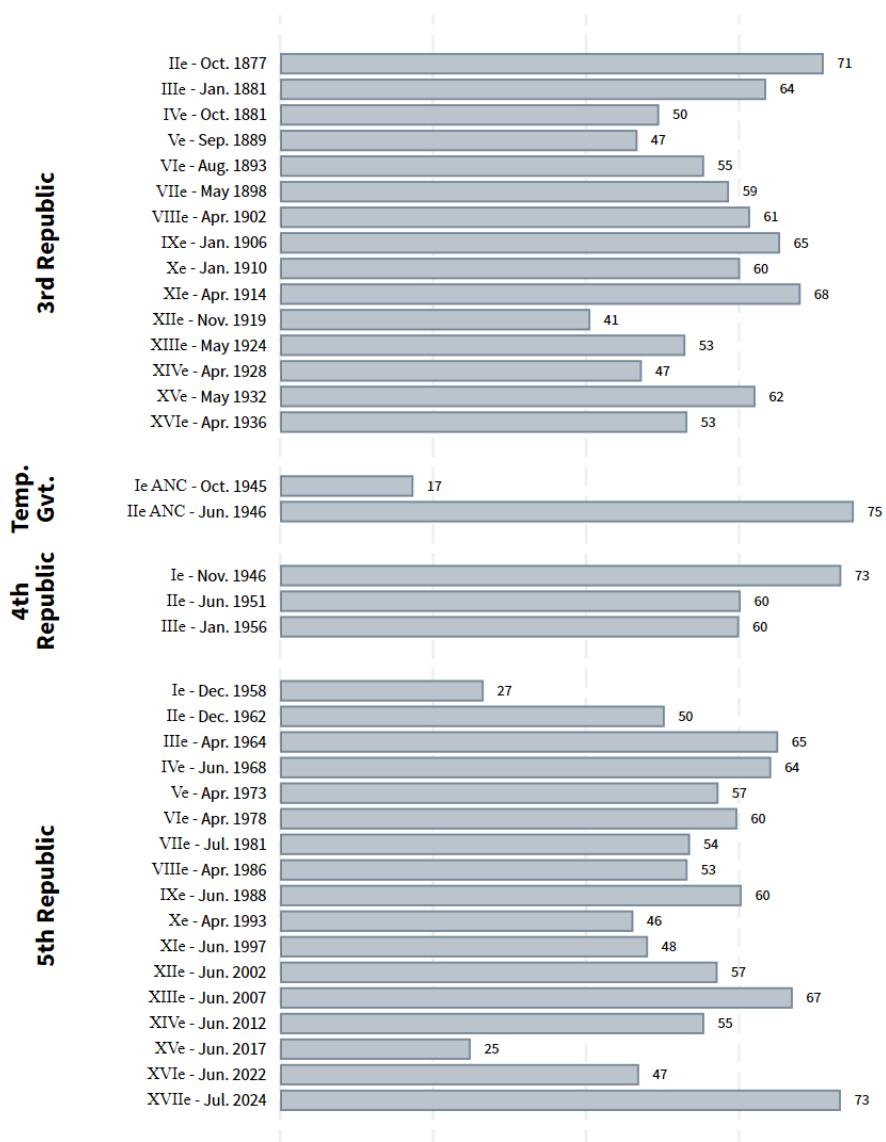
Sources: Pierre-Henri Bono (Sciences Po/ Cevipof), French Ministry of Internal Affairs

### 3/ History of the re-election of outgoing candidates

The graph below shows how this election fits into electoral history. It shows the proportion of out-going candidates who have been re-elected, i.e. who had already been elected in the previous legislative election (whether or not it was a by-election) over time and over the course of the legislature.

The July 2024 legislative election saw the highest percentage of outgoing deputies re-elected in the Fifth Republic and among the highest in the last three republics. The reputed incumbency bonus has never lived up to its name so well.

**Figure 3: Percentage of outgoing deputies**



*Note: An outgoing deputy is a deputy who was elected during the previous legislature (by-election or other or other)*

*Sources: Pierre-Henri Bono (Sciences Po/Cevipof). French National Assembly*

### 4/ Previous Political Experience of Deputies

The graph below shows the average length of time, i.e. the experience of those who make up the new assembly measured by the average number of days of candidates elected as deputies prior to the election.

In this respect, the June 2017 election came as a great shock. Never during the Fifth Republic had average experience been so low. And looking at the long term, the situation is equivalent to those encountered during changes of regime and after the Second World War.

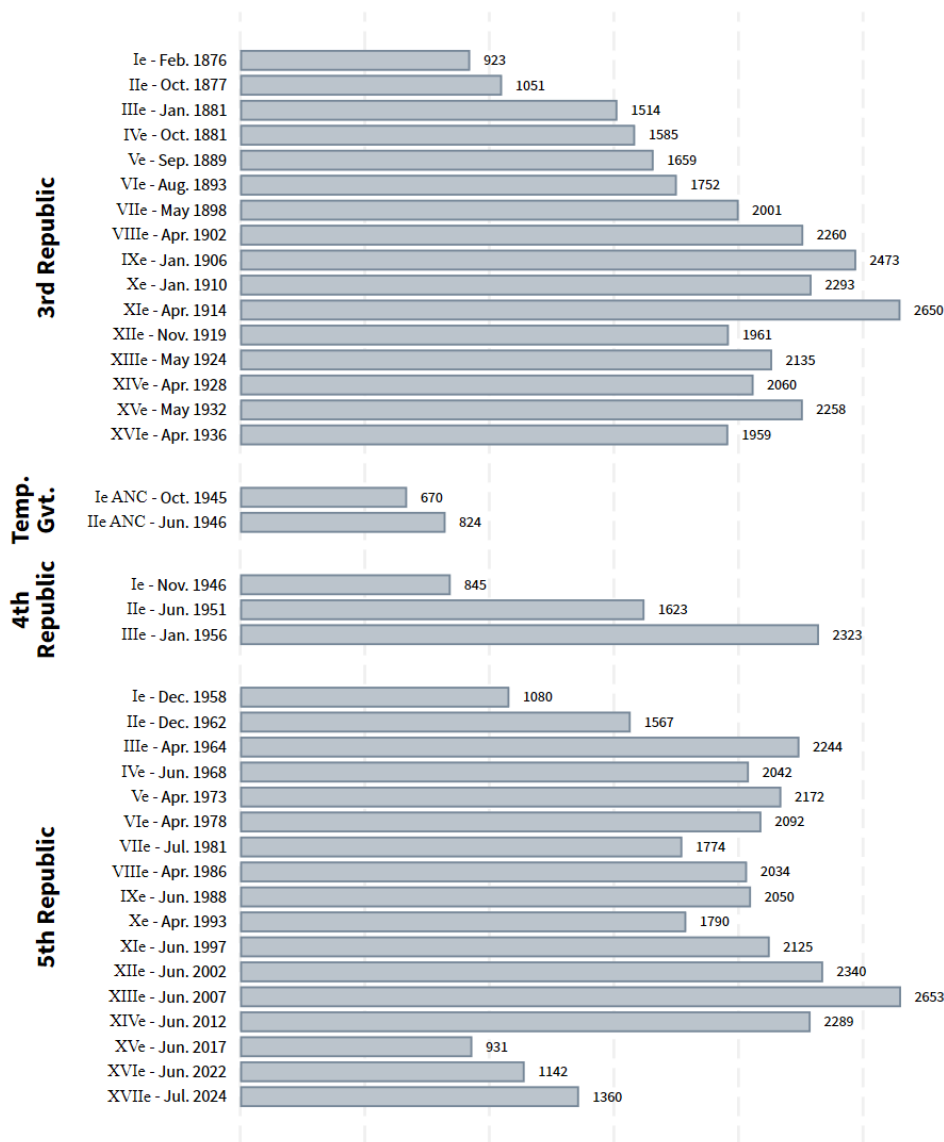
As the graph shows, in 2024, for the 17<sup>th</sup> legislature of the Fifth Republic, the average range of experience among elected deputies is low.

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**Figure 4: Political Experience of Deputies in History**



*Note: Experience is measured by the number of days a deputy has had a mandate for at the beginning of the legislature*

*Sources: Pierre-Henri Bono (Sciences Po/Cevipof), French National Assembly*

# The Most Astounding Legislative Election in the 66 Years of the Fifth Republic

*Jérôme Jaffré, Associated Researcher at CEVIPOF*

The seventeenth in the chronology of the Fifth Republic, the legislative election that took place on June 30 and July 7, 2024 was the most astounding of the series. The phenomenon was perceptible from the first round, with the first novelty being a system of parties organised into three major antagonistic and powerful blocs: the Left, the presidential majority and the extreme-right National Rally. The LR-Diverse Right group was too weak to rank equally. Until then and since the majority mutation of 1962, the dominant parties were Gaullist, Socialist or Macronist (in 2017). There were also Left-Right confrontations with internal competitions and withdrawals aimed at conquering power or maintaining it. This pattern had long persisted despite the emergence of the National Front.



The second new feature is nothing short of a major upheaval: for the first time under the Fifth Republic, the Far Right, with the NR and its allies, came out clearly ahead in the first round, with 33.2% of votes cast. The four left-wing parties had to unite to take second place, and the presidential majority was relegated to a distant third. This three-way contest, combined with a high turnout, resulted in a multitude of possible triangular contests for the second round: 306 to be exact. This was well above the 1962 record of 129 triangular contests, at a time when the conditions for qualifying for the second round were much less strict. Subsequently, a law passed in 1976 stipulated that in order to qualify for the second round, parties had to be one of the top two or obtain a minimum of 12.5% of the vote in the first round.

It is no exaggeration to say that the first round was organised to counter Emmanuel Macron and his candidates. The other two blocs had fired red-hot bullets in the same direction. None of this applied to the second round. And therein lies what is probably the most extraordinary event in the history of legislative elections under the Fifth Republic: the main opponent changed between the two rounds of voting. The Macronists were the target in the first round, and the NR in the second. What's more, the left-wing parties (including the Mélenchonists) and the presidential majority withdrew in huge numbers to ensure a single anti-NR second-round candidate was in place thus reducing the danger of splitting the vote. This tactic reduced the number of theoretical 306 triangular contests to 89. Somewhat comically, after having fought so hard against the Macronists, the Left put its efforts and votes into the second round to enable them to save a large number of seats and thus transform a predicted debacle into a more honourable setback.

While the political balance of power changed between the two rounds of voting, voters also had their say. The vote on June 30 was marked by a record score for the NR and the continued domination of LFI in the New Popular Front (NPF). The vote on July 7 saw a turnaround among part of the electorate. With 143 seats including those who had rallied to their side, the National Rally recorded a gain that would have been considered remarkable (and truly is) had the party not announced loud and clear that it was going to win an absolute majority. Meanwhile, on the left, France Unbowed, which in 2022 represented 50% of NUPES seats, now accounts for only 42% of the NPF total.

The fact remains that the National Rally, the leading party in terms of votes in both the first and second rounds, will form the largest parliamentary group in the National Assembly. But the biggest surprise on July 7 was that the New Popular Front coalition took first place in terms of the number of seats it won and considers itself to be the winner of the election. Never since 1958 has the winning coalition been so far from an absolute majority. The NPF only accounts for 31% of the seats, a long way from 50%. In the three known cases of relative majority under the Fifth Republic, the leading party was much closer: 41% of seats for the Gaullists in 1958, 48% for the Socialist Party and the Left Radicals in 1988 and 43% after all for the Macronist relative majority in 2022. Never in all the legislative elections of the Fifth Republic has the elected National Assembly found itself

so far removed from the notion of a majority and, with antagonistic blocs facing each other from within, from the governability of the country. The entire constitutional and political architecture of the Fifth Republic has been undermined.

## **The “Blockade” Vote: a Decisive Factor in Voting Decision-making**

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



Since 2017, the political disruption brought about by Macronism has been a profound game changer and has disturbed the partisan balances at the heart of the two-party system of the Fifth Republic. It has also led to deep changes in the voting habits of French citizens. While an albeit weakened central power is now in place, polarisation at the two extremes of the party spectrum has also crystallised. This development has in turn imposed positioning issues that require new types of arbitration among voters. For a long time now, voting ‘against’ or voting strategically has been competing with the ‘adherence’ vote. However, such tactics are taking on a new dimension in a context where votes marked by political radicalism, both on the Left and on the Right, have undermined the traditional governing parties. The presidential camp initially used this context to its advantage, but ultimately has paid a heavy price for doing so.

Was this what led to the President's need for clarification, with the price to be paid for that a dissolution and unprecedented political chaos in the Fifth Republic? Clearly, this election entirely orchestrated by the implementation of a Republican Front, has not provided him with a clear answer, since no solid majority has emerged from among the three political blocs. The ‘blockade’ vote was seen as an essential means of arbitration in a context that was as unexpected as it was unpredictable, whose only focus was to limit the dangers and damage incurred for the country - and more broadly for democracy. The Republican Front, whose effectiveness had been questioned, proved decisive in stemming the tide of the National Rally and bringing it back to third place after the second round of the legislative election.

The blockade vote is nothing new, having been institutionalised by the two-round single-member constituency system ("in the first round you choose, in the second you eliminate"). Nevertheless, the campaign between the two rounds of the legislative election focussed entirely on the positioning of the various candidates and parties on this issue, to the detriment of programmes or fundamental political debate. Never before had the issue of an extremist political force coming to power been so high on the agenda of the political parties involved and the reasons why voters voted.

While two thirds of voters (65%) justified their vote in the first round of the legislative election by their desire to help a candidate win, a third (35%) went to the polls primarily to vote against a candidate. This is a significant proportion and may have had an impact on the results of the vote. More women than men used their vote to this end (39% versus 31%), as did senior executives slightly more than other categories (38%). These "blockade" votes were more numerous in the Greater Paris Area (40% compared to 31% in the PACA and Corsica regions and 34% in the Hauts de France), and in the major conurbations (39% compared to 32% in rural areas).

This desire to cast a blockade vote was most pronounced among Macronist voters (44% of Ensemble! voters) and those on the right of government (45% of LR voters). It was also pronounced among NPF voters (38%), but with significant variations depending on the party. It was least pronounced among LFI and PCF supporters (26% and 32% respectively), while it was much more pronounced among EELV (42%) and especially PS (46%) voters. For their part, National Rally supporters were much less likely to use their vote in this way (16%).



In the second round, the blockade vote was distributed as follows: 43% of Republican voters, 38% of Ensemble! voters, 35% of NFP voters and only 20% of National Rally voters. The "blockade" vote thus primarily concerned voters from the centrist movements and the governing Right. More than half of them (52%) wanted to block the RN candidate in their constituency, just over a third (36%) voted against an NPF candidate, and 12% wanted to block an Ensemble! candidate.

As can be seen, many voters voted for a candidate who was very much opposed to their camp. In a duel between an LFI candidate and a RN candidate, 43% of Ensemble! voters and 26% of LR voters chose to vote for the former (38% and 36% respectively abstained). In the case of the Ensemble!/RN duel, 72% of NPF voters in the first round voted for the Ensemble! candidate.

At the end of this extraordinary electoral sequence, with three successive rounds of voting from the European elections to the second round of the legislative elections, and with unpredictable twists and turns in the balance of power, one thing is certain: French voters were hugely mobilised. The highest levels of voter turnout in a long time had a major impact on the composition of the new assembly, and the blockade vote played a decisive role, particularly in the relative failure of the RN and the unexpected performance of the NPF, as well as in the resilience of the outgoing majority.

### **Revitalised Ecology?**

*Daniel Boy, Emeritus senior research fellow*

In the unexpected sequence of European and parliamentary elections, the Ecologists got off to a poor start. By obtaining a result of 5.5% on the evening of June 9, they guaranteed their representation in the European Parliament. However, this score, their lowest for a European election in the previous twenty years, did not augur well for their performance in an election less favourable to them in principle than the European ballot. The dissolution decided by President Macron put them to the test. Whatever the reasons for this surprise dissolution, it was undoubtedly based on the inability of the almost defunct NUPES to come together in a new electoral coalition. A miscalculation, as the NUPES partners reunited speedily and within a few days had negotiated a common programme and an electoral agreement designed to put forward a single New Popular Front candidate in each constituency. Given the urgency to prepare for the election, the convergence between the programmes of the four partners (PC, LFI, PS, *Écologistes*) was hardly surprising. There was immediate agreement on a series of vigorous measures for economic recovery together with social and fiscal justice. The protection of the environment and the fight against climate change, issues that barely featured in the electoral campaign, were dealt with to a minimum in the programme agreement, which "forgot" to mention nuclear issues, the only fundamental point of disagreement between the partners. With regard to the electoral agreement itself, it has benefited the Ecologists, as they will have the same number of constituencies reserved for an Ecologist as in the 2022 legislative elections, i.e. around one hundred. In the run-up to the second round, the mobilisation of the *Écologistes*, embodied by their very convincing Secretary-General Marine Tondelier, greatly contributed to the adoption of a "republican withdrawal" approach by the NFP partners. The revitalised ecologists regained 33 seats in total the new Assembly.



## Undispelled Confusion Remains After the Second-Round Results

Bruno Cautrès, CNRS Researcher



The unexpected second round results of the legislative election were largely brought about by the major change that occurred when candidates withdrew in the name of a "Republican Front" that was largely considered to no longer be in operation. The 1,094 candidates who remained on the ballot in the 501 constituencies where the second round was to be held, came out on top in 410 duels, 89 triangles and 2 quadrangles, compared with 306 potential triangles on the evening of the first round. This fundamental change produced major effects in terms of

the rules of the electoral game in this second round. Political science has long studied these effects as have social scientists interested in decision-making mechanisms more generally. In his 1976 book (*La décision de majorité*, Presses de Sciences Po), Pierre Favre pointed out that for any majority decision-making, two voting options rather than three, or three rather than two, can change everything. This includes the fact that results not actually intended by voters may also be produced. These decision-making paradoxes usually occur in assemblies where there are few voters. Political science will undoubtedly have to take a close look at the 2024 legislative election to determine whether, for many voters, the candidate withdrawals merely changed the hierarchy of preferences (blocking the NR, voting for a candidate for rational rather than heart-felt reasons) or whether the said withdrawals went so far as to produce an unexpected result in terms of the country's dominant social choice. For the time being, it's too early to say.

What is certain, however, is that in the aftermath of this second round and its unexpected results, confusion prevail. Such an outcome is far from the clarification Macron sought to reach when he declared the dissolution of the National Assembly. The campaign between the two rounds did not focus primarily on public policy issues, but rather on questions of governance and stability (politics and policy), as well as on the credibility of a number of National Rally candidates. The confusing campaign, fraught with social divisions and conflicts of values, pitted whole swathes of the country head-on against each other. However, this did not result in a loss of electoral motivation: voter turnout was at the same level as in the first round (66.63% compared with 66.71% in the first round), a result that shows how strongly mobilised the various electorates were.

One might also have assumed that there would be a significant increase in the number of blank or spoiled votes, as a result of difficult moral dilemmas for some electorates when faced with voting choices forced by the withdrawal of candidates. However, this was not the case. Although the number of blank votes rose from 1.77% in the first round to 4.13% in the second round, the percentage remains lower than in 2022 when the blank vote totalled 5.52% in the second round. For all that, the feeling of confusion remains dominant for the time being.

Significant pressure will be exerted on the various political families likely to form a government. On this question, not everyone will be in agreement: different conclusions about the results of the election will undoubtedly be drawn within the New Popular Front and/or the former presidential majority.

Confusion is likely to reign for some time to come as the central question has not been clearly decided by this election: according to what dominant social and political choice will the government run the country for the three years to come? Will it be the programme defined by the New Popular Front or that of the former (relative) presidential majority? And what about National Rally voters? They saw their party win the European election and subsequently the first round of the legislative elections. What is their sentiment now? Clearly, this early legislative election does not – at least for the moment – provide any answers to the state of confusion, anxiety and doubt in which France finds itself.



## An Election but No Solution

*Luc Rouban, Senior research fellow CNRS at CEVIPOF*



The second round of the legislative election has shown that a majority of French voters did not want the National Rally to take power. However, a majority of them don't want the Left or Ensemble! either, as shown by the fact that none of the three groups can form an absolute majority. The legislative election has thus led to the need for a coalition government, while polarisation is reaching fever pitch: "we will not agree to any compromise in the implementation of the New Popular Front programme" says Jean-Luc Mélenchon. A crisis of regime is on the horizon, as even the return to parliamentarianism, celebrated by Raphaël Glucksmann who speaks of "appeased democracy", now seems to have resurfaced in the chronic governmental instability which was the main characteristic of the previous Fourth Republic.

What was supposed to be a powerful democratic moment, a Gaullist appeal to the people as Macron had in mind (though he had not shown many signs of Gaullism since 2017) has only worsened the political situation to unprecedented proportions. And this for three reasons.

The first is that the expectation of politics that the French public nurtured, often expressed violently since the Yellow Vests movement, has led to the return of partisan apparatuses in which they have little confidence. On the left, parties that share no common vision of either the economy, Europe or the environment have united around the NPF to counter the NR; local agreements have been reached for single LR-Renaissance-MoDem candidacies; and now plans are being discussed for a centre-left technical government combining *Renaissance* and the moderate Left either with or without LFI, depending on the interpretation. The French people wanted the election to give them a sense of citizenship and a political horizon; what they got were political manoeuvres, calculations and - no doubt - backroom deals for ministerial positions. Any coalition implies compromise and sacrifice.

The second reason is that this election did not settle or resolve anything of substance. The extreme polarisation during the election not only swept away Macronism's claims to be both right-wing and left-wing, but it also failed to allow a model for society to be chosen. The anti-Macron referendum in the first round turned into an anti-NR referendum in the second. But nobody talked about the social problems at the root of this political situation: secularism, social mobility, the call for economic autonomy, the integration of immigrants, safety in Europe and on the streets. Mobilising for or against the NR is not a project in itself.

The third, last but not least, is that the election has fuelled political readings that once again misrepresent the spirit of the institutions of the Vth Republic. The disavowal of Emmanuel Macron was systematic in the European election and in both rounds of the legislative election. General de Gaulle had always interpreted legislative elections as confirmation or disavowal elections, putting his presidency on the line, without ever imagining that a period of cohabitation<sup>1</sup> might follow, a practice introduced for the first time by President Mitterrand. Macron no longer has the authority to organise the French political landscape, he no longer calls the shots. The weakening of the presidency will combine with the downsizing of his parliamentary base. The question of a new presidential election may therefore emerge very quickly.

<sup>1</sup> In French politics, 'cohabitation' refers to a situation where the President is from a political party that is different from the majority in the National Assembly.

## Should Majority Rule be Preserved?

Martial Foucault, Full Professor in Political Science at Sciences Po Paris,  
Holder of the Chaire de recherche sur les Outre-mer at Sciences Po Paris



In the space of just one week, opinions on the virtues and limitations of the two-round majority voting system have evolved in line with the results of the 2024 legislative elections. The question of reforming the voting system to instil a dose of proportional representation (Emmanuel Macron's initial project in 2018 aborted due to the Yellow Vests crisis) or imposing full proportional representation on a departmental basis (a project supported by France Unbowed) has resurfaced following the absence of an absolute majority at the end of the second round of the legislative election.

As the cornerstone of Fifth Republic institutions, majority rule has become the criterion used to legitimise the vote, ensuring an absolute majority in all elections until June 2022 (with the exception of 1988). This rule has often been presented as a republican umbrella fending off the rise of the extremes. The ballot on June 30 last seems to have rendered this principle obsolete (the National Rally took first position in 289 out of 577 constituencies, totalling 10.6 million votes and 33.2% of the vote). In the second round, however, the situation was completely reversed, with the NR winning 143 seats but still with 10 million votes, or 37% of the vote. Without the two-round voting system, it is highly likely that the Republican Front would never have seen the light of day and reversed the trend of the first round.

So, should we do away with the majority system and introduce a proportional system to appoint parliamentary deputies? If such a reform were to be adopted, it would fulfil at least two objectives: 1- it would guarantee that all political parties were represented (and no longer only those who qualified for the second round) and 2- it would re-parliamentarise the democratic life of the country.

The arguments against proportional representation are well known. They include the ghost of parliamentary instability under the Fourth Republic and the difficulty of cohabiting<sup>1</sup> within a semi-presidential system. However, the results of the 2024 legislative election second round produced a situation of immediate ungovernability under the majority system. As a result, the party leaders will be forced to attempt the adoption of a coalition culture in order to secure a sufficiently strong majority for the government to govern.

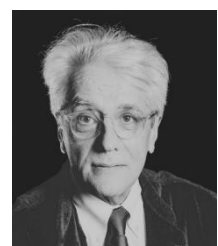
Now that France is the last European country to elect its deputies using a two-round majority system, the time has come to reflect on the evolution of our institutional rules which, since the end of the 19th century, have seen proportional representation or the first-past-the-post system take over everywhere in Europe, except in France.

<sup>1</sup> In French politics, 'cohabitation' refers to a situation where the President is from a political party that is different from the majority in the National Assembly.

## What Kind of Government Would Work in a Political Context Which Resembles a Cracked and Broken Mirror?

*Pascal Perrineau, Full Professor*

The 17th legislative election of the Fifth Republic has just taken place, resulting in a political and parliamentary landscape that has never been so fragmented. From 1958 to 2017, every election resulted in stable governments organised around the political party that won the legislative election (UNR, UDR, RPR-UDF, PS, UMP, LREM). Even in 1988, when the PS and its allies won only a relative majority of seats in the National Assembly, a government led by Michel Rocard was formed,



with a group representing 48% of the seats and seeking parliamentary support on a case-by-case basis from the centrists and communists. In 2022, everything went wrong as the majority coalition attracted just 43% of deputies (250 out of 577) and had been struggling to govern for the past two years.

Some forty seats short of an absolute majority, the majority camp will only survive by drawing on the tools of streamlined parliamentarianism, in particular Article 49-3<sup>1</sup>, and the critical support or benevolent abstention of one or other segment of the opposition. In such a context, voting on bills can become somewhat chaotic. Two examples of this would be the pension reform law (2023) and the asylum and immigration law (2024) both of which resembled an obstacle course. The Borne and Attal governments have operated under very difficult conditions.

After the results of the legislative election in June-July 2024, the situation has become even more complex. Whereas in 2022, the political party that came out on top controlled 250 of the 577 seats the New Popular Front, which is in the lead and wants the Prime Minister to be appointed from among its ranks, has only won around 180 seats (to which can be added around ten from other left-wing parties). With around 170 seats the members of the outgoing majority come just behind the Left. In third place, the RN (and its Ciottist<sup>2</sup> ally) saw its first-round surge curbed by the "Republican Front" strategy implemented by the Left and by Macron's government. Just over 140 seats were won by Jordan Bardella's party and its allies. At a significantly lower level, the Republicans and various other right-wingers have remained resilient with around sixty seats.

National representation is now a cracked and broken mirror. The three pillars of the tripolar space were quite distinct in terms of their strength in 2022. Ensemble! won 250 seats, the left-wing parties making up NUPES won 151 and the RN 89. Today, these three pillars appear to be evening out. This is likely to result in reciprocal neutralisation and blockage. No single platform has clearly emerged which means that no group can claim to be the backbone of a new parliamentary majority.

The solution of a strong platform capable of rallying an absolute majority of seats to itself does not exist: the RN is powerful, but it remains a solitary power that has lost its "platform position"; the Left, buoyed by a happy surprise in the second round, cannot be assured of internal unity and may find it difficult to find allies in the central bloc. Finally, Macron's party is less weakened than one might have liked to believe but is also home to a number of different sensitivities. It cannot therefore act as a rallying force. This leaves the possibility of a minority government being formed. Such a government would regularly need to seek episodic support or benevolent neutrality from other groups. This is similar to how the government has functioned over the last two years. The National Rally is strategically isolated and exposed to a "Republican Front strategy" designed to reinforce its ostracism. It cannot in any case implement a policy of compromise and alliance which is not in its political DNA.

The Left is divided between a desire for reform, possibly accompanied by social-democratic compromise and a revolutionary sensitivity that is hostile to any negotiation that would escape its absolute power. It is therefore not in a position to rally beyond its already divided camp. Ensemble! has lost more than a third of its deputies, due to the sanction vote which has had heavy repercussions for the party. Obviously, the party that has lost the most seats is not in a position to lead the way.

Faced with this difficulty of putting a lasting minority government in place, some dream of a government of republican concentration, as was imagined at the end of the nineteenth century to avoid the victory of the monarchist Right. This political formula has always been fragile and fraught with internal divisions, particularly between radicals and opportunists.

France is about to witness governments rushing through current affairs and endless negotiations between partisan sides, as was the case in Belgium. It is doubtful that the clarity of the political system will benefit from such a context and that the country

will be able to afford the luxury of governmental impotence for too long. The inability of politicians to deal with the major issues of the day (purchasing power, immigration, insecurity, public deficits, etc.) was at the root of the current crisis in political representation. If the government remains powerless, it will not improve - quite the contrary - a situation that is already disastrous.

Would the situation be any different today with political temperaments different from those of Gérard Larcher, Edouard Philippe, François Bayrou, Marine Tondelier, Olivier Faure and Fabien Roussel? No matter who was elected, wouldn't a government of this kind appear above all else as an alliance of opposites, driven by a single objective: to prevent the National Rally (NR) from gaining a possible victory?

That leaves one last solution: a government of technicians that would ensure the temporary neutrality of many of the elected representatives in place. This approach has never been used in France, and smacks of technocracy and anarchy at a time when revolt against elites of all kinds is in full swing. Admittedly, in Italy, the former president of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi, led a government of this type for a year and a half, which had the advantage of getting the country back on track. However, he had the support of almost all the parties in Parliament, "*combinazione*" is a particularly Italian art, and the government was soon caught up in party intrigues.

<sup>1</sup> This article allows a government to take responsibility for a bill which can then be adopted without having to be approved by vote.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Ciotti is the President of LR. He made an agreement with the NR to put forward candidates with the support of the party.