

Research Briefing

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France: recent political developments and the 2024 National Assembly elections



Summary

- 1 Background and recent developments
- 2 The 2024 National Assembly elections
- 3 Election aftermath and government formation

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Summary

The French President, Emmanuel Macron, called early elections for the National Assembly following the European Parliament (EP) elections in June 2024. In the EP elections, Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) were the leading party with 31.4% of the vote.

Macron called the National Assembly election just two years after the last Assembly elections in 2022 when no political party or alliance had won a majority. Macron said that he [could not act "as if nothing had happened"](#) and said that France needed a clear majority. However, the elections held on 30 June and 7 July accentuated a three-way split in the Assembly, with Macron's Ensemble alliance losing seats, while RN and an alliance of left-wing/centre-left parties made gains.

Changes in the party system in France

Prior to 2017, when Macron was first elected president at the head of his new centrist En Marche! (EM) party, French politics was dominated by rival blocs on the centre-right and centre-left. EM (later becoming Renaissance, forming part of the broader Ensemble alliance) [took votes from both its left and its right](#), with the centre-left Socialist Party (PS) and centre-right Republicans (LR) losing ground in elections in 2017 and 2022.

Further to the right, RN has however made gains. The presidential elections in 2017 and 2022 were both contested in second-round run offs between Macron and Le Pen. In both elections, supporters of other candidates in the first round backed Macron in the second-round, forming a so-called "republican front".

Le Pen has pursued a [strategy known as "de-demonisation"](#) to make RN, often labelled a "far right" party more acceptable to voters and establish it as a potential governing force. This has involved [paying greater attention to cost-of-living issues](#), while also presenting a [hardline stance on migration](#), calling for a ban on the Islamic headscarf, and for preference for French citizens in public housing and social services. Le Pen has shifted from advocating French withdrawal from the EU to pledging to keep France in the EU and reform it from within. Critics have [highlighted Le Pen's and RN's ties with Russia](#) and previous pro-Russia line, although Le Pen [sought to distance RN from these positions](#) following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The highest placed left-of-centre candidate in the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections was Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of France Unbowed (LFI), which has eclipsed the PS as the main party of the left. Mélenchon has [advocated wealth taxes and high tax rates for the top earners](#) and in the past

has [been supportive of Russia and authoritarian left-wing leaders](#) in Latin America and advocated French withdrawal from NATO and the EU.

LFI, the PS, the Communist Party (PCF) and Ecologists formed [an alliance for the 2022 National Assembly elections](#). PS left the alliance in late 2023 after [Mélenchon refused to describe Hamas as a terrorist group](#). There were also [splits over Ukraine](#), with PS and the Ecologists disagreeing with LFI and PCF criticism of the government approach. The alliance was nevertheless [resurrected as the New Popular Front \(NFP\)](#) for the 2024 election.

Developments since 2022

Following the 2022 elections, Ensemble continued to lead the government relying on the support of LR in key votes. The government made frequent use of Article 49.3 of the constitution that [allows the government to force some legislation through parliament without a vote](#) which can then only be overturned by a vote of no-confidence in the government, with LR supporting it in confidence votes. This included a [pension reform in early 2023](#), to increase the retirement age from 62 to 64 by 2030, amid much protest. A new restrictive immigration law was adopted by the National Assembly in December 2023, with support from LR and RN, [leading to disquiet within the governing coalition](#).

The election campaign

Polls at the start of the 2024 election campaign indicated that RN would win the most seats, but NFP closed the gap during the campaign. There was a [split in LR](#), with its leader Eric Ciotti backing an alliance with RN which the bulk of the party refused to go along with.

Both RN and NFP [pledged to reverse the government's pension reform](#), while also making a range of other spending pledges. RN also proposed [measures to drastically reduce legal and illegal immigration](#) while NFP pledged to reverse the immigration law adopted in December 2023.

During the campaign, President Macron continued to attack [“the extremes” of the right and left](#). Ensemble leaders attacked the spending plans of both the RN and NFP [as unworkable and irresponsible](#). RN rowed back on some of its costly pledges, and also [distanced itself from previous pledges](#) to withdraw from NATO's military command and promote dialogue with Russia.

Positions taken by Mélenchon and others on the left on Israel and Palestine were highlighted during the campaign, with some of their opponents [accusing them of antisemitism](#). Accusations of far left antisemitism [also came from RN](#), but RN also faced accusations of antisemitism and racism, with [media](#)

[reports highlighting comments](#) and past unlawful behaviour among some of its candidates.

Election results

Elections to the National Assembly are based on a two-round system in the 577 constituencies. To win in the first round, [candidates need to obtain 50% or more votes](#) from at least 25% of registered voters. Where no candidate wins in the first round, candidates winning more than 12.5% of the votes of registered voters go through to the second round.

After the first round of voting on 30 June, RN were the [leading political party](#) with 29.3% of the vote and [leading in 297 seats](#). 501 of the 577 seats went to a second round, with over 300 of these contests having three or more candidates. Both Ensemble and NFP then [called on their candidates to withdraw from second-round contests](#) where there was a better placed candidate to beat RN. The instruction from Ensemble was, however, less clear where the NFP candidate was from LFI, with Ensemble leaders indicating the call to withdraw would only apply [where the NFP candidate shared “republican” values](#).

Withdrawals [reduced the number of three-way contests](#) in the second round on 7 July to under 100. Although RN again finished ahead on vote share, with 32.1% of the vote, the “republican front” meant it [finished behind NFP and Ensemble on seats](#). NFP won 178 seats over the two rounds, followed by Ensemble with 150 and RN with 125. Ciotti’s group brought an additional 17 deputies allied to the RN, while the main LR slate won 39 seats.

Far from bringing the “clarification” that Macron had sought, commentators noted that the elections had [brought greater instability](#) and further weakened his authority. Whereas prior to the election the governing parties had been able to win votes in the National Assembly with the help of LR, this would [no longer be possible in the incoming Assembly](#).

Michel Barnier leads new government

As the leading bloc in terms of seats, the NFP [demanded that it should lead the government](#). However, Macron insisted that his choice of prime minister would [need to be able to command a wider majority](#). Government formation was [delayed over the summer](#). On 5 September 2024, Macron [appointed Michel Barnier of LR](#) (a former foreign minister, European Commissioner and EU Brexit negotiator) as Prime Minister. Reports suggested that this [followed talks with Le Pen](#), who had said RN would oppose other candidates but not block Barnier.

Barnier's government was announced on 21 September 2024, with most ministers coming from Ensemble and a smaller number from LR. These developments [sparked protests from the left](#), with Mélenchon branding it a [government of "election losers"](#).

NFP tabled a vote of no confidence in the government on 8 October 2024. The government defeated the motion, with the help of RN which [said it would abstain "for now"](#) on confidence votes.

1 Background and recent developments

Shortly after Emmanuel Macron had won re-election to the French Presidency in 2022, his centrist coalition lost its majority in elections to the National Assembly. Although the centrist Ensemble coalition established by Macron was the leading political bloc in the chamber, a bloc of parties on the left and National Rally on the right both held a significant number of seats with the Assembly split three-ways.

The government subsequently encountered difficulty in passing legislation, though it used powers granted to it under the French constitution to force controversial bills through parliament.

1.1 French constitution and political system

The French Fifth Republic established in 1958 created a semi-presidential system. Executive power is held by the President. The President was originally elected for a seven-year term, but this was amended to a five-year term prior to the 2002 election.

The President appoints the Prime Minister, who directs the operation of the Government and needs to command majority support in the National Assembly. Ministers are constitutionally prohibited from being members of Parliament.¹

Parliament

The bicameral Parliament comprises the Sénat (Senate) and the Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly). The National Assembly has 577 Members elected for five years by universal adult suffrage (555 for metropolitan France and 22 for the overseas territories). The Senate has 348 members elected indirectly by an electoral college made up largely of representatives of local authorities, for a six-year term (with half the senate terms expiring every three years).²

As with the presidential election, a two-round system operates for the National Assembly. Candidates are elected at the first round where they win

¹ Europa World, [France, Government and Politics](#) [accessed 1 October 2024]

² Europa World, [France, Government and Politics](#) [accessed 31 October 2022]

an absolute majority (more than 50%) of vote and the vote of at least 25% of registered votes. If these conditions are not met, a second round takes place.³

Whereas in the presidential election the top two candidates go through to a second-round run-off, in the National Assembly all candidates winning more than 12.5% of the votes of registered voters (not simply 12.5% of those who have voted) go through to the second round, or the top two candidates if two candidates do not reach this threshold. There can however be pressure for candidates to drop out to prevent certain candidates winning in the second round.⁴

The French constitution provides that legislation should be adopted in identical form by both the National Assembly and the Senate. However, ultimately where the two do not agree then the National Assembly can adopt a legislative text without the agreement of the Senate. Where the two chambers cannot agree on a text, a joint committee composed of members of both chambers is appointed to work out a text. If the joint committee fails to agree on a common text, or if the text is not passed as provided, the government may ask the National Assembly to reach a final decision after a further reading by the National Assembly and by the Senate.⁵

The constitution gives the government the power to force a bill through parliament without a vote by making it a matter of confidence. Under a procedure set out in Article 49.3 of the constitution, a government bill can be adopted unless a resolution of no-confidence is passed by the National Assembly within the next twenty-four hours. The procedure can be used multiple times for the passing of a Finance Bill or Social Security Financing Bill. It can also be used one other time in each annual parliamentary session (October to June) for the passing of another bill.⁶

Powers of President

The President has considerable powers under the constitution, including appointing the Prime Minister and dissolving the National Assembly, thereby forcing new legislative elections. If the President dissolves the National Assembly, this cannot be repeated for another year.⁷

When the President is from the same party as their government then they are effectively head of the executive and can drive through their policy agendas with little formal opposition. This makes the position of the French President

³ Europa World, [France, Government and Politics](#) [accessed 1 October 2024]

⁴ [France's mysterious two-round voting system, explained](#), Euractiv, 28 June 2024

⁵ French National Assembly, [Constitution of October 4, 1958](#), accessed 23 January 2023

⁶ French National Assembly, [Constitution of October 4, 1958](#), Articles 49-50, accessed 23 January 2023

⁷ Article 12 of the constitution.

uniquely powerful in comparison to other major democracies.⁸ France's legislature is also considered one of the weakest in Europe.⁹

However, the Prime Minister is required to lead a government that can command a majority in the National Assembly. There are times, therefore, when the President and Prime Minister are from different parties. This is called 'cohabitation' and before 2024 had happened three times in the history of the Fifth Republic. The last period was between 1997 and 2002 when centre-right President Jacques Chirac had to work with the Socialist Lionel Jospin. The presidential term was reduced from seven years to five in 2000 as the result of a constitutional referendum, in part to align the electoral cycles and reduce the scope for cohabitation to occur.¹⁰

During such periods the president cannot impose their domestic agenda on the government and must negotiate their programme with them.¹¹ The constitution gives the prime minister the power to direct the actions of the government and ensure the implementation of legislation.¹²

Some commentaries suggest that the president has reserved powers in defence and foreign affairs.¹³ This is less than clear cut given that the constitution gives responsibility for national defence to the prime minister (article 21) and states that the government will have "the armed forces at its disposal" (article 20). However, the constitution makes the president the "guarantor of national independence" and "territorial integrity" of France and of respect for its treaties (article 5), and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, presiding over the higher national defence councils and committees (article 15). The president's role also includes to "negotiate and ratify treaties" (article 52). The president holds the nuclear codes and alone decides on their use.¹⁴

1.2

Changes in the French party system

The decline of the centre-left and centre-right parties

Recent elections in France have seen a decline in the fortunes of what were previously the two main parties of the centre left and centre right, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (LR). The PS had held the Presidency of France from 1981 to 1995 and from 2012 to 2017. LR is a rebranded version of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) which was formed in 2002 and brought together the Gaullist-conservative Rally for the Republic (RPR) and

⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, [How Powerful Is France's President?](#), 25 April 2017

⁹ [The 'flaws' of French democracy](#), BBC News, 12 June 2014.

¹⁰ [What's a cohabitation in French politics and what are the precedents?](#), Le Monde, 17 June 2024

¹¹ Council on Foreign Relations, [How Powerful Is France's President?](#), 25 April 2017

¹² Article 21 of the constitution. See also: [What's a cohabitation in French politics and what are the precedents?](#), Le Monde, 17 June 2024

¹³ Council on Foreign Relations, [How Powerful Is France's President?](#), 25 April 2017

¹⁴ [What's a cohabitation in French politics and what are the precedents?](#), Le Monde, 17 June 2024

the more liberal and centrist Union for French Democracy (UDF).¹⁵ The UMP/RPR held the Presidency from 1995 to 2012 and predecessor parties held the presidency of the French Fifth Republic from its foundation in 1958 to 1981.¹⁶

The loss of support for the “mainstream” centre-left and centre-right parties has been partly explained as being a result of the creation of Macron’s centrist En Marche! (EM) movement (later Renaissance) in 2016, which took votes from its left and right.¹⁷

The rise of Macron and En Marche!

2017 elections

The 2017 presidential election was the first time in the history of the French Fifth Republic that neither of the main centre-left or centre-right parties or their predecessors had made the final run-off. Macron was elected to his first term as President of France in May 2017.¹⁸ Macron had been Minister for the Economy in the PS-led government under the previous President, François Hollande, but had quit in 2016 shortly after establishing EM.¹⁹

Macron’s election programme pledged economic reform, including lowering taxes on companies and low paid workers, and making reductions in the numbers of civil servants and state spending. However, he also promised a programme of public investment and modernisation and to preserve many of the benefits of France’s social welfare system.²⁰

Macron beat Marine Le Pen of the National Front (FN) by 66.1% to 33.9% of votes in the second round of the election, after leading in the first round of the elections in April 2017 with 24% of the vote against 21.3% for Le Pen. François Fillon of LR was third with 20%, with Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the left-wing France Unbowed (LFI) fourth with 19.6%.²¹

Following the presidential election, Macron’s renamed La République en Marche (LREM) was successful in National Assembly elections in June 2017, winning a resounding majority with 308 seats while an allied party, the Democratic Movement, won 47 seats. LR and PS, were reduced to 113 and 29

¹⁵ [Sarkozy renames French opposition The Republicans](#), BBC News, 30 May 2015; [Old differences threaten ruling UMP party power](#), France 2024, 30 March 2011

¹⁶ Andrew Knapp, From the Gaullist movement to the president’s party, in Jocelyn Evans (ed), [The French Party System](#) (PDF), Manchester University Press, 2003, p121-136

¹⁷ Philippe Marlière, [This time around, the threat of a Le Pen presidency is real](#), UCL Europe blog, 13 April 2022

¹⁸ [Emmanuel Macron defeats Le Pen to become French president](#), BBC News, 8 May 2017. For more information and background on the 2017 French presidential election see House of Commons Library briefing paper 7962, [The French Presidential election 2017](#)

¹⁹ [France’s maverick Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron resigns](#), France 24, 20 August 2016

²⁰ House of Commons Library briefing paper 7962, [The French Presidential election 2017 \(second round\)](#)

²¹ See House of Commons Library briefing paper 7962, [The French Presidential election 2017 \(second round\)](#)

seats respectively.²² Several former prominent LR members joined LREM. These including the first prime minister appointed by Macron, Édouard Philippe, and his successor Jean Castex.

LREM was renamed again as Renaissance in September 2022.²³

2022 elections

In the 2022 Presidential election, Macron promised “complete renewal”, involving increased spending in some areas to be partly funded by increasing the pension age to 65. There would be an expansion of nuclear, wind and solar power, increased spending on the military and the police and continued support for Ukraine following the Russian invasion.²⁴

Macron repeated his victory over Le Pen in the run-off but the gap between the two closed. Macron defeated Le Pen by 58.5% to 41.5% in the second round on 24 April. In the first round of elections on 10 April, Macron received 27.9% of the votes, ahead of Le Pen on 23.2% and Jean-Luc Mélenchon of LFI on 22.0%. Eric Zemmour, a candidate viewed as further to the right than Le Pen, came fourth with 7.1% of the vote while the traditional parties of the centre-right and centre-left lagged further behind.²⁵

As in 2017, Macron was able to benefit from an anti-Le Pen vote in the second round, winning over voters from defeated centre-right and left-wing candidates. Supporters of Mélenchon were however less likely to switch to Macron, with many not voting in the second round. The majority of his voters that did vote in the second round nevertheless voted for Macron.²⁶

However, LREM could not repeat its success at National Assembly elections held in June 2022, with no party or alliance able to command a majority. LREM formed part of the broader Ensemble (together) coalition which was the leading bloc with 245 seats. The New Ecological and Social People’s Union (NUPES), a left-wing coalition which included LFI, the PS, the Ecologists and various other left-wing parties won 131 seats. Le Pen’s re-named National Rally (RN) party won 89 seats and LR won 61 (with an additional three deputies in an allied party).²⁷

²² See House of Commons Library briefing paper 8015, [The 2017 French parliamentary elections](#)

²³ [Macron’s party changes name to ‘Renaissance’](#), Politico, 5 May 2022

²⁴ [French Presidential Elections 2022 - The candidates and the policies - Part 2](#). RFI, 30 March 2022; [French elections: Macron v Le Pen and two visions for France](#), BBC News, 21 April 2022

²⁵ [2022 French presidential election – first-round results](#), France 24 [accessed 12 September 2024],

²⁶ The Guardian, [French election 2022: full second round results](#), 25 April 2022

²⁷ French Ministry of the Interior, [Résultats des élections législatives 2022](#) [accessed 19 September 2022]; IFES Election Guide, [Elections: French National Assembly 2022 Round 2](#), International Foundation for Electoral Systems, modified 26 October 2023 [accessed 10 September 2024]

The tripolarisation of French politics

Commentaries have highlighted a shift in the French party system since 2017 towards a “tripolarisation” of French politics.²⁸ As explained in an article by Mathias Bernard of the Université Clermont Auvergne (UCA), this was grouped around the following three blocs:

- i) A liberal, centrist and pro-EU bloc which coalesced around President Macron’s LREM/Renaissance.²⁹
- ii) A populist and identity-based pole on the right, dominated by Le Pen and RN but with votes also going to Zemmour in 2022. Le Pen benefited in 2022 from the comparison with Zemmour, who was viewed as a more extreme candidate.
- iii) A radical left-wing pole, dominated by Mélenchon, but also including Communist and Trotskyist candidates. Support for the PS, which aligned with this bloc in 2022, had however plummeted.³⁰

In 2022, the three poles received 25% to 30% in the first round of the presidential election and similar numbers in the National Assembly election. Overall, there had been a further shift to the right in 2022, with Le Pen and Zemmour combined winning more than 30% of the vote in the presidential election and both LREM and LR having moved rightwards.³¹

Increasing support for National Rally

RN’s performance in the 2022 elections, with 89 seats in the National Assembly elections (with 18.7% of the vote in the first round and 17.3% in the second³²) and 41.5% of the vote in the second round of the presidential elections, were an unprecedented high for the party. In the previous National Assembly elections in 2017 it had won eight seats, and the only previous election in which it had reached double figures was in 1986 when France switched to proportional representation for one election and it won 35 seats.³³

²⁸ Lise Esther Herman and Marta Lorimer, [The French elections of 2022: Macron’s half victory in a changing political landscape](#), UK in a changing Europe, 28 August 2023

²⁹ [Macron’s party changes name to ‘Renaissance’](#), Politico, 5 May 2022

³⁰ Mathias Bernard, [First round of the French election: apparent stability, yet a profound reconfiguration](#), The Conversation, 11 April 2022

³¹ Mathias Bernard, [First round of the French election: apparent stability, yet a profound reconfiguration](#), The Conversation, 11 April 2022; Philippe Marlière, [This time around, the threat of a Le Pen presidency is real](#), UCL Europe blog, 13 April 2022

³² French Ministry of the Interior, [Résultats des élections législatives 2022](#) [accessed 19 September 2024]

³³ Europa World, [France: Profile](#) [accessed 16 September 2024]

FN/RN has often been labelled as a far right party.³⁴ It has also been described as a populist radical right party.³⁵ The other leading parties in France have historically worked to exclude it from power at the national level, forming a so-called “republican front” by advocating votes for alternatives whenever a FN/RN candidate reaches a run-off in France’s two-round electoral system.³⁶ Commentaries on the 2022 elections noted that this was beginning to break down with voters from the “mainstream” parties moving to RN in second-round run-offs.³⁷

Since taking over as leader of FN from her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in 2011, Marine Le Pen has pursued a strategy known as “de-demonisation” to make the party more acceptable to voters and establish it as a potential governing force.³⁸ This involved expelling her father in 2015, when he repeated comments dismissing the Holocaust as a detail of history, and the adoption of the new RN name in 2018.³⁹

Ahead of the 2017 presidential election, Le Pen attacked the impact of globalisation on France and warned that its cultural identity was being threatened by radical Islam.⁴⁰ She pledged to free France from what she described as the “tyrannies” of globalisation, Islamic fundamentalism and the EU.⁴¹ This also involved a proposed referendum on renegotiated EU membership terms.⁴² Le Pen has however subsequently shifted from advocating French withdrawal from the EU to pledging to keep France in the EU and reform it from within. Critics have nevertheless commented that some RN policies would be incompatible with EU membership obligations.⁴³

Critics have also highlighted Le Pen’s and RN’s ties with Russia and previous pro-Russia line, including financial support for RN from a Russian bank. Le Pen sought to distance RN from its pro-Russia line following the Russian

³⁴ [France's National Front renamed 'National Rally'](#), France 24, 1 June 2018; Joseph Downing, [How the French far-right rose to prominence](#), The Conversation, 3 July 2024

³⁵ Cas Mudde, [Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe Today](#) (PDF) in Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Tendencies, edited by John Abromeit, York Norman, Gary Marotta, Bridget Maria Chesterton, Bloomsbury publishing, 19 November 2015

³⁶ [Could proportional representation work for France?](#), Euractiv, 16 June 2017; [French elections: what is the republican front – and will it head off National Rally?](#), The Guardian, 4 July 2024

³⁷ [The unprecedented progression of the Rassemblement National in the legislative elections](#), Le Monde, 23 June 2023

³⁸ [How Le Pen's far-right party went from 'de-demonisation' to 'normalisation'](#), France 24, 4 August 2022

³⁹ Marta Lorimer, [10 Years of Marine Le Pen – When gaining a lot may not be enough](#), Populism in Action project, University of Birmingham, 1 March 2021

⁴⁰ [France election: Far-right's Le Pen rails against globalisation](#), BBC News, 5 February 2017; [Marine Le Pen promises liberation from the EU with France-first policies](#), The Guardian

⁴¹ [Marine Le Pen promises liberation from the EU with France-first policies](#), The Guardian, 5 February 2017

⁴² See House of Commons Library briefing paper 7962, [The French Presidential election 2017 \(second round\)](#)

⁴³ [Le Pen's U-turn on EU policy is proving difficult to sell](#), Euractiv, 21 April 2022

invasion of Ukraine in 2022 but opposed military support for Ukraine and further sanctions against Russia.⁴⁴

In the 2022 presidential elections, having a prominent candidate, Eric Zemmour, further to the right of her was viewed as of benefit to Le Pen. Zemmour focused on identity issues while Le Pen was able to pay greater attention to cost-of-living issues, helping to “normalise” her candidacy.⁴⁵ Le Pen’s policy programme included doubling support for single mothers, exempting young workers up to the age of 30 from income tax and an emergency financial support package for the health service.⁴⁶

Le Pen also called a for referendum on ending what she described as “anarchic and massive immigration”, as well as an end to family reunification for migrants, expulsion of foreign criminals and undocumented migrants, and stricter rules on entering France and obtaining citizenship.⁴⁷ In line with the party’s traditional calls for “national preference” she proposed that French citizens be given priority in housing and access to social services ahead of foreign nationals.⁴⁸ Referring to the headscarf as a “uniform” for those with a radical vision of Islam, she called for an outright ban and fines for women wearing it in public places.⁴⁹

Le Pen stepped down as party leader to focus on leading the RN parliamentary group following the 2022 National Assembly elections. Jordan Bardella, then aged 27 and viewed as a protégé of Le Pen, was elected to replace her as RN president in November 2022.⁵⁰ Le Pen was still expected to play a leading role in RN and be its presidential candidate again in 2027.⁵¹

France Unbowed and shifts within the French left

The PS won the French presidency in 2012 but subsequently lost support to both LREM in the centre and LFI to its left. The PS candidate in the 2017 presidential election, Benoît Hamon, came in fifth place with 6.4% of the vote

⁴⁴ Marlene Laruelle, [Marine Le Pen, the Rassemblement National and Russia: history of a strategic alliance](#), The Conversation, 21 April 2022; [Le Pen’s far right served as mouthpiece for the Kremlin, says French parliamentary report](#), France 24, 3 June 2023

⁴⁵ Mathias Bernard, [First round of the French election: apparent stability, yet a profound reconfiguration](#), The Conversation, 11 April 2022

⁴⁶ [French Presidential Elections 2022 - The candidates and the policies - Part 2](#), RFI, 30 March 2022

⁴⁷ [French Presidential Elections 2022 - The candidates and the policies - Part 2](#), RFI, 30 March 2022

⁴⁸ Philippe Marlière, [This time around, the threat of a Le Pen presidency is real](#), UCL Europe blog, 13 April 2022

⁴⁹ [French elections: Macron v Le Pen and two visions for France](#), BBC News, 21 April 2022

⁵⁰ [France’s far-right National Rally elects new president to replace Le Pen](#), The Guardian, 5 November 2022

⁵¹ [Jordan Bardella: French National Rally has new leader to replace Le Pen](#), BBC News, 5 November 2022

in the first round.⁵² In the 2022 election, the PS candidate Anne Hidalgo finished in tenth place in the first round with 1.8% of the vote.⁵³

In both the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections, the leading left of centre candidate was Jean-Luc Mélenchon, with 19.6% in 2017 and 22% in 2022.⁵⁴ Unlike other candidates on the left and centre-left he did not endorse Macron in the second round of these elections.⁵⁵ Mélenchon is a former member of the PS, and was a minister in Lionel Jospin's PS-led government from 1997 to 2002. He left the PS to form the Left party in 2009 before founding LFI in 2016.⁵⁶

LFI has been labelled hard left, far left or radical left.⁵⁷ Mélenchon uses anti-establishment discourse and has also been described as a charismatic orator. He has also been described, including by himself, as a populist.⁵⁸ He has been dismissive of the traditional left in France and in the past has been on friendly terms with left-wing leaders in Latin America, including the former president of Venezuela Hugo Chávez. He has opposed global free trade deals and advocated French withdrawal from NATO.⁵⁹

In 2017, Mélenchon's election platform included substantial increases in spending, financed partly by increased borrowing and partly by higher taxation, including a proposed 90% tax rate on income levels over €400,000.⁶⁰ He also advocated changes to EU policies, including ending independence of the European Central Bank and changes to Member State debt and deficit limits, with a referendum on France leaving the EU if renegotiation demands were not met. Other policies included increases to the minimum wage and public sector pay in France, stricter limits on working

⁵² See House of Commons Library briefing paper, [The French Presidential election 2017 \(second round\)](#)

⁵³ House of Commons Library briefing paper, 9522, [France: 2022 presidential election and future prospects](#)

⁵⁴ House of Commons Library briefing paper, 9522, [France: 2022 presidential election and future prospects](#)

⁵⁵ Philippe Marlière, [Jean-Luc Mélenchon and France Insoumise: The Manufacturing of Populism](#) (PDF), in Giorgos Katsambekis, Alexandros Kioupiolis (eds), *The Populist Radical Left in Europe*, London, Routledge, 2018; Philippe Marlière, [This time around, the threat of a Le Pen presidency is real](#), UCL Europe blog, 13 April 2022

⁵⁶ [French elections: Who is Mélenchon and what does his Nupes alliance want?](#), BBC News, 15 June 2022; Mathias Bernard, [Macron's 2017 victory was supposed to usher in a new politics – instead, France remains gripped by political crisis](#), *The Conversation*, 11 January 2022; Martial Foucault, Elizabeth Beasley, Daniel Cohen and Yann Algan, [The rise of populism and the collapse of the left-right paradigm: Lessons from the 2017 French presidential election](#), Centre for Economic Policy Research, 7 September 2018

⁵⁷ Reuters, [Jean-Luc Melenchon: Star of France's hard-left poses problem for election victors](#), 9 July 2024

⁵⁸ Philippe Marlière, [Jean-Luc Mélenchon's populist gamble](#), *Open Democracy*, 27 October 2017

⁵⁹ Philippe Marlière, [Jean-Luc Mélenchon and France Insoumise: The Manufacturing of Populism](#) (PDF), in Giorgos Katsambekis, Alexandros Kioupiolis (eds), *The Populist Radical Left in Europe*, London, Routledge, 2018

⁶⁰ [Boost public spending, tax the rich - French left-winger's election pledges](#), RFI, 20 February 2017

hours and changes to the French constitution to reduce the power of the president.⁶¹

Mélenchon proposed similar policies in the 2022 presidential election. His programme included wealth taxes, renationalisation of rail and motorways, an increase in paid holidays, requisition of empty housing to house the homeless, and the convening of a constituent assembly in order to create a Sixth French Republic.⁶²

Decline of the French Communist Party

As well as PS, PFI has eclipsed the French Communist Party (PCF) on the French left. The PCF was historically one of the strongest Communist parties in Western Europe, winning around 20% of the vote in elections in the 1960s and 1970s before the PS firmly established itself as the principal party of the French left.⁶³ It joined PS-led governments in the early 1980s and between 1997 and 2002 but its vote share has subsequently declined further, falling to 1.2% and 10 seats in 2017.⁶⁴

NUPES

In 2022 legislative elections, PFI, the PS, the PCF, Europe Ecology – the Greens (EELV) and other centre-left parties formed the NUPES alliance with Mélenchon and PFI playing the leading role. The alliance admitted to policy differences, which included differing approaches to the EU. They did however agree on a programme which included reducing the retirement age from 62 to 60, implementation of wealth taxes, an increase in the minimum wage, a freeze on the prices of basic essentials, and the creation of a million jobs.⁶⁵

NUPES received 31.6% of the vote in the second round of the elections.⁶⁶ Of the 131 seats won by NUPES, PFI took 75 seats (compared to 17 in 2017) whereas PS won 27 and PCF won 12 (the PS slightly declining and PCF slightly increasing compared to 2017). EELV (renamed as the Ecologists in 2023⁶⁷) won 16 seats, compared to one in 2017.⁶⁸

There were subsequent splits in the NUPES alliance over positions taken on Ukraine and the Israel-Gaza conflict. Mélenchon's refusal to describe Hamas as a terrorist group following its attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 led to the

⁶¹ [Factbox: Jean-Luc Melenchon's presidential election policies](#), Reuters, 14 April 2017

⁶² [French Presidential Elections 2022 - The candidates and the policies - Part 2](#), RFI, 30 March 2022

⁶³ [What happened to the French Communist Party?](#), The French history podcast, 19 May 2023

⁶⁴ [The French Socialists and the legacy of a fragmented left](#), History and Policy, 1 June 2007; Nick Parsons, [Macron won a huge majority, but he is supported by only one in five voters](#), LSE Europpe blog, 20 June 2017

⁶⁵ [French elections: Who is Mélenchon and what does his Nupes alliance want?](#), BBC News, 15 June 2022

⁶⁶ French Ministry of the Interior, [Résultats des élections législatives 2022](#) [accessed 19 September 2024]

⁶⁷ [Europe Écologie-Les Verts launches its Ecologists movement](#), Global Green News, 4 November 2023; [Why do French political parties keep changing names?](#), Le Monde, 19 August 2024.

⁶⁸ [Start of Macron second term upended by hotly-contested legislative elections](#), Le Monde, 19 June 2022

PS suspending participation in the alliance.⁶⁹ The PS and the Ecologists also disagreed with LFI and PCF criticism of the government approach to Ukraine and their calls for an international peace conference which would consider Russia's territorial demands.⁷⁰ Mélenchon has been criticised for supporting Russian actions before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and for downplaying antisemitism.⁷¹

1.3

Macron's presidency

Macron's first term

President Macron and the LREM-led government promoted a series of economic reforms, including labour market reforms which provoked industrial action by public sector workers. The government's proposed tax reforms, including a carbon tax, led to wider anti-government protests, known as the "gilets jaunes" (yellow jacket) protests.⁷² This led the president to announce a freeze on fuel taxes and energy prices at the end of 2018.⁷³ In July 2019, proposed pension reforms which would entail an increased retirement age for many workers led to a series of strikes and demonstrations. The government then withdrew the proposed retirement age increase in January 2020.⁷⁴

In July 2021, the National Assembly approved the so-called "anti-separatism" law proposed by President Macron at the end of 2020.⁷⁵ This was presented by Macron as addressing "Islamist separatism" in French society and followed the beheading of schoolteacher Samuel Paty in October 2020. The law created new offences on threatening public sector employees, spreading information on social media to cause harm and obstructing teaching functions. It also extended prohibitions on the wearing of religious symbols including the headscarf in the public sector and introduced stricter controls on religious associations and home schooling and against forced marriages and the practice of "virginity tests".⁷⁶ The legislation was criticised by the left for being anti-Muslim, and by the right for not going far enough.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ [Socialist Party suspends participation in France's left-wing Nupes coalition](#), RFI, 18 October 2023

⁷⁰ [Sliver of hope for unity in French left collapses over war in Ukraine](#), Euractiv, 14 March 2024

⁷¹ [Jean-Luc Mélenchon is a disaster for the French left – his response to the attack on Israel proves it](#), The Guardian, 27 October 2023; [French PM lashes out at leftist leader Mélenchon after antisemitic assault](#), Politico, 20 June 2024

⁷² [Who are the gilets jaunes and what do they want?](#), The Guardian, 7 December 2018

⁷³ Europa World, [France, Recent History](#) [accessed 31 January 2023]

⁷⁴ [France's pension reform compromise: The light at the end of the metro tunnel?](#), France 24, 14 January 2020; Europa World, [France, Profile - The 'Gilets Jaunes' Protests and Reform Proposals](#) [accessed 31 January 2023]

⁷⁵ [France's anti-separatism bill deemed constitutional with only minor changes](#), RFI, 14 August 2021

⁷⁶ [Macron vows to fight radical Islam with crackdown on foreign influence](#), Politico, 2 October 2020

⁷⁷ [France's lower house approves anti-separatism bill to battle Islamist extremism](#), France 24, 23 July 2021

Macron's second term

As noted above, LREM/Ensemble was unable to retain a majority in the National Assembly at the June 2022 legislative elections. This was an unprecedented situation for the French Fifth Republic as for the first time there was neither a majority bloc supporting the President nor a unified alternative bloc able to command a majority in support of a “cohabiting” government. In previous periods of cohabitation, coherent government was still possible due to the nature of the French constitution which gives the Prime Minister and government authority over domestic affairs, while the President retains powers over external affairs and defence. The situation was also unusual in 2022 because National Assembly elections that come straight after presidential elections usually result in a clear majority for a bloc of parties supporting the President.⁷⁸

Borne government

Élisabeth Borne of LREM, had been appointed by Macron as Prime Minister in May 2022 following the presidential elections and continued in the post at the head of a minority government. Although a clear majority or coalition government in support of the President was not possible, Ensemble and LR came to an agreement whereby the government would receive LR support in confidence motions and other key votes.⁷⁹

Borne's government nevertheless found it difficult to pass legislation. The government resorted to the use of Article 49.3 of the French constitution several times at the end of 2022 to push budget and financial legislation for 2023 through parliament.⁸⁰ Both NUPES and RN responded by tabling separate no-confidence votes. But these motions did not pass, even when National Rally voted with a NUPES motion, as the government had the support of LR to defeat them.⁸¹ The government invoked the clause again several times in late 2023 to pass the budget for 2024.⁸² By the end of 2023, the Borne government had used the article 23 times.⁸³

⁷⁸ [Legislative elections: A fragmented France in search of a functional majority](#), Le Monde, 19 June 2022; [Start of Macron second term upended by hotly-contested legislative elections](#), Le Monde, 20 June 2022

⁷⁹ Europa World, [France: Profile - The 2022 Presidential and Legislative Elections](#) [accessed 13 September 2024]

⁸⁰ [Macron forces budget through divided French parliament](#), France 24, 19 October 2022; [Social security budget: French PM bypasses Assemblée Nationale for the fifth time](#), Le Monde, 22 November 2022

⁸¹ [Macron forces budget through divided French parliament](#), France 24, 19 October 2022; [Le Pen joins forces with far-left in no-confidence vote against Macron](#), Politico, 24 October 2022; French National Assembly, [Rejet de 2 motions de censure: Adoption de la 1ère partie du P.L.F. 2023 - Assemblée nationale, 24 October 2022](#). See also [Budget : l'Assemblée nationale rejette les motions de censure de la Nupes et du RN](#), Le Monde, 24 October 2022

⁸² Europa World, [France: Recent Developments - Government Crisis](#) [accessed 20 September 2024]

⁸³ Vie publique, [Le recours à l'article 49.3 de la Constitution](#), last updated 20 December 2023, accessed 20 September 2024; [Elisabeth Borne utilise l'article 49.3 pour la 23e fois de la législature](#), Libération, 19 December 2023

Pension reform

The government also used Article 49.3 to push through its pension reform in early 2023. This had been a long-standing goal of President Macron that was thwarted in his first term.⁸⁴

The reform involved gradually increasing the retirement age from 62 to 64 by 2030, with people expected to have worked for at least 43 years to get a full pension. Those who started working before the age of 20 will be able to get early retirement.⁸⁵ The government said the plan would benefit poorer workers, as it would also enable an increase in the minimum monthly pension.⁸⁶ Public sector workers in jobs deemed physically or mentally arduous would keep the right to retire early.⁸⁷

The announcement of the proposals led to strike action by trade unions and mass protests, with demonstrations across France.⁸⁸ Both the left and RN said they would seek to block the reform but the government initially hoped for support from LR deputies to pass the legislation given their previous support for reform.⁸⁹ However, with support from LR deputies uncertain the government said in March 2023 that it would invoke the Article 49.3 clause, leading to further protests and two confidence votes in the National Assembly which the government won.⁹⁰ Some LR deputies voted against the government in one of the confidence motions, which was narrowly won by the government.⁹¹ The reform was eventually adopted following a ruling by the Constitutional Council on its legitimacy in April 2024.⁹²

Immigration law

A new immigration law was adopted by the National Assembly in December 2023, with support from LR and RN. The government had made changes to the original text of the bill after it was rejected in a parliamentary vote earlier in the month. The left had argued that it was too repressive while RN and LR said it did not go far enough.⁹³

The legislation curtailed access to citizenship, social benefits and family reunification procedures for migrants. Proposals to issue work visas for irregular migrants if they had stable employment were amended so that they

⁸⁴ BBC News, [French plan to raise retirement age by two years to 64](#), 10 January 2023

⁸⁵ RFI [French PM Borne unveils revamp of pension payments](#), 10 January 2023

⁸⁶ Politico, [Day of reckoning for Macron on French pension reform](#), 18 January 2023

⁸⁷ RFI [French PM Borne unveils revamp of pension payments](#), 10 January 2023

⁸⁸ BBC News, [French plan to raise retirement age by two years to 64](#), 10 January 2023

⁸⁹ Financial Times, [‘We must work longer’: Macron prepares for fight over French pensions reform](#), 9 January 2023; France 24, [French Government pushes pension reform through to parliament](#), 23 January 2023

⁹⁰ [French MPs file no-confidence motion, clashes erupt over pension reform](#), France 24, 17 March 2023

⁹¹ [Macron's pension reform adopted by French Parliament after government survives no-confidence votes](#), Le Monde, 20 March 2023

⁹² [French pension reform: Constitutional Council approves core of bill, rejects referendum request](#), Le Monde, 14 April 2023; [France's top constitutional body rejects bid to hold referendum on pension reform](#), France 24, 3 May 2023

⁹³ [Emmanuel Macron's government in crisis after migration bill defeat](#), BBC News, 12 December 2023

would be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Restrictions were also placed on foreign citizens wishing to study in France.⁹⁴ The legislation won the support of RN, but 27 deputies from the governing coalition parties voted against and 32 abstained. Some government ministers also expressed reservations, and the health minister, Aurélien Rousseau of Renaissance, resigned. Leaders of a third of departments (local authorities) said they would not implement provisions related to benefits for non-citizens.⁹⁵

The Constitutional Council issued a ruling at the end of January 2024 striking off parts of the legislation. These included measures making the payment of some social benefits to foreign nationals conditional on their employment status and the introduction of quotas to restrict the number of immigrants admitted to France over a three-year period.⁹⁶

Borne replaced by Attal

Following rumours of a government overhaul, Borne resigned as Prime Minister on 8 January 2024 and was replaced the following day by Gabriel Attal, until then the education and youth minister. A wider government reshuffle followed. Aged 34, Attal was France's youngest and first openly gay prime minister.⁹⁷

Attal was faced with a protest by farmers which began in January over EU farming policies, low purchase prices for agricultural products and proposed reductions in subsidies for farmers' diesel fuel. Blockades were established across France but were ended at the beginning of February after Attal announced new support measures for the agricultural sector.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ [Le Pen claims 'ideological victory' after French lawmakers approve contested immigration bill](#), Euractiv, 20 December 2023

⁹⁵ [French MPs pass controversial immigration reform](#), BBC News, 20 December 2023

⁹⁶ Europa World, [France: Recent Developments - Government Crisis](#) [accessed 20 September 2024]

⁹⁷ [French PM Élisabeth Borne resigns ahead of expected reshuffle](#), BBC News, 8 January 2024; [How Gabriel Attal became France's youngest-ever prime minister](#), France 24, 9 January 2024

⁹⁸ Europa World, [France: Recent Developments - Government Crisis](#) [accessed 20 September 2024]

2 The 2024 National Assembly elections

2.1 Macron calls elections

President Macron called early parliamentary elections as results came in for the European Parliament (EP) elections on 9 June 2024. Le Pen's RN was the leading party in the EP elections in France with 31.4% of the vote. Macron's coalition trailed in second with 14.6% of the vote.⁹⁹

In calling the election, Macron said he could not act “as if nothing had happened”, that France needed a clear majority “if it is to act in serenity and harmony” and the people needed to have their say. Macron also referred to the “rise of nationalists and demagogues” as “a danger to our nation” and to “France's position in Europe and in the world”. He referred to his opponents on the left and right as “unholy alliances at the two extremes”. He indicated that a reason for calling the elections was to halt the momentum of RN saying that he did not want “to give the keys to power to the far right in 2027 [the date of the next presidential election]”.

Some analysts suggested that in calling the election Macron was seeking to seize the initiative by inviting voters to make a choice between his own centrist bloc and parties which he viewed as undermining France and its position in the world. The opposition had been calling for fresh elections and Macron may have been seeking to pre-empt attempts to bring down the government. Other analysts suggested that Macron thought RN was likely to be the leading party at the election and that a period in government would lead to its popularity declining and damage its chances at the 2027 election.

Following Macron's calling of the National Assembly elections on 9 June 2024, political parties in France had less than three weeks to agree on alliances and strategy for the election, outline their political programmes and set out their case to the French electorate. The first round of the elections would take place on 30 June, and the second round on 7 July.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ European Parliament, [2024 European election results](#) [accessed 26 September 2024]

¹⁰⁰ [Macron calls shock French elections after far-right rout](#), Reuters, 9 June 2024

2.2

Alliance formation and party divisions

Divisions on the right

Two days after Macron announced the election, LR leader Eric Ciotti called for an alliance between his party and the RN and said he had already held talks with Le Pen and RN leader Bardella. This caused a huge row within LR with several other senior party figures, including the head of the LR group in the National Assembly and the president of the Senate, rejecting the idea.¹⁰¹ The move was also criticised by Macron, who called it a “pact with the devil”.¹⁰² Bardella confirmed there was an agreement for RN to support LR candidates. However, on 12 June, an emergency meeting of the party’s political bureau dismissed Ciotti from the leadership.¹⁰³ Ciotti had tried to prevent the meeting taking place by ordering that the doors of the party headquarters be locked.¹⁰⁴

The party secretary-general Annie Genevard and vice-president François-Xavier Bellamy were then expected to take over the leadership of the party.¹⁰⁵ However, a Paris court decision on 13 June suspended the decision to remove Ciotti from the leadership.¹⁰⁶ Ciotti continued to present himself as leader of LR and fielded a slate of 62 candidates (including two incumbent deputies) in alliance with RN. The main LR slate, supported by the rest of the party leadership fielded 400 candidates, including 59 incumbent deputies.¹⁰⁷

In the midst of celebrating their result in the European Parliament elections, which they said delivered a “clear message” to President Macron and to EU leaders, RN leaders welcomed the calling of legislative elections.¹⁰⁸ Le Pen said RN was “ready to exercise power ready to defend the interests of the French, ready to put an end to mass immigration [and] ready to make the

¹⁰¹ [French conservatives in turmoil as leader backs Le Pen alliance for snap elections](#), France 24, 11 June 2024

¹⁰² [Macron says he called snap elections to prevent rise of far right in 2027 presidential vote](#), France 24, 12 June 2024

¹⁰³ [France's rightwing Les Républicains vote out leader Éric Ciotti over election pact with far right](#), France 24, 12 June 2024; [France's Republicans ditch leader over far-right alliance deal](#), BBC News, 12 June 2024

¹⁰⁴ [French conservative leader locks opponents out of party headquarters](#), Politico, 12 June 2024; [French conservative party leader Ciotti deposed after tumultuous day](#), Le Monde, 13 June 2024; [Barricades, betrayal and bust-ups: Macron triggers a wild week in French politics](#), CNN, 15 June 2024

¹⁰⁵ [Uncertainty looms for French Les Républicains as Ciotti ousted over alliance with far right](#), Euractiv, 13 June 2024

¹⁰⁶ [Paris court overturns decision to expel Ciotti as head of France's right-wing Les Républicains](#), France 24, 14 June 2024

¹⁰⁷ Corrine Deloy, [Dissolution of the National Assembly and early general elections: Emmanuel Macron's gamble](#), Fondation Robert Schuman, 25 June 2024; [Controversial right-wing party leader Eric Ciotti announces his re-election in parliamentary elections](#), Le Monde, 23 September 2024; [How Bolloré, the 'French Murdoch', carried Le Pen's far right to the brink of power](#), France 24, 25 June 2024

¹⁰⁸ [France: Marine Le Pen's far-right party makes historic gains in EU elections](#), Euronews, 9 June 2024

purchasing power of the French a priority”.¹⁰⁹ Le Pen also welcomed Ciotti’s proposed alliance, saying that the “pseudo sanitary cordon” (whereby the “mainstream” political parties worked together to exclude her party) was “disappearing”.¹¹⁰ Jordan Bardella would be RN’s candidate to be Prime Minister, although he said that he would only take the position if RN won an outright majority in the election.¹¹¹

The potential of a broader alliance of the right also caused divisions further to the right. Reconquest leader Eric Zemmour expelled Marion Maréchal (the niece of Le Pen) on 12 June after she called on party supporters to back candidates in Ciotti’s proposed alliance with the RN.¹¹² Maréchal was one of five Reconquest MEPs elected on 9 June, but three of the four others were also expelled by Zemmour. The four expelled MEPs had all criticised Zemmour for scuppering an alliance with RN, although RN had also refused to be associated with Zemmour.¹¹³

Left-wing parties form popular front

On 10 June, the day after the election was called, the leaders of PFI, PS, PCF and the Ecologists announced that they were forming a New Popular Front (NFP).¹¹⁴ This re-established the NUPES alliance that fought the 2022 election. As noted above, the alliance had fallen apart over the last year, with the PS suspending participation after LFI’s refusal to label Hamas a terrorist group in October 2023, and there were also disagreements on Ukraine.¹¹⁵ The main parties of the left and centre-left ran separately in the EP elections in early June 2024. The PS however ran on the joint “Wake up Europe” list together with a small centre-left party, Public Place, and polled 13.8% of the vote. It overtook LFI which polled 9.9%.¹¹⁶

Public Place was founded in 2017. Its co-founder Raphaël Glucksmann, headed the joint list with the PS for the European Parliament elections and his campaign was viewed as central to the revival of the fortunes of the moderate pro-EU centre left.¹¹⁷ Although Glucksmann had clashed repeatedly with Mélenchon, Public Place also joined the NFP. Glucksmann said that France

¹⁰⁹ [Macron calls snap election after EU setback: What’s at stake for France?](#), Al Jazeera, 10 June 2024

¹¹⁰ [French conservatives in turmoil as leader backs Le Pen alliance for snap elections](#), France 24, 11 June 2024

¹¹¹ [France’s far-right leader says he will not be PM without absolute majority](#), The Guardian, 19 June 2024

¹¹² [Court overturns move to expel Ciotti as head of France’s Republicans party](#), RFI, 15 June 2024; [Barricades, betrayal and bust-ups: Macron triggers a wild week in French politics](#), CNN, 15 June 2024

¹¹³ [Political future of expelled newly elected Reconquête! MEPs in question](#), Euractiv, 13 June 2024; [Maréchal to ‘build her own party’ after Reconquête implodes in French election chaos](#), Brussels Signal, 13 June 2024

¹¹⁴ [French left agrees to form new ‘Popular Front’ in parliamentary elections](#), Le Monde, 11 June 2024

¹¹⁵ [Socialist Party suspends participation in France’s left-wing Nupes coalition](#), RFI, 18 October 2023

¹¹⁶ European Parliament, [2024 European election results](#) [accessed 18 July 2024]

¹¹⁷ [Raphaël Glucksmann, the man who revived France’s centre-left](#), France 24, 26 June 2024; [European elections 2024: Socialist Raphaël Glucksmann wins his gamble, coming in third place](#), Le Monde, 9 June 2024

could not be left “to the Le Pen family” but that in joining the NFP, he had obtained “extremely clear commitments” on Ukraine, the EU and the Israel-Palestinian conflict.¹¹⁸

The NFP did not appoint a lead or prime ministerial candidate going into the election, with Glucksmann and the leaders of the PS, Ecologists and PCF parties indicating that they did not want Mélenchon to take this role.¹¹⁹

The NFP published its programme on 21 June, pledging to reverse several changes introduced under Macron’s presidency including its reforms to unemployment benefits and pensions, and the immigration law adopted in December 2023 (see below).¹²⁰ The NFP parties agreed on a slate of candidates for the first-round of the elections, with the LFI fielding 229 candidates, 175 for the PS, 92 for the Ecologists and 50 for the PCF.¹²¹

Ensemble coalition renewed

Macron’s Ensemble coalition was revived for the 2024 election, under the name Ensemble “Ensemble pour la République” (together for the Republic).¹²²

This includes his own Renaissance party, the Democratic Movement (known as MoDem) and Horizons.

MoDem is an older centrist party, formed as a successor party to the UDF in 2007.¹²³ It joined forces with En Marche! to support Macron’s election in 2017.¹²⁴

Horizons is a centre-right party formed by Macron’s first prime minister Édouard Philippe in 2021.¹²⁵

Other smaller centrist parties, including the Radical Party and the Union of Democrats and Independents, also joined the alliance.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ [‘We can’t leave France to Le Pen’: Leading left-winger Glucksmann throws weight behind new alliance](#), France 24, 26 June 2024

¹¹⁹ [A ‘non’ for Mélenchon? France’s left seeks unifying figure ahead of legislative elections](#), France 24, 13 June 2024

¹²⁰ The Local – France, [Explained: The party manifestos for France’s snap elections](#), 17 June 2024

¹²¹ [French election: Your guide to a vote that is set to shake the EU and NATO](#), Politico, 20 June 2024

¹²² [Législatives 2024 : la majorité sous la bannière “Ensemble pour la République”](#), Europe 1, 13 June 2024

¹²³ [France’s third man fades into background](#), Reuters, 9 August 2007

¹²⁴ [French elections: Emmanuel Macron and François Bayrou form alliance](#), The Guardian, 22 February 2017

¹²⁵ [Ex-PM Philippe launches his own political party](#), Euractiv, 11 October 2021

¹²⁶ Ensemble pour la République, [Notre Projet](#) [accessed 26 September 2024]

2.3

Party programmes

The main parties and alliances made the following pledges in the run-up to the election, either through formal programmes or other statements:

Ensemble

- Promoting the creation of 200,000 industrial jobs and the opening of 400 factories
- Reforming social contributions for the low paid in order to increase their net pay and expand the scope for employers to pay bonuses to workers free of tax
- Work to address tax loopholes while not increasing the tax burden
- Reduction of energy prices through reform of the European electricity market
- Setting minimum agricultural prices for farmers
- Continuing work to reduce carbon emissions, developing eight new nuclear reactors and offering electric vehicles through a leasing system
- Launching a “great national debate” on secularism in France
- Continuing France’s support for Ukraine, in particular through sending aircraft, weapons and ammunition.
- Ending EU trade negotiations with countries that do not respect the Paris Climate agreement
- Doubling the French army budget by 2030.¹²⁷

NFP

- Cancelling the pension age increase from 62 to 64 and instead reducing the pension age to 60
- Increasing the minimum wage by 15% to €1,600 a month
- Capping the prices of essential food products and cancelling planned increases in gas and electricity
- Introducing a mileage tax on imported products and a minimum agricultural price guarantee for farmers

¹²⁷ [Législatives 2024 : quels sont les programmes des principaux partis?](#), Le Monde, 5 July 2024

- Promoting renewable energy, including offshore wind and tidal energy, and a moratorium on new highway projects
- Financing the programme, at an estimated cost of €30 billion a year, through a wealth tax on assets and high incomes and a tax on the “super-profits” of businesses
- Reversing the immigration law adopted in December 2023. Access to visas would be facilitated and ten-year residence permits made the standard. There would be safe and legal pathways to claim asylum, a new status of “climate displaced persons”, and a rescue agency for irregular migrants established
- Establishing a Sixth Republic through an elected citizen constituent assembly. Proportional representation would be implemented for legislative elections and article 49.3 of the constitution allowing government legislation to be adopted without a vote in parliament would be repealed.
- On Israel and Palestine, acting for the release of hostages held by Hamas as well as “Palestinian political prisoners”. The state of Palestine would be recognised immediately, and there would be an embargo on arms sales to Israel.
- Defending “the sovereignty and freedom of the Ukrainian people” including through delivery of the “necessary weapons”
- At the EU level, seeking an end to the “austerity constraints” of the EU growth and stability pact, and of free trade treaties such as the EU-Canada (CETA) deal, and reform of the common agricultural policy.¹²⁸

National Rally

- Suspending VAT on essential products “in the event of high inflation”
- Reducing VAT on fuel, electricity, gas and fuel oil to 5.5% and negotiating an exemption from European electricity market rules to the advantage of France.
- Replacing the real estate wealth tax with a financial wealth tax
- Reversing the government’s pension reform, returning to 62 as the retirement age and to 60 for those who started working before the age of 20

¹²⁸ [Législatives 2024 : quels sont les programmes des principaux partis?](#), Le Monde, 5 July 2024; [Who are the left-wing alliance that won France's election?](#), BBC News, 7 July 2024; [France's new left-wing alliance unveils ambitious economic programme – and how they'll pay for it](#), France 24, 21 June 2024; [What are the top three French parties offering voters as they go to the polls today?](#), The Journal, 30 June 2024

- Removing subsidies for wind turbines and gradually dismantling existing projects and launching a new nuclear energy plan
- Reviewing the ban on the sale of new cars with combustion engines by 2035 and eliminating low-emission zones in urban areas
- Reserving social benefits for French nationals or for those who have worked for at least five years in France. Residency permits would be withdrawn from non-French citizens unemployed for more than one year
- Measures to drastically reduce legal and illegal immigration and deport foreign criminals, and asylum claims to be processed outside of France. Also reinstating the criminal offence of illegal presence in France (included in the 2023 immigration law but struck out by the constitutional council), and restricting medical aid to undocumented migrants to cover emergencies only
- Abolishing legislation granting French citizenship to those born on French soil to foreign parents
- Prohibiting dual nationals from holding “certain strategic positions” in the French state apparatus
- Establishing a presumption of self-defence for members of the police, stricter sentencing including penalties for parents of juvenile offenders
- Introducing a proportional representation element in legislative elections
- Increasing the defence budget by around 25%
- Opposing the recognition of a Palestinian state “as things currently stand”
- Establishing a moratorium on new EU free trade agreements, a “double” EU and French border, and reducing the French budget contribution to the EU.¹²⁹

The Republicans

The following are pledges from the main LR slate, rather than those candidates that followed Ciotti in supporting an alliance with RN:

- Removing “unnecessary” regulations and putting in place a moratorium on new regulations, and lowering costs on business
- Increasing net salaries by lowering social security contributions

¹²⁹ [Législatives 2024 : quels sont les programmes des principaux partis?](#), Le Monde, 5 July 2024; The Local – France, [Explained: The party manifestos for France's snap elections](#), 17 June 2024

- Continuing to develop the nuclear sector, defunding wind energy and removing taxes on electricity that finance wind turbines
- Taxing imports that do not meet French standards
- Lower taxes on rental income to put housing back on the market
- Reserving non-contributory social assistance for residents legally in France for several years
- Restricting state medical aid for undocumented migrants to urgent care only
- Introducing into the constitution a prohibition on rule “prohibiting one from relying on one's religion or one's origin in order not to respect the laws of the Republic”
- Reforming juvenile justice, reinstating minimum sentences and recruiting more police officers
- Providing continuing support to Ukraine but not allowing it to join the EU.¹³⁰

2.4 Election campaign

Opinion polls during the election campaign showed the RN, together with its allies in Ciotti's group of Republicans, as the leading party, although the NFP was closing the gap. An opinion poll the weekend before the first round of elections showed the RN and Ciotti's group on 35.5% of the vote, with the NFP on 29.5% and Ensemble on 19.5%.¹³¹

Focus on spending plans of left and right

During the campaign, President Macron continued to present the governing alliance as a guarantee for stability in France against what he described as “the extremes” of the right and left.¹³² He warned that a victory for either side would risk bringing “civil war” to France.¹³³ Both Macron and Attal also attacked the spending plans of both the RN and NFP as unworkable and irresponsible, pointing to questions raised by economists about the feasibility of their plans.¹³⁴ There were also government warnings about an adverse market reaction akin to that which occurred in the UK following the

¹³⁰ [Législatives 2024 : quels sont les programmes des principaux partis?](#), Le Monde, 5 July 2024

¹³¹ [French elections zero-sum game: Is France headed to a minority government?](#), Euronews, 25 June 2024

¹³² [What are the top three French parties offering voters as they go to the polls today?](#), The Journal, 30 June 2024

¹³³ [Emmanuel Macron: win for far left or far right 'will spark civil war'](#), The Guardian, 24 June 2024

¹³⁴ [French political camps draw battle lines over economic policies](#), RFI, 21 June 2024

September 2022 budget.¹³⁵ The government's own record in managing the public finances came under scrutiny on 19 June when the European Commission said it would be launching a procedure against France because it had breached EU rules on excessive deficits and debt.¹³⁶

The NFP responded to criticisms from the governing parties and employers organisations of its economic programme by claiming their critics had a "strategy designed to scare people".¹³⁷ The NFP set out costings and revenue raising measures which they said covered its plans, but their critics pointed to other estimates indicating their plans would cost more and argued that the NFP would be damaging to business.¹³⁸ Attal said the NFP plans would be "a shredder for the middle class" but the NFP said their plans would not affect low and middle earners.¹³⁹

RN rows back on some commitments

Following claims that many of RN's commitments were unfunded, Bardella indicated that some of their plans would be implemented gradually or at a later date, including the proposed VAT reductions and their reversal of the government's pension reforms. The proposal to abolish income tax for all those under 30 also appeared to be withdrawn. He also said that there would first need to be an audit of government finances if RN took office.¹⁴⁰ However, Bardella later said that the pension reform would take place in autumn 2024.¹⁴¹

Bardella also said that the proposed RN ban on wearing the veil in public spaces would be "an objective for 2027".¹⁴² Bardella reiterated the long-standing RN policy of "national preference", limiting social spending to French citizens. He said constitutional impediments to this would be overcome by holding a referendum.¹⁴³

Proposals for French withdrawal from NATO's military command, ending structure cooperation with Germany and dialogue with Russia were also withdrawn, with Bardella saying that he did "not plan to question the commitments France has made on the international stage" on defence and that France's "credibility towards our European partners and NATO allies is at

¹³⁵ [European Commission warns France over fiscal rules as election looms](#), The Guardian, 19 June 2024

¹³⁶ [European Commission reprimands France and six countries for breaking budget rules](#), Le Monde, 19 June 2024

¹³⁷ [France's new left-wing alliance unveils ambitious economic programme – and how they'll pay for it](#), France 24, 21 June 2024

¹³⁸ As above

¹³⁹ [What are the top three French parties offering voters as they go to the polls today?](#), The Journal, 30 June 2024

¹⁴⁰ [Élections législatives 2024 : retraites, TVA, voile, Matignon... les renoncements du Rassemblement national interrogent](#), La Dépêche, 19 June 2024

¹⁴¹ [French elections: What we know about the policy platforms](#), Le Monde, 18 June 2024

¹⁴² [Élections législatives 2024 : retraites, TVA, voile, Matignon... les renoncements du Rassemblement national interrogent](#), La Dépêche, 19 June 2024

¹⁴³ [Jordan Bardella: France's far-right leader 'ready' to rule and fight immigration](#), BBC News, 24 June 2024

stake”.¹⁴⁴ Bardella said there would be continued support for Ukraine if the RN was in government, but that there would be a “red line” against sending long-range missiles or French troops to Ukraine.¹⁴⁵

The campaign saw several large protests take place across France against a possible RN election victory.¹⁴⁶ These include NFP and trade unions-sponsored rallies, with some unions adopting a statement calling for “a democratic and social upsurge” warning that “the extreme right will take power” and that the French Republic and democracy were “in danger”.¹⁴⁷ Women rights’ groups also organised protests, with some referring to RN opposition to abortion rights.¹⁴⁸

Accusations of racism and antisemitism

The NFP programme referred to Hamas as “terrorists” although Mélenchon had previously declined to describe them as such. Positions taken by Mélenchon and others on the left on Israel and Palestine were nevertheless highlighted during the campaign, with some of their opponents accusing them of antisemitism.¹⁴⁹ Mélenchon’s comments at the beginning of June that antisemitism in France was “residual” and “absent” from pro-Palestinian rallies also provoked criticism.¹⁵⁰

Accusations of far-left antisemitism also came from RN. One RN spokesperson presented the election as a battle between “those who love France and ... those who love Hamas”.¹⁵¹ Le Pen said voters should keep in mind the “stigmatisation of Jews by the far left” and Bardella pledged to “fight the antisemitism that has been plaguing France” since the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023.¹⁵²

RN also faced accusations of antisemitism and racism, with media reports highlighting comments and past unlawful behaviour among some of its

¹⁴⁴ [French far right pulls manifesto that included controversial Russia, NATO plans](#), Politico, 17 June 2024; [What are the top three French parties offering voters as they go to the polls today?](#), The Journal, 30 June 2024; [Élections législatives 2024 : retraites, TVA, voile, Matignon... les renoncements du Rassemblement national interrogent](#), La Dépêche, 19 June 2024

¹⁴⁵ [Jordan Bardella: France's far-right leader 'ready' to rule and fight immigration](#), BBC News, 24 June 2024

¹⁴⁶ [Protesters across France mobilise against the far right ahead of the country's snap elections](#), France 24, 15 June 2024

¹⁴⁷ [France elections: Thousands gather to protest against surge of far right](#), AP News, 15 June 2024; [Nantes : un drapeau français arraché à une fenêtre en marge d'une manifestation anti-RN](#), Le Journal du Dimanche, 11 June 2024

¹⁴⁸ [Thousands of women march in France against far right](#), Reuters, 23 June 2024

¹⁴⁹ [French elections: Left's campaign poisoned by anti-Semitism accusations against Mélenchon](#), Le Monde, 29 June 2024; [In snap election, many French Jews reluctantly endorse far right over dreaded far left](#), The Times of Israel, 29 June 2024

¹⁵⁰ [French PM lashes out at leftist leader Mélenchon after antisemitic assault](#), Politico, 20 June 2024

¹⁵¹ [How France's far-right National Rally plans to secure its absolute majority in parliament](#), France 24, 3 July 2024

¹⁵² [French president denounces 'scourge of antisemitism' after rape of Jewish girl](#), BBC News, 19 June 2024

candidates.¹⁵³ One RN candidate was suspended by the party during the campaign after previous antisemitic social media posts were highlighted.¹⁵⁴ There was a renewed focus on inflammatory statements made by RN candidates between the first and second rounds of the election.¹⁵⁵

Leaders' debates

A televised leaders' debate took place on 25 June, bringing together Attal for Ensemble, Bardella for RN and LFI party coordinator Manuel Bompard. Bardella said he would increase the purchasing power of the French people, with cuts to VAT and tax breaks for under 30s. Bardella also pledged to “drastically reduce migratory flows” and said that many French people “do not recognise the France that they grew up in”.¹⁵⁶

Attal presented himself as offering stability to France, and dismissed RN pledges on the economy saying that Bardella was “offering the moon” and would not say how the pledges would be financed. Bardella however attacked the government's record on budget discipline, referring to high public debt and budget deficit levels. Attal also attacked Bardella over the RN's proposal to ban French citizens with dual nationality from sensitive defence and security posts.¹⁵⁷ Bardella was also criticised by Bompard, who said the RN had abandoned many of its costly pledges during the election campaign.¹⁵⁸

Another televised debate was held on 27 June, bringing together Attal and Bardella and the PS leader Olivier Faure. In the debate, Attal said that RN had presented over a hundred candidates accused of making racist remarks.¹⁵⁹ Both Bardella and Faure criticised earlier suggestions from President Macron that French troops could be sent to Ukraine. Bardella said Ukraine should be supported but that escalation with Russia should be avoided.¹⁶⁰

2.5

First round of elections

In the first round of elections on 30 June, RN were the leading political party with 29.3% of the vote. Adding the votes of Ciotti's group, which received just

¹⁵³ ['Black sheep' embarrass the National Rally ahead of decisive parliamentary vote](#), France 24, 4 July 2024; [French election: Nazi attire and racist comments dog Le Pen's campaign](#), Politico, 7 July 2024

¹⁵⁴ [France's far-right leader says he will not be PM without absolute majority](#), The Guardian, 19 June 2024

¹⁵⁵ [French elections: Far right embarrassed by candidate's racist remarks about dual nationals](#), Le Monde, 3 July 2024; Philippe Marlière, [After the general election, France in a political conundrum](#), UCL Europe blog, 8 July 2024

¹⁵⁶ [French PM, far-right chief clash in election debate exposing fierce tensions](#), France 24, 25 June 2024

¹⁵⁷ [French PM, far-right chief clash in election debate exposing fierce tensions](#), France 24, 25 June 2024

¹⁵⁸ [French PM refuses to 'promise the moon', clashes with far-right in debate](#), Reuters, 26 June 2024

¹⁵⁹ [French party leaders hold heated last election debate](#), Reuters, 27 June 2024. See also ['Black sheep' embarrass the National Rally ahead of decisive parliamentary vote](#), France 24, 4 July 2024

¹⁶⁰ [Bardella rips into Macron's French troops in Ukraine pitch during election debate](#), Euronews, 28 June 2024

under 4% of the vote, brought the RN and allied vote share up to 33.2%. The NFP came second with 28.1%, followed by Ensemble with 20%. The main LR slate took 6.6%.¹⁶¹

In the seats where candidates met the threshold to be elected outright in the first round, the RN won 37, followed by NFP with 32 and Ensemble with two. The main LR group and Ciotti's LR group had one seat each. Other candidates classified by the interior ministry as right-wing or extreme right won three seats. The latter figure did not include Reconquest, which received under 0.8% of the vote and no seats.¹⁶²

The remaining 501 seats would go a second round of elections on 7 July.

Across the National Assembly 577 constituencies, RN and their allies were the leading party in 297 seats, NFP in 159 seats, Ensemble in 70 and LR in 20. Other candidates led in 31 seats.¹⁶³

On the evening of 30 June French broadcasters estimated that after the second round RN and their allies would win between 230 and 280 seats in the 577-seat National Assembly. NFP would be the second-biggest group with 125 to 165 seats, followed by the Ensemble coalition with 70 to 100 seats.¹⁶⁴

Table 1: French legislative elections, first round, 30 June 2024

Political Party/Alliance	Vote Share	Seats
National Rally	29.3%	37
New Popular Front	28.1%	32
Ensemble	20%	2
The Republicans	6.6%	1
LR-RN (Ciotti group)	4%	1
Other right-wing candidates	3.6%	2
Extreme right candidates	0.2%	1

Source: France, Ministry of Interior and the overseas, [Élections législatives 2024 : les résultats définitifs](#), 12 July 2024 [accessed 30 September 2024]

An analysis of the results by the Le Monde newspaper cautioned that projections for the second round were difficult to make accurately given that much depended on the specific situation in each constituency. It nevertheless

¹⁶¹ France, Ministry of Interior and the overseas, [Élections législatives 2024 : les résultats définitifs](#), 12 July 2024 [accessed 30 September 2024]

¹⁶² France, Ministry of Interior and the overseas, [Élections législatives 2024 : les résultats définitifs](#), 12 July 2024 [accessed 30 September 2024]

¹⁶³ [French elections: First round takeaways](#), Le Monde, 1 July 2024

¹⁶⁴ [2024 French legislative elections: Results of the first round](#), France 2024, 1 July 2024

noted that RN had doubled its vote share compared to the first round in 2022 and that this was the first time RN/FN had broken the 20% barrier in a parliamentary election.¹⁶⁵ This was also the first time that RN/FN had led in the first round in National Assembly elections.¹⁶⁶

As the results came in for the first round of the elections, Marine Le Pen said that “democracy has spoken” and called on voters to give RN a decisive majority in the second round.¹⁶⁷ Bardella said that the second-round vote would be one of the most decisive in the entire history of the Fifth Republic”.¹⁶⁸

2.6

Second round of elections

Candidates withdraw from three-way contests

Candidates winning more than 12.5% of registered votes in the first round were eligible for the second round of voting.¹⁶⁹ In over half of seats, this meant that more than two candidates could go through to the second round. In the 501 seats left to be contested there were 306 possible contests between three candidates, known as “triangulaires” (triangular contests), and five four-way contests.¹⁷⁰

The prevalence of such contests was viewed as helpful to the RN in winning more seats in the second round without the need for outright majorities.¹⁷¹ As the results of the first round became clear, NFP leaders including Mélenchon announced that they would withdraw candidates who came third or lower in the first round in order to help better placed candidates defeat RN or allied candidates in the second round.¹⁷²

Attal said that the Renaissance party would do likewise, warning that the “far right is at the gates of power” and that the “objective is clear: to prevent the RN from getting elected in the second round”.¹⁷³ Attal said it was a moral duty to bar the far right from governing the country “with its disastrous project”.¹⁷⁴ However, he also indicated that candidates would only withdraw in constituencies where RN’s remaining opponent “defends the values of the

¹⁶⁵ [French elections: First round takeaways](#), Le Monde, 1 July 2024

¹⁶⁶ [France's far right celebrates lead and seeks majority](#), BBC News, 1 July 2024

¹⁶⁷ [Le Pen's far-right party wins first round as Macron's snap elections gamble backfires](#), France 24, 30 June 2024

¹⁶⁸ [France: Far right leads first round of parliamentary election in blow to Macron](#), CNN, 1 July 2024

¹⁶⁹ [France's mysterious two-round voting system explained](#), Euractiv, 28 June 2024

¹⁷⁰ [French elections: 224 candidates have officially withdrawn from the second round](#), Le Monde, 2 July 2024

¹⁷¹ Rainbow Murray, [French far-right in sight of majority for first time after first round of voting – here's what happens now](#), The Conversation, 1 July 2024; [French election: Le Pen's party now dominant force in France](#), BBC News, 30 June 2024

¹⁷² [Le Pen's far-right party wins first round as Macron's snap elections gamble backfires](#), France 24, 30 June 2024

¹⁷³ [French PM Gabriel Attal: 'Not one single vote must go to the National Rally'](#), France 24, 30 June 2024

¹⁷⁴ [France's far right celebrates lead and seeks majority](#), BBC News, 1 July 2024

republic”.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, President Macron called for a “wide-ranging rally behind republican and democratic” candidates for the second round.¹⁷⁶

These statements appeared to suggest that Ensemble candidates would not stand down in favour of LFI candidates, viewed as “extremist” by Renaissance and its allies in the Ensemble coalition. The Ensemble campaign later suggested that the encouragement to stand down would also apply where the opponent to RN came from LFI, but some government ministers maintained that this should not extend to LFI and there were also indications that decisions to stand down would depend on an assessment of the individual LFI opponent.¹⁷⁷ Former prime minister and founder of Horizons, Édouard Philippe, was more explicit and said that candidates from his party should not stand down where an LFI candidate represented NFP.¹⁷⁸

While political leaders from the centre and left focused on the need to stop RN winning more seats after the first round, Bardella called on voters to choose between the left-wing alliance which he described as “an existential threat to the French nation” and his own “party of patriots”.¹⁷⁹

Candidates had until the 2 July to confirm whether they were running in the second round. 224 candidates withdrew from the second round ahead of the deadline, including 126 NFP candidates and 81 Ensemble in contests against RN candidates. This reduced the number of “triangulaires” to 89 and four-way contests to two.¹⁸⁰ This meant there would be 409 two-way contests, with the RN candidate facing an NFP candidate in 149 of these, and an Ensemble candidate facing an RN candidate in 134 contests.¹⁸¹

According to Le Monde, there were 16 Ensemble candidates that did not stand down in favour of a better placed NFP candidate. These were mainly where LFI candidates were running, but there were also cases of Ensemble candidates declining to withdraw against PS and Green candidates. There were also five contests where NFP candidates from LFI and the PCF did not withdraw for better placed candidates. Most LR second-round candidates continued to stand against an RN candidate even if there was another better placed candidate, while some LFI candidates did likewise where the other non-RN candidate came from LR.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ [French elections: Which parties refused tactical withdrawals to beat the RN?](#), Le Monde, 3 July 2024

¹⁷⁶ [France election 2024: How will the second round run-off work?](#), Reuters, 1 July 2024

¹⁷⁷ [French elections: Which parties refused tactical withdrawals to beat the RN?](#), Le Monde, 3 July 2024; [France's parties launch new push after far-right success](#), BBC News, 1 July 2024

¹⁷⁸ [Le Pen's far-right party wins first round as Macron's snap elections gamble backfires](#), France 24, 30 June 2024

¹⁷⁹ [France's parties launch new push after far-right success](#), BBC News, 1 July 2024

¹⁸⁰ [French elections: 224 candidates have officially withdrawn from the second round](#), Le Monde, 2 July 2024

¹⁸¹ [French elections: How the 224 candidate withdrawals have reshaped the second round](#), Le Monde, 3 July 2024

¹⁸² [French elections: Which parties refused tactical withdrawals to beat the RN?](#), Le Monde, 3 July 2024

Election result

In the second round of elections, RN again finished ahead on vote share, with 32.1% of the vote and winning an additional 88 seats. However, assisted by the withdrawal of other candidates, the NFP won an additional 146 seats with 25.7% of the vote. This brought the NFP total up to 178 over the two rounds, while RN won 125 seats over the two rounds. Ciotti's group brought an additional 17 deputies allied to the RN. Ensemble won an additional 148 seats, bringing their seats to 150 and ahead of RN and its allies.

Table 2: French legislative elections, second round, 7 July 2024

Political Party/Alliance	Vote Share	Seats	Total Seats (1 st + 2 nd round)
National Rally	32.1%	88	125
New Popular Front	25.7%	146	178
Ensemble	23.1%	148	150
The Republicans	5.4%	38	39
LR-RN (Ciotti group)	5%	16	17
Other right-wing candidates	3.6%	25	27
Other left-wing candidates	1.5%	12	12
Regionalists	1.1%	9	9
Horizons	1%	6	6
Other centre candidates	0.7%	6	6
Union of Democrats and Independents	0.4%	3	3
Others	0.1%	1	1
Ecologists	0.1%	1	1
Socialist Party	0.1%	2	2
Extreme Right candidates	0.1%	0	1
Total			577

Source: France, Ministry of Interior and the overseas, [Élections législatives 2024 : les résultats définitifs](#), 12 July 2024 [accessed 30 September 2024]

There were also additional candidates elected from the parties that made up Ensemble and NFP who ran separately (notably Horizons and the Socialist party). These were listed separately in the results published by the interior ministry but some were later listed as part of the parliamentary groups of

these parties. Figures published in the week after the election showed NFP with 182 seats, Ensemble with 168 seats and RN and its allies with 143 seats.¹⁸³

As second round results became clear, Bardella said “alliances of dishonour” had prevented an RN victory.¹⁸⁴ He denounced President Macron for pushing France towards instability, and into the arms of the “extreme left”, while Le Pen said the “tide is rising” and “our victory has only been delayed”.¹⁸⁵

Mélenchon said that President Macron now had a duty to call on NFP to govern.¹⁸⁶ Attal said he would hand in his resignation as Prime Minister the following morning but would remain in office “as long as duty require”.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ [2024 French legislative elections: Results of the second round](#), France 24, 4 July 2024; [2024 French elections: Map and chart of results](#), Le Monde, 8 July 2024

¹⁸⁴ [Left alliance celebrates as France's far right faces surprise defeat](#), BBC News, 7 July 2024

¹⁸⁵ [France's far right 'sad and disappointed' over election result](#), BBC News, 7 July 2024

¹⁸⁶ [Left alliance celebrates as France's far right faces surprise defeat](#), BBC News, 7 July 2024

¹⁸⁷ [French PM Attal offers to resign after Macron's coalition loses majority](#), Le Monde, 7 July 2024

3 Election aftermath and government formation

3.1 Commentary on elections

Commentaries following the election highlighted that once again a republican front had come together to defeat the RN with a large majority of voters unwilling to accept them as a governing party.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the election was also viewed as having strengthened the RN. Together with its allies it won the support of around a third of voters and was the leading party by vote share in both rounds. It would be able to claim that “establishment parties” had worked together to prevent its victory and could benefit from remaining out of government and standing apart from the likely instability of the incoming National Assembly.¹⁸⁹

The coming together of parties on the left to form the NFP and win the largest number of seats was unexpected when the election was called. However, commentaries on the election raised questions as to whether they could remain a cohesive bloc in the incoming Assembly, particularly given disagreements on foreign policy.¹⁹⁰

Macron’s gamble in holding the election was seen as not having paid off. Far from bringing the “clarification” that Macron had sought, commentators noted that it had brought greater instability and further weakened his authority.¹⁹¹ Whereas prior to the election the governing parties had been able to win votes in the National Assembly with the help of LR, this would no longer be possible in the incoming Assembly and the Assembly would be able to exert greater control over the government.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Célia Belin, Camille Grand and Camille Lons, [Anatomy of a close call: The aftermath of Macron’s great gamble](#), European Council on Foreign Relations, 12 July 2024; Giovanni Capoccia, [The French Fifth Republic Enters Uncharted Waters](#), Verfassungsblog, 8 July 2024

¹⁸⁹ Philippe Marlière, [After the general election, France in a political conundrum](#), UCL Europe blog, 8 July 2024; Christine Ockrent, [The murky world of French politics](#), Centre for European Reform, 19 July 2024

¹⁹⁰ Célia Belin, Camille Grand and Camille Lons, [Anatomy of a close call: The aftermath of Macron’s great gamble](#), European Council on Foreign Relations, 12 July 2024

¹⁹¹ Christine Ockrent, [The murky world of French politics](#), Centre for European Reform, 19 July 2024; [French President Macron’s snap election gamble ‘did not pay off,’ professor says](#), CNBC, 8 July 2024

¹⁹² Sébastien Maillard, [Four far-reaching consequences of France’s shock election result](#), Chatham House, 8 July 2024

3.2

Parliamentary groups in the National Assembly

The newly elected National Assembly convened for the first time on 18 July. The main political parties in both the NFP and Ensemble alliances formed their own separate parliamentary groups, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Political Groups in the National Assembly, July 2024

Political Party/Alliance	Members	Allied Members	Total
New Popular Front			193
France Unbowed	71	1	72
Socialists and Allies	62	4	66
Ecologists and Social	38	0	38
Democratic and Republican Left (inc PCF)	17	0	17
Ensemble			164
Ensemble for the Republic (Renaissance)	85	11	96
Democrats (MoDem)	35	1	36
Horizons and Independents	28	5	33
National Rally	123	3	126
Republican Right (LR)	41	6	47
Union of the Right (Ciotti group)	16	0	16
Liberties, Independents, Overseas & Territories	22	0	22
Non-attached	8	0	8
Total			577

Source: [Which political groups make up France's new Assemblée Nationale?](#), Le Monde, 22 July 2024; French National Assembly, [Effectif des groupes politiques - Assemblée nationale](#), [accessed 30 September 2024].

The figures in table 3 are based on parliamentary group numbers at the end of September 2024, with some minor changes in group composition having taken place since the National Assembly convened on 18 July 2024.¹⁹³

As shown in table 3, some parties adopted new or modified names for their parliamentary groups. This included the Republicans becoming Republican

¹⁹³ Changes in parliamentary group composition are listed by date on the National Assembly website. See French National Assembly, [Modifications à la composition des groupes](#) [accessed 30 September 2024]

Right.¹⁹⁴ Renaissance adopted the name used for its coalition in the election, Ensemble for the Republic, while the Ecologist group became Ecologists and Social. The Democratic and Republican Left group continued from the previous National Assembly and included the PCF and deputies from the overseas territories.¹⁹⁵ Ciotti's group was originally named the Right group, but later became the Union of the Right for the Republic, with Ciotti announcing he was leaving LR to form a new party with this name.¹⁹⁶

3.3

Delay over government formation

In a “letter to the French” published on 10 July, President Macron said that no-one had won the elections and called on all political forces committed to “republican institutions, the rule of law, parliamentarianism, a European orientation and the defence of French independence” to engage in dialogue “to build a solid majority, necessarily plural, for the country”.¹⁹⁷

Reports suggested that there were differences within the Ensemble alliance over whether to seek an alliance with LR or seek a broader coalition with the more “social democratic” (the PS and Ecologists) components of NFP. This description of political forces in Macron’s letter was interpreted as excluding LFI.¹⁹⁸ While angering LFI, Macron’s letter also received criticism from RN.¹⁹⁹ Le Pen said Macron now appeared to be blocking LFI a few days after helping to elect LFI deputies and relying on LFI support to get his own deputies elected. Mélenchon said Macron should accept defeat, recognise the NFP victory and allow it to nominate a prime minister.²⁰⁰

President Macron accepted Attal’s resignation as prime minister on 16 July. However, the president asked Attal to continue in a caretaker role until a new government was announced.²⁰¹ After disagreements over other proposed candidates, on 23 July the NFP put forward Lucie Castets, an economist

¹⁹⁴ [Why do French political parties keep changing names?](#), Le Monde, 19 August 2024; Christine Ockrent, [The murky world of French politics](#), Centre for European Reform, 19 July 2024

¹⁹⁵ [Which political groups make up France's new Assemblée Nationale?](#), Le Monde, 22 July 2024. For political groups in the 2022-2024 National Assembly, see [L'Assemblée nationale en 2022](#), LCP - Assemblée nationale, 25 June 2024

¹⁹⁶ [Eric Ciotti crée l'Union des droites pour la République, afin de transformer Les Républicains](#), Les Echos, 31 August 2024; [France's right-wing Ciotti quits Les Républicains party, claiming it has dissolved into macronism](#), France 24, 22 September 2024

¹⁹⁷ [French elections: Macron urges lawmakers to build broad 'republican' coalition to break deadlock](#), Le Monde, 10 July 2024

¹⁹⁸ Christine Ockrent, [The murky world of French politics](#), Centre for European Reform, 19 July 2024

¹⁹⁹ [Anger on France's left and right as Macron calls for centre coalition](#), The Times, 10 July 2024

²⁰⁰ [French elections: Macron urges lawmakers to build broad 'republican' coalition to break deadlock](#), Le Monde, 10 July 2024

²⁰¹ [Macron accepts PM's resignation, government shifts to caretaker role](#), Le Monde, 16 July 2024;

working for the Paris local authority, as its candidate.²⁰² However, on the same day Macron said that a new prime minister would not be named until after the Paris Olympics, which took place from 26 July to 11 August.²⁰³

On 23 August, Macron began consultations with leaders from across the main political blocs, including RN. The president's office said a prime minister would be named based on these consultations. NFP leaders continued to press for their candidate, Castets, although Castets herself said that Macron had been unwilling to appoint an opposition candidate. Reports suggested that Macron was still seeking a candidate that could win support from a wider spectrum of parties, and parties on the centre and right had indicated they would move to bring down any government that included LFI.²⁰⁴

3.4 Michel Barnier appointed Prime Minister

On 5 September 2024, President Macron appointed the EU's former Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier of LR (also a former foreign minister and European Commissioner), as Prime Minister. According to reports, the President had turned to Barnier as a potential candidate that would not immediately be brought down in a confidence vote in the National Assembly and after Le Pen had indicated that RN would oppose other candidates from the centre-right and right he had suggested.²⁰⁵ The NFP had insisted on its own candidate but Macron believed that Castets would not survive a confidence vote.²⁰⁶

The appointment sparked protests on the left, with demonstrations held in Paris on 7 September.²⁰⁷ Mélenchon said that the election had been "stolen" and claiming that a "Macron-Le Pen government" had been formed.²⁰⁸ Le Pen denied having played a part in Barnier's appointment and said RN would not participate in his government.²⁰⁹ However, she said that RN did not want to cause "obstructions" for the government and that Barnier had similar positions to the RN on migration.²¹⁰ When seeking to be LR candidate for the French Presidency in 2021, Barnier had suggested that France suspend all

²⁰² [Macron accepts PM's resignation, government shifts to caretaker role](#), Le Monde, 16 July 2024; [Macron accepts French PM Attal's resignation but asks him to stay as caretaker](#), BBC News, 16 July 2024; [French left bloc New Popular Front agrees to propose Lucie Castets for prime minister](#), France 24, 23 July 2024

²⁰³ [Macron says he won't name new French government until after the Olympics](#), France 24, 24 July 2024

²⁰⁴ [France's Macron holds talks with key political players in a bid to form a new government](#), AP News, 23 August 2024

²⁰⁵ [Far right given kingmaker role in Macron's prime minister search](#), Le Monde, 5 September 2024

²⁰⁶ [Michel Barnier named by Macron as new French PM](#), BBC News, 5 September 2024; See also Mujtaba Rahman (@Mij_Europe), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 5 September 2024 [10 October 2024]

²⁰⁷ [French protesters rage at 'stolen election' as Macron picks conservative Barnier for PM](#), France 24, 7 September 2024

²⁰⁸ [Michel Barnier named by Macron as new French PM](#), BBC News, 5 September 2024

²⁰⁹ [Le Pen denies playing a part in Macron's choice of Barnier as French PM](#), France 24, 8 September 2024

²¹⁰ [France's Le Pen says she will let new Prime Minister Barnier do his job](#), Politico, 8 September 2024

non-EU immigration for three to five years (excluding students and refugees), push for tougher EU migration policy, and a referendum on a “constitutional shield” to prevent France being subject to EU Court Justice and European Convention on Human Rights judgements in this policy area.²¹¹

Following Gabriel Attal, who was France’s youngest prime minister, Barnier became France’s oldest prime minister at the age of 73.²¹² Attal continues to lead the Ensemble for the Republic parliamentary group and was involved in negotiations with Barnier and LR on forming the government.²¹³

On 21 September, a new government headed by Barnier was announced with ministers drawn mainly from the Ensemble alliance, including Jean-Noël Barrot of MoDem as foreign minister, and Antoine Armand of Renaissance as finance minister. There are a smaller number of LR ministers, including Bruno Retailleau as interior minister, viewed as having hardline views on immigration. Some independent figures were also appointed.²¹⁴

The new government was condemned by Bardella as a “a return to Macronism” with “no future whatsoever” and from the left by Mélenchon who branded it a government of “election losers”. PS leader Olivier Faure dismissed it as “a reactionary government” and an affront to democracy.²¹⁵

3.5

New government in office

Government sets out policy plans

Barnier set out the government’s policy plans to the National Assembly on 1 October 2024. He said there would be “better control” of the number of people coming to France and moves to facilitate the detention of migrants staying illegally in the country, pending implementation of deportation orders. On 29 September, interior minister Bruno Retailleau had expressed regret that the French constitution does not allow for a referendum on the immigration question.²¹⁶

²¹¹ [Michel Barnier: Everything you need to know about the new French PM’s conservative politics](#), Politico, 5 September 2024; [France should suspend all immigration from outside EU for up to five years, Michel Barnier says](#), The Independent, 11 May 2021; [Barnier the Brexiteer? French candidate gets tough with EU on campaign trail](#), Politico, 9 September 2021; Michel Barnier (@MichelBarnier), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 9 September 2021 [accessed 10 October 2024]

²¹² [The long political career of France’s new prime minister, Michel Barnier](#), France 24, 5 September 2024

²¹³ [New French government deal struck, PM Barnier says](#), Politico, 19 September 2024

²¹⁴ [French government revealed: More of the same, with hard-right turn on immigration in the works](#), Euractiv, 21 September 2024

²¹⁵ [Macron appoints new government in shift to right after weeks of uncertainty](#), France 24, 21 September 2024

²¹⁶ [Tougher immigration rules, higher taxes: French PM Barnier policy plan’s main takeaways](#), Euronews, 3 October 2024

Barnier also said it would be a priority to reduce France's budget deficit, following the launch of the EU's excessive deficit procedure for France. This would involve cutting spending, fighting evasion, and an exceptional tax on wealthy households and large companies. He said France would continue to stand with Ukraine, and that a plan to increase spending on the French military would continue.²¹⁷

Government survives first confidence vote

The new government faced its first confidence vote on 8 October, tabled by NFP deputies. The motion accused the new government of denying "the result of the most recent legislative elections". However, the motion was not successful with RN saying it would abstain "for now" on confidence votes.²¹⁸ Further confidence votes are expected in the coming months, but the constitution prevents the National Assembly from being dissolved again for another year following the 2024 election.²¹⁹

Government sets out budget for 2025

The new government presented a draft budget for 2025 on 10 October. The government aims to bring the budget deficit down from over 6% in 2024 to 5% in 2025, with a longer-term aim of reducing it to 3% by 2029. This involves €40 billion in spending cuts and €20 billion in additional revenues. €15 billion worth of cuts are expected in social protection spending. The defence, interior and justice budgets are protected, with the defence budget expected to increase in line with previous government commitments. Revenue will increase through a "temporary and exceptional" contribution from large companies with an annual turnover of €1 billion or more and households with an annual income of more than €500,000.²²⁰

The government is expected to make concessions to win wider support in the National Assembly with final adoption in December.²²¹ As with previous budgets, the government has the option of forcing the budget through using article 49.3 of the constitution but could face another confidence vote if it did so.²²²

²¹⁷ [Tougher immigration rules, higher taxes: French PM Barnier policy plan's main takeaways](#), Euronews, 3 October 2024

²¹⁸ [New French government under PM Michel Barnier survives no-confidence vote](#), Euronews, 8 October 2024

²¹⁹ French National Assembly, [Constitution of October 4, 1958](#), accessed 10 October 2024, Article 12

²²⁰ [Barnier's 2025 budget heads to Parliament after ministers' nod](#), Euractiv, 11 October 2024

²²¹ [France's minority government set to present make-or-break austerity budget \(france24.com\)](#)

²²² [French PM Barnier presents high-risk budget](#), Le Monde, 10 October 2024

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