

French parliamentary elections: Macron's regime in disarray

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Dave Kellaway unravels the unexpected and unparalleled second round results of the French parliamentary elections

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*Please join Anti*Capitalist Resistance on Thursday, June 23 2022 at 19:30 BST for a discussion with Penny Duggan of the New AntiCapitalist Party on France After the Elections. Please register [here](#).*

Coalitions and parties	2017 seats	2022 seats
Macron coalition*	345	246
NUPES**	60	142
Rassemblement Nationale (National Rally) Le Pen	8	89
Les Republicains (LR)-UDI	100	64
Left (non-Nupes	.	13
Others	.	23

2022 Abstentions: 53.77 of registered voters

* The presidential coalition includes LREM-Renaissance (160 MPs), François Bayrou's Modem (48 MPs) and Edouard Philippe's Horizon (28 MPs).

** New Popular, Social and Ecological Union (NUPES) : La France Insoumise (LFI, France Unbowed) 72, Socialist Party (PS) 24, EELV (Greens) 23 Communist Party (PC) 12 plus independent lefts (mostly overseas).

Figures updated by ESSF taking into account the labeling done by Le Monde.

There are 13 independent deputies from the left and 9 from the right who may join a parliamentary group in the next few days.

All elections reflect political and social reality. Normally this is distorted and does not immediately reveal the relationship of class forces in society due to the power and ideological systems of the ruling class. Undemocratic electoral systems can under-represent or over-represent different

political forces. Sometimes elections reveal a lot more of a political crisis or of the conflicts in society. Often the election does not have a very direct impact on the class struggles of society. Yesterday in France the parliamentary elections both exposed the political crisis of the Macron regime and made a difference in the ability of working people to defend their interests.

Alex Corbière, a leading member of La France Insoumise (LFI, France Unbowed) summed up the last point on TV last night when he said the government's proposed raising of the pension age to 65 was dead in the water. At the same time, the election of 72 MPs from the LFI who stood on a programme to the left of Jeremy Corbyn is a victory for working people. Theoretically, Macron could get his reactionary reform through if he managed to get the agreement of nearly all the Republicans (LR), the right of centre party. Its leader stated last night that it would be in the opposition and would not be a 'crutch' for Macron's government. LR could be more amenable once Macron starts offering ministries and makes other concessions to them but even then it is difficult to see the reform passing.

Libération, the left-of-centre daily newspaper, summarised the results quite well on its front page:

*A Slap in the face,
RN(Le Pen) shock, NUPES breakthrough, Fall of Macronism.*

Macron's demise

The big question before the election was whether the surge in support of the new broad left united front that included the LFI, the ecologists of EELV, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PC), would be enough to stop Macron getting the traditional, absolute majority that voters give to a recently elected president. In fact, Macron lost over 100 seats compared to 2017 but his coalition remains the biggest bloc, he needed 289 for a working majority. The real surprise of the elections was the 89 seats won by the far-right National Rally (Rassemblement Nationale, RN), a more than tenfold increase from the last parliament. Its success contributed significantly to the failure of Macron to get that majority. It is the biggest single political opposition party, getting ten more seats than the LFI.

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Macron ran a curiously detached campaign. He did not set out a convincing narrative, or at least in a way, he managed in 2017. The president thought a spectacular eve of poll trip to Ukraine, his red-baiting attacks on Mélenchon and NUPES and the so-called 'republican front' against Le Pen would do the business. His attacks on Mélenchon perhaps had some effect on NUPES coming in below the lowest pre-poll survey prediction. However, those attacks combined with a clear hypocritical failure to unequivocally call for a vote for NUPES candidates in second-round runoffs against the far-right RN meant that NUPES voters were less inclined to vote for Macron candidates against the RN in other run-offs. Macron to some extent has only won the presidency twice because progressives and

democrats have voted him as the lesser evil against Le Pen. Once that 'republican front' no longer functions so well the fragility of the president's social and political base has been exposed. In 52 out of the 62 NUPES/RN run-offs, there was no clear call from the government party to vote against the RN. Instead, Macron suggested that a lot of the left failed the same test of 'republican values' that Le Pen did. The loss of 100 seats compared to 2017 reflects the growing discontent over the first 5 years of his presidency and a realisation by many people that Macron was not some new shining third way, centrist solution.

A 'paralysed' government?

Élisabeth Borne, the recently installed prime minister made a call last night for all parties to reflect on the new more difficult parliamentary situation and to work constructively for a 'majority of action'. The government will surely focus most on the mainstream right-wing LR to try and create that majority although there are a small number of independent left and rightwing MPs who may be amenable for the right price. What is clearly exposed is the myth that Macron expresses some new shiny centrist force which is neither right nor left. He will have to tack right to get a working majority. It is difficult to see Macron getting much response from a fishing expedition to his left given the re-composition on the left. The LFI has around 60% of the NUPEs MPs and the PS representatives are mostly those who formally reject a repeat of the former neo-liberal policies represented by former president Hollande. Macron could possibly dangle some ecological promises to the EELV group but the numbers he needs are not there anyway. Green leaders like Rousseau are not likely to respond positively to Macron and her current appears to be in the ascendant as a result of the debacle of the moderate Jadot's presidential campaign.

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The new make-up of parliament allows groups with sixty or more MPs to lay down censure motions so any ad hoc majority will be under continual pressure. On the 5th of July, the prime minister has to propose a government programme to the assembly which could already be countered with a no-confidence motion. The chair of the finance commission has to be somebody from the largest opposition group. This will be a NUPES MP which gives the left a tactical advantage in having an early sight of any economic proposals from the government. Most pundits were saying that the President will have to work in a totally different way from his first 5 years and that the presidential bias of the Vth Republic will be constrained by a new dynamism of parliament. However, the president still has considerable powers at his disposal, such as the power to dissolve parliament.

Breakthrough on the Left

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, in his post-election statement, correctly said it was an unexpected, unique situation for a president of the Vth Republic not to have a majority. He claimed to have achieved the

objective of defeating Macron and that there was total disarray in the presidential party. However his goal of becoming prime minister – emblazoned on all the posters – failed by around 140 seats. All the pre-election polls suggested NUPES would get between 150 and 210 seats. Like the prediction for Macron, his support did not reach the lowest projection. Mélenchon was right to raise the issue of mass abstention as a reason for the left not to have done better. If the abstention rate was higher in the second round it means the Left failed to increase the mobilisation. Further data will reveal whether it was able to mobilise new young voters in the second round.

Fabien Roussel, the Communist leader was more measured in his response to the results. He said the left had progressed in the number of seats but not in votes. He suggested that the objective for the left had not been reached since ‘we did not win a majority and the far-right have progressed’. Roussel was of course very happy that the PC would have a parliamentary group which may well have not been possible without the LFI’s generosity in allocating his current seats even where the Mélenchon vote had dwarfed the PC score.

The NUPES leader was inspiring in his remarks to continue the struggle and call on the young to rebel against the way the world is organised. Just compare this with Keir Starmer’s values of security, prosperity and respect:

“We are not in the same world, we do not have the same values and we do not share the same future. Everything is possible, unbelievable opportunities are opening up.”

His remarks were met with chants of ‘people’s movement, people’s union’. Mélenchon proclaimed the new union of NUPES as the key instrument in all these struggles. It is a gain for the struggle that there is a large broad left/green group and eighty ‘Corbynesque’ MPs elected including prominent worker leaders like Rachel Keke, a housekeeper who led a long but successful struggle against the IBIS hotel management. She defeated a government minister, Roxana Maracineau. All this must give confidence to the movement on the ground. This confidence includes the idea that we need a government that acts in our interests. Only sectarians and the ultra-left fail to grasp this.

Nevertheless building the movement on the ground, in the communities and workplaces is still undeveloped, a work in progress. The ‘tool’ of struggle that he extolls has to be democratically organised and open to all forces. The LFI still has a very top-down structure, it will be interesting to see how it evolves with the succession to Mélenchon being discussed. Local committees that supported NUPES candidates need to be sustained on a more permanent basis so that all the struggles can be coordinated and carried forward. Discussions about a strategy of rupture with the system and its institutions are also necessary. There is not going to be a Mélenchon government. What strategy now? Will the LFI be able to hold the coalition together through what will be a parliament of much deal-making?

The big winner is... Marine Le Pen

Unquestionably the biggest victor of the night was Marine Le Pen. The lack of proportional representation has meant her current has been historically underrepresented in the institutions. She only had eight MPs in 2017 despite being in the run-off against Macron and winning 34% of the vote. Paradoxically her 90 MPs, won under a first past the post system, have delivered a ‘fairer’ expression of her true support. This is a consequence of the breakdown of the other parties working as a republican front to combine to defeat her in run-off elections. It means she will have a parliamentary group, unlike in the last parliament, enabling her to have parliamentary time, places on commissions and so on. More importantly, she will receive up to 52 million euros of state funding according to some estimates. With Mélenchon not standing as an MP she can also boast of being the

most prominent national opposition leader. This position is reinforced by the fact that she will have the largest single-party opposition group.

Her strategy over the years of exorcising the more extreme aspects of her current's politics and her emphasis on populist social policies has proved productive. The pro-Vichy Éric Zemmour candidature could have hurt the RN badly but her firm rejection of some of his extreme positions and refusal of all alliances with him has resulted in Zemmour's rout. The latter was eliminated in the first round as a candidate. Her positioning has allowed her to win support from LR voters and even some abstentions or votes from first-round NUPES supporters. She is in a stronger position now to continue her project of re-composition of the right of French politics.

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If you look at the electoral map of France last night the RN now has a greater national spread and has won support outside the major cities in the smaller town and rural areas. It is no longer strong just in the de-industrialised areas of the north, east and south-east but has mopped up support in the south-west and west too. It was noticeable how the RN defeated a number of PC candidates in the run-offs. For the left this is a considerable challenge, the RN has a real base among the poorest and the working class. Only radical and concrete progressive policies can start to reverse this dynamic.

Struggles ahead

The NPA, (New Anticapitalist Party) welcomed the breakthrough of the left, particularly the number of MPs elected on the basis of a break with neo-liberalism. The election is a defeat for Macron and shows the growing rejection of his anti-working class policies. However, the rise of Le Pen is a real danger and campaigning against this reactionary extreme right-wing current needs to be stepped up. Although the NUPES is a step forward in bringing together the left and progressive forces we still need to work to build a political movement that can:

'defend the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population and put forward the perspective of another society, freed from capital and its social and ecological disasters. We need a class struggle movement'

Dave Kellaway

P.S.

- Anti*Capitalist Resistance. 20 Jun 2022:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/macrons-regime-in-disarray/>

- Dave Kellaway is on the Editorial Board of Anti*Capitalist Resistance, a member of Socialist Resistance, and Hackney and Stoke Newington Labour Party, a contributor to International Viewpoint and Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres.