



French Assembly elections trigger legislative uncertainty

By Vincent Tournebize, Oona Bienvenu and Anaïs Bismuth



Introduction

"I am everyone's president". That's what **Emmanuel Macron** promised in his victory speech at the base of the Eiffel Tower in April where he said the strong support for far right and high abstention rate in the presidential elections showed France was *"full of doubts and full of divisions"*. One month later, his failure to win an outright majority in parliamentary elections in June means the pro-European president has no choice but to make good on that pledge and work with opposition groups if he has any hope of delivering his legislative agenda.

Macron's centrist Ensemble! political group [won](#) 245 seats in the June 12 and 19 legislative elections, leaving it 44 seats short of an absolute majority in the 577-seat National Assembly – the first time a French president has not had numerical command of the lower house since 1997 when the opposition won an outright majority. The new coalition of left-wing parties, the Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale (NUPES), led by veteran radical **Jean-Luc Mélenchon**, has rapidly established itself as the main opposition group with 131 seats. And the far-right anti-immigration Rassemblement National (RN) party, led by presidential election runner up **Marine Le Pen**, has also emerged as a potent opposition voice with 89 seats. The centre-right Les Républicains (LR) party, with their 61 seats, are being looked to as potential kingmakers.

The lack of an absolute majority in the National Assembly--which plays a key role in proposing, debating, and amending legislation and holding ministers to account--means France has entered a new era of political uncertainty and possible bill-by-bill horse trading. It suggests Macron will need to forge ad hoc partnerships with the left and right to deliver his agenda, such as his plans to raise the retirement age and deepen European Union integration which are opposed by the NUPES and RN. Experts say the initial mood music suggests a formal pact with LR is unlikely. Against this backdrop it remains to be seen whether Macron can find the political compromise and consensus necessary to tackle France's economic and social challenges or face legislative paralysis. While Macron has the power to dissolve the National Assembly and trigger fresh elections, it is unclear another vote would yield a more conclusive result.

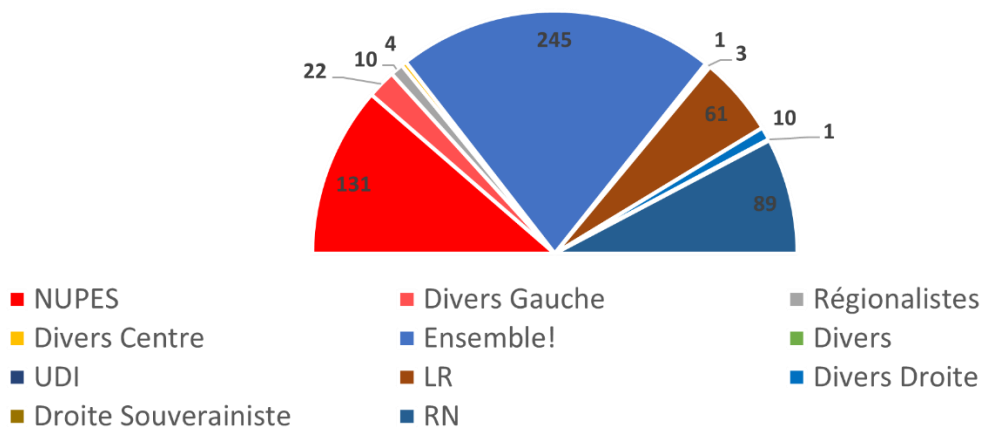
This Dods Political Intelligence report, produced by Trombinoscope Monitoring's political consultants, examines the composition of the new National Assembly and the priorities of the main political groups that have emerged.



Hung Assembly clouds legislative outlook

For the first time since 1988, France’s legislative elections have failed to deliver an absolute majority in the National Assembly either for the president’s party or the main opposition party in times of so-called cohabitation—when the head of state and prime minister come from rival parties. That suggests legislative progress will depend on Macron and his team’s ability to attract sufficient support from opposition groups for every bill his government puts forward. The new National Assembly (see breakdown by party below) is due to sit for the first time on 28 June.

Composition of the National Assembly following the 2022 legislative elections



The elections, which were characterised by a historically high voter abstention rate, confirmed the emergence of three key political groups: Macron’s centrist Ensemble! coalition, the new NUPES leftist alliance, and the far-right Rassemblement National. However, a fourth group, the centre-right LR party which won 61 seats, could play kingmaker– a significant turnaround in its fortunes since its candidate **Valérie Pécresse** failed to make a significant impact in the presidential elections.

Ensemble !

After a muted campaign, the president’s political group won 245 seats, well short of an outright majority and the 350 seats Macron and his allied parties commanded in his first term. At the heart of the coalition is Macron’s own Renaissance party, rebranded from La République En Marche (LREM) shortly before the start of the legislative election campaign. It has again joined forces with its centrist traditional allies, the Movement Démocrate (MoDem), and some smaller likeminded parties including Horizons, set up in 2021 by former prime minister **Edouard Philippe**. The results mean Ensemble! will need to forge alliances with other parties to deliver the pro-European president’s legislative agenda, which includes pension reform to raise the retirement age to around 65, investment in education, reindustrialisation, developing nuclear power, and a mission to reduce debt and taxes. Ensemble! has said it wants to require unemployed people to spend 15 to 20 hours per week on professional training to get the Active Solidarity Income (RSA) benefit. It has also said it plans to increase the defence budget and invest in nuclear power with plans for the construction of six new European Pressurized Reactors (EPR).

The legislative elections will also lead to changes in Macron's top team, after he established a rule that ministers needed to retain their Assembly seat to remain in post. Three ministers lost their seats: **Amélie de Montchalin**, Minister for Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion and fifth in the order of protocol of the Government, was defeated by a NUPES candidate in Essonne; **Justine Benin**, Secretary of State for the Sea, lost to a NUPES candidate in Guadeloupe; and **Brigitte Bourguignon**, Minister for Health and Prevention, was defeated by a RN candidate in Pas-de-Calais.

Prime Minister **Elisabeth Borne**, who has been criticised by some commentators for presiding over the loss of Macron's Assembly majority, offered to resign in the days after the election. It is customary for the prime minister to offer to step down after parliamentary elections, only for the president to reappoint the person to form a new government. However, the Élysée Palace said Macron had rejected Borne's offer "so the government can remain on task and act". Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how long she will remain in her job, and whether Macron will change his cabinet to reflect the new political reality. Government spokeswoman, **Olivia Grégoire**, said on 20 June that a new government would be [appointed](#) "in the coming days".

Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale (NUPES)

France's leftist parties managed to put their difference aside and regroup for the legislative elections after Mélenchon failed to make the second round of the presidential contest in April. The narrative of a resurgent left wing helped the Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale (NUPES) grab the headlines and enough votes to become the largest opposition bloc in the Assembly. Spearheaded by veteran radical Mélenchon, the coalition includes four parts: La France Insoumise (LFI), Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV), the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS).

Although the number of left-wing votes was broadly similar to 2017, fighting under the NUPES banner helped provide leftist parties with a much more potent and united front against Macron's bloc. With 131 seats, the NUPES is now the leading opposition in the National Assembly. Among its constituent parties, La France Insoumise (LFI) is the main beneficiary of the coalition, with 72 deputies, including four elected in the first round, while the greens have also benefitted with 23 deputies, their highest ever seat tally. However, although the leftists helped prevent Macron's group securing an absolute majority, it fell well short of winning enough seats to make Mélenchon eligible to be appointed as prime minister and force the first cohabitation arrangement in 20 years.

In terms of policy, the NUPES group has [campaigned](#) for a reduction in working hours, an increase in the minimum wage to 1,500 euros per month, the reinstatement of the retirement age of 60, and price limits on certain products to shield consumers from the rising cost of living. It has also pushed some environmental policies, such as the inclusion in the Constitution of a green rule and ecological planning.

However, it remains to be seen whether the NUPES group can hold together and provide a cohesive opposition, or whether policy differences will lead it to fracture into its constituent parts. Evidence of splits had emerged even before the election took place, with some party candidates refusing to give way to the official NUPES candidate in some constituencies. Former President **Francois Hollande**, a PS member, has also clashed with Mélenchon after criticising a union of the PS and LFI. The Socialists, Greens, and Communists have also turned down Mélenchon's proposal to form a single NUPES group in the Assembly, arguing that the coalition agreement signed in

early May provided for separate groups. Analysts have also raised questions about the leadership of the group should Mélenchon, who did not run in the legislative elections, decides to stand down.

Rassemblement National (RN)

Despite a low-key campaign, Le Pen's party secured its highest ever seat total of 89, which effectively makes it the largest single opposition group in the parliament. For the first time since 1986, the party easily surpassed the 15-seat threshold to be able to form an official parliamentary group, thereby earning associated privileges including speaking time on the house floor, funding for parliamentary staff, and access to parliamentary office space and facilities. However, this dramatic jump in prominence also brings significant challenges for the party to maintain message discipline and cohesiveness.

The RN did not present a separate programme for the legislative elections. Instead, it stuck to Le Pen's presidential campaign messages against immigration and combating the rising cost of living and sought to make the most of her strong run against Macron which saw her attract 41.4 percent of the vote in the second round. RN's anti-immigration policy proposals include the abolition of the "right of birthplace" and a bill to counter Islamist ideologies. To help insulate people from the soaring cost of living, the RN has called for VAT on fuel and energy to be slashed to 5.5 percent from 20 percent, scrapping VAT on 100 essential products, and indexing pensions to inflation. The party, which has its roots in the Front National party founded her father **Jean-Marie Le Pen**, also opposes raising the retirement age and has put forward a range of security proposals, including the introduction of the presumption of self-defence for the police.

The RN is now the standard bearer of the nationalist bloc in the Assembly, after no candidate from **Éric Zemmour's** group managed to qualify for the second round of the elections. Geographically, the party now benefits from a strong presence in several regions such as the North of France, the South-East and the East (Pas-de-Calais, Var, Gard, Aisne, Moselle).

Les Républicains (LR)

After flopping in the presidential contest, the centre-right LR party's success in the legislative elections has put it in a position to be the kingmaker in the Assembly. Under party president **Christian Jacob**, it teamed up with the Union des démocrates et indépendants (UDI) and Les Centristes (LC) to form the Union de la Droite et du Centre (UDC), and [campaigned](#) to improve security, public spending, and control over immigration. In the face of stiff opposition from the far right and left of the political spectrum, the LR appear to be the most obvious Assembly partner for Ensemble!. The party's economic proposals chime with the president's, including plans to raise the retirement age and make French work longer hours.

There has been fierce debate within LR about whether to work with Macron, and if so on what basis. Jacob has said he has told the president that a coalition deal would be a [betrayal](#) of his voters, but also that his party would be responsible. Within the LR, **Catherine Vautrin**, who some have speculated could be a candidate for prime minister, has suggested the party could find common cause with Macron's coalition and that being in opposition was pointless. But other LR figures, such as lawmaker **Francois-Xavier Bellamy**, have been less keen to join forces with a president who spent much of his first term trying to weaken the party of former president **Nicolas Sarkozy**.



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