



**POLITICAL  
INTELLIGENCE**

# French legislative elections

A short guide

By Vincent Tournebize and Oona Bienvenu

## Introduction

France holds legislative elections on June 12 and 19 to elect the 577 deputies who sit in the National Assembly. Polls suggest President Emmanuel Macron's centrist bloc—Ensemble—is likely to be the largest in the lower house. However, it is unclear whether it will win an outright majority, an unusual situation which could complicate Macron's ability to push through his legislative agenda for the second-term, including a controversial plan to raise the retirement age.

Macron faces a stiff challenge from a new alliance of left-wing parties led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon which is pushing back against the president's pro-business reforms. Although the veteran hard-left firebrand was beaten to the second round of the presidential elections in April by far-right challenger Marine Le Pen, Mélenchon has rallied various leftist factions under the banner of the Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale (NUPES) and hopes to win enough seats to become prime minister.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Le Pen has called for measures to ease the soaring cost of living in an effort to replicate her strong presidential election performance and boost the relatively modest seat tally of her Rassemblement National (RN) party. And centre-right parties have formed a group called Union de la Droite et du Centre (UDC), led by Les Républicains (LR) party president Christian Jacob, in a bid to improve on their lacklustre performance in the presidential contest.

However, overcoming voter apathy in the wake of the more significant presidential elections may turn out to be the biggest challenge facing the political parties. One survey carried out in late May [suggested](#) the level of abstentions could hit a new high with only about one third of respondents saying they were interested in the elections and up to speed on the candidates and their pledges.

This brief Dods Political Intelligence guide to the legislative elections, produced by Trombinoscope Monitoring political consultants, explains the process and significance of the vote, and provides details of the main political groups and their key campaign pledges.

## Process and significance

Legislative elections are held every five years in France to elect the 577 deputies of the National Assembly, the lower house. The deputies, who each represent a single constituency across the nation, will be elected in a two-round system on June 12 and June 19. In the unusual event that a candidate wins an absolute majority representing at least 25 percent of registered voters in the first round they will be declared the winner of the constituency. If no candidate wins an absolute majority in the first round—the more common occurrence—a second-round runoff is held on the following Sunday between the candidates that won at least 12.5 percent of the votes in the first round. Whoever wins the most votes in the second round takes the seat.

Although the President of the Republic is the most powerful political figure in France, the National Assembly plays a key role in proposing, debating, and amending legislation and holding government ministers to account in oral and written questions. The elections are also key for determining who will be country's prime minister, who usually comes from the party or political grouping with the most seats in the Assembly.

It is possible for the president and prime minister to hail from different and sometimes even hostile parties, a situation known as 'cohabitation' which can lead to friction between the Elysée Palace and the Assembly and weaken the president's decision-making powers.

However, since the electoral calendar was modified in 2000 to put the legislative elections within two months of the presidential contest and reduce the presidential term to five years to match the Assembly's term, the chances of cohabitation have reduced considerably. The last time there was cohabitation was in 1997 under conservative President Jacques Chirac. Since then the electorate has tended to vote in legislative elections to give the recently elected president sufficient clout in the Assembly to follow through on their campaign pledges, which has reinforced the "presidentialization" of the French political system.

## Key political groups and their pledges

The presidential elections, which have come to be a harbinger of the Assembly contest, saw Macron [re-elected](#) with 58.55 percent of the vote, beating far-right rival Le Pen who garnered 41.45 percent. Left-wing leader Mélenchon [stood out](#) after winning more than one fifth of the first-round votes, but failed to unite the various left-wing factions.

Since then the political landscape has evolved, with like-minded parties joining forces to form larger political groupings to give them a better chance of winning the Assembly seats and ensure they have more clout in the lower house if they are elected. The formation of political groups is important for deputies to exert influence on debates and the workings of the Assembly. Parliamentary groups are allocated more speaking time to question ministers and also receive Assembly funding to cover their expenses. The larger the parliamentary group the more powers they have, including referring laws to the Constitutional Council or issuing a no-confidence motion which launches a debate and vote. A total of 6,293 candidates, or an average of eleven candidates per constituency, are running in the elections. The new Assembly is due to take office on 22 June.

These are the political groups that polls suggest will win the most votes and details of some of their aims.

### Ensemble

Ensemble (together) is the political grouping that aims to secure a majority in the Assembly that will back Macron's legislative agenda. At the heart of the coalition is Macron's own Renaissance party, which he rebranded from La République En Marche (LREM) shortly before the start of the legislative election campaign. LREM was the largest party in the last Assembly, with 267 deputies. It has again joined forces with its centrist traditional allies, the Movement Démocrate (MoDem), which had 57 seats in the last Assembly, and some smaller likeminded parties including Horizons, set up in 2021 by former prime minister Edouard Philippe. Combined, the Ensemble parties had 267 seats in the last Assembly.

In broad terms, Ensemble is championing the pro-European president's legislative agenda, which includes pension reform to push back the retirement age, investment in education, reindustrialisation, developing nuclear power, and a mission to reduce debt and taxes. Early election results from the 11 constituencies of French voters who live overseas—who hold their first round of voting vote before the French mainland—showed Ensemble won the largest number of votes in eight of them, but faced a stronger challenge from the left than in 2017. However, a recent

Odoxa poll [showed](#) that almost three quarters of voters do not believe Macron will change the way he governs despite his pledge to take a more inclusive approach in his second term. The poll also showed some respondents were dissatisfied with his new ministerial team, and others saw the appointment of Elisabeth Borne as prime minister as a sign he will not change his ways.

## NUPES

Leftist parties have come together to form a new coalition for the legislative elections, the Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale or NUPES, which hopes to replace LR as the largest opposition group. The coalition includes four parties: La France Insoumise (LFI), Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV), the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS).

NUPES is headed by LFI leader Mélenchon, who performed strongly in the first round of the presidential elections but failed to unite left-wing parties to get him into the run-off against Macron. He wants the coalition to win enough seats to deny Macron's group a majority and make him eligible to be appointed as prime minister, which would represent the first cohabitation arrangement in 20 years. 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. An April poll by Ifo [suggested](#) French people are in favour of a majority of the Assembly being opposed to Macron, with NUPES being the most popular group to take part in a cohabitation arrangement.

However, splits have emerged within NUPES, a sign the alliance may not be the saviour of the left that some have hoped. Some PS candidates have said they will run in constituencies where there is already an agreed NUPES-backed candidate and a LFI candidate also running in the North against Fabien Roussel, the national secretary of the PCF. Former President Francois Hollande, a PS member, has also clashed with Mélenchon after criticising a union of the PS and LFI. Questions have also been asked about the longevity of the NUPES group after a Ministry of the Interior decision meant its members will still represent their respective parties in the National Assembly.

## UDC

On 7 May, Jacob, the president of the centre-right Les Républicains (LR) party, announced the formation of the Union de la Droite et du Centre (UDC). Specially created for the legislative elections, this alliance brings together Les Républicains, the Union des démocrates et indépendants (UDI) and Les Centristes (LC). The coalition has [campaigned](#) to improve security, public spending, and control over immigration.

In the absence of a union with the Rassemblement National (RN), LR is counting on local allegiances to maintain its seats in the Assembly. The party has 80 outgoing MPs standing for re-election. However, a late April poll [published](#) by Odoxa indicated that while three quarters of right-wing voters want like-minded parties to join forces, LR supporters were less keen on the idea than RN supporters. The survey also found LR supporters would prefer an alliance with LREM. The disappointing performance of centre-right presidential candidate Valérie Pécresse, who secured less than 5 percent of the votes in the first round, also does not bode well for the UDC grouping.



## RN

Le Pen, who is running for re-election in the northern constituency of Pas-de-Calais, is hoping her success in the presidential elections will help RN add to its seven Assembly seats.

RN, which is standing 569 candidates, has retained its focus on the cost-of-living crisis, calling 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. RN is also [campaigning](#) for tougher immigration controls and against raising the retirement age. Despite some ideological similarities, RN has not formed an alliance with far-right presidential candidate Eric Zémour and his party Reconquête.

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