

France's next 5 years: Analysis of the 2022 French Presidential & Parliamentary Elections results

◆ November 2022 ◆



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PARIS ADVANCED RESEARCH CENTER

France's Next 5 Years: Analysis of the 2022 French Presidential and Parliamentary Election results

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Abstract

This paper analysis the 2022 French Presidential and Parliamentary Election results in which Macron received 38% of the vote from counting all voters and was elected president of France for the second time. However, in the parliamentary elections held about two months after the presidential election, Macron failed to win the seats required for an absolute majority. This leaves Macron facing a potentially turbulent five-year period of dilemma. The polls also reveal that France is going through a tough period, both politically and economically. The record low turnout shows that people have given up hope in politicians in a period of declining purchasing power and structural problems in the health service. The paper shows the increasing far-right votes on the one hand and the leftist movement led by Mélenchon on the other will increase extreme division in France politics. There is also a mass of people who did not participate in the elections, showing their despair and distrust of politics at record levels. For France, a country of Revolutions, this record low turnout demonstrated the problematic functionality of democracy in the country.

2022 French Presidential Election

The French completed the first round of presidential elections on April 10 and the second round on April 24, electing current President Emmanuel Macron for the second time. His predecessors, center-right Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) and Socialist François Hollande (2012-2017) were elected only once. In 2017, the presidential battle was between Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right party, Le Rassemblement National - RN, and Emmanuel Macron from La République En Marche! located in the center to center-right of the French political spectrum. However, compared to 5 years ago, Le Pen's lead party has increased considerably, and she has broken the record by receiving more votes than any far-right candidate in the history of the 5th Republic, since 1958.

In France, which switched from a seven-year to a five-year presidency in 2002, 12 candidates competed in the first round of the 2022 presidential election. Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, the top two candidates with the most votes in the first round, competed for the second round on April 24. Macron won the presidency for the second time with 58.54% of the vote against 41.46% for his rival Marine Le Pen. In 2017, the two candidates again reached the second round, in which Macron obtained 66.1% and Le Pen 33.9% of the vote. In the intervening five years, the gap between the two leaders has narrowed.

Macron announced that he would again pursue a liberal policy in his second presidential race and would continue with reforms and reduce unemployment. Macron also stated that he would raise the retirement age from 62 to 65 and reduce inheritance taxes. It should be noted that the French inheritance tax has the highest rates compared to other European countries.¹ Macron also stated

¹ Charlotte Combier, "10 points sur l'héritage" Grand Continent, 2 juin 2021, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2021/06/02/10-points-sur-lheritage/>

that he would make France a self-sufficient country and accelerate the country's agricultural and industrial development. He also stated that he would try to strengthen the French army. Despite the growing anti-nuclear sentiment both in France and in Europe, especially after the Fukushima nuclear reactor accident in Japan in 2011, Macron did not hesitate to include more nuclear reactors in his program and underlined that this is important for France's economy and energy supply. Nuclear energy is “the only option that allows us to reduce carbon emissions efficiently, quickly, and independently” Macron said, adding that the State will increase its stake in strategic energy companies.²

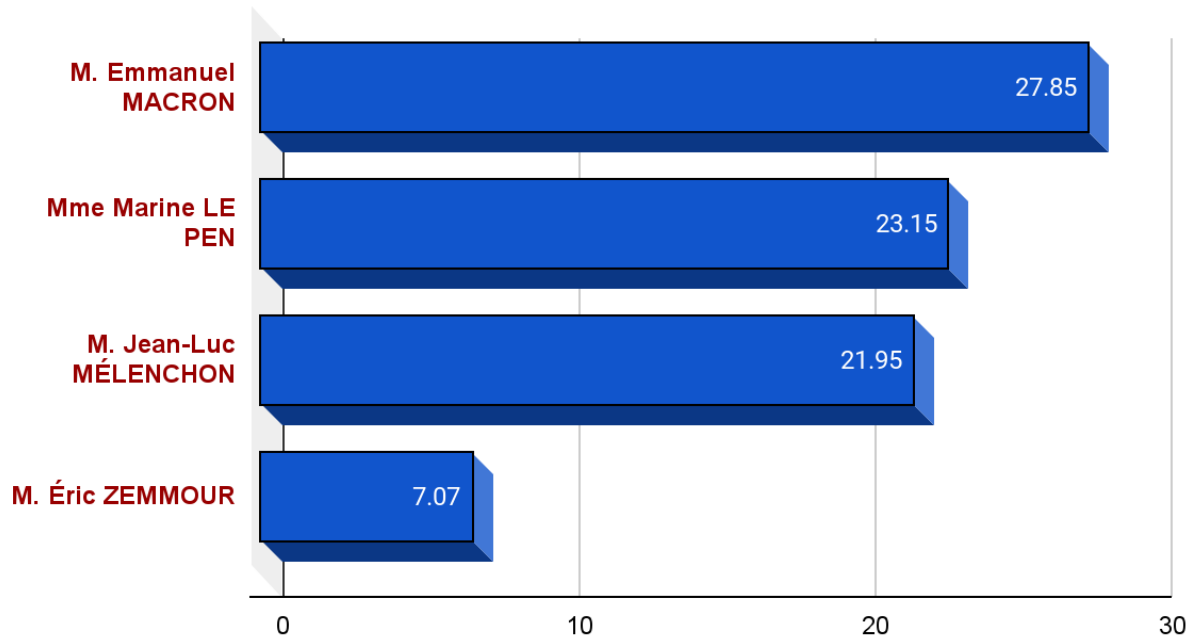
Le Pen, on the other hand, has portrayed an extreme anti-immigrant profile, saying that if elected as a President, she would ban the Islamic headscarf in public spaces. Le Pen has also advocated for an "alliance of European nations" to reshape the European Union. Le Pen's failure to stand up to Putin in the war with Russia over Ukraine, which coincided with the election period, benefited Macron, who called for stability. This also prevented a victory for Le Pen, who has called for closer ties with Moscow and has vowed to withdraw France from NATO.

Another important party and name in the presidential election race was "La France insoumise" - France Unbowed - led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. He came in 3rd place in the first round, with a very small margin against Le Pen. He received votes usually in the Paris suburbs, which have a large immigrant population, and from young people across the country. This prompted Macron to visit Saint-Denis, a controversial, multicultural, Muslim-majority suburb of Paris, to demand for support in the second round. In this region, Jean-Luc Mélenchon had a clear lead in the first round of the election. In contrast to the more radical rhetoric of the far-right candidates Eric Zemmour and Le Pen against Muslims in France, Mélenchon criticized their rhetorics. According to a survey conducted by Ifop for La Croix newspaper, nearly seven out of ten Muslim voted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round of the French presidential elections.³

² “Macron unveils re-election manifesto, vows stronger France in time of crisis”, *France24*, 17/03/2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220317-macron-unveils-re-election-manifesto-vows-stronger-france-in-time-of-crisis>

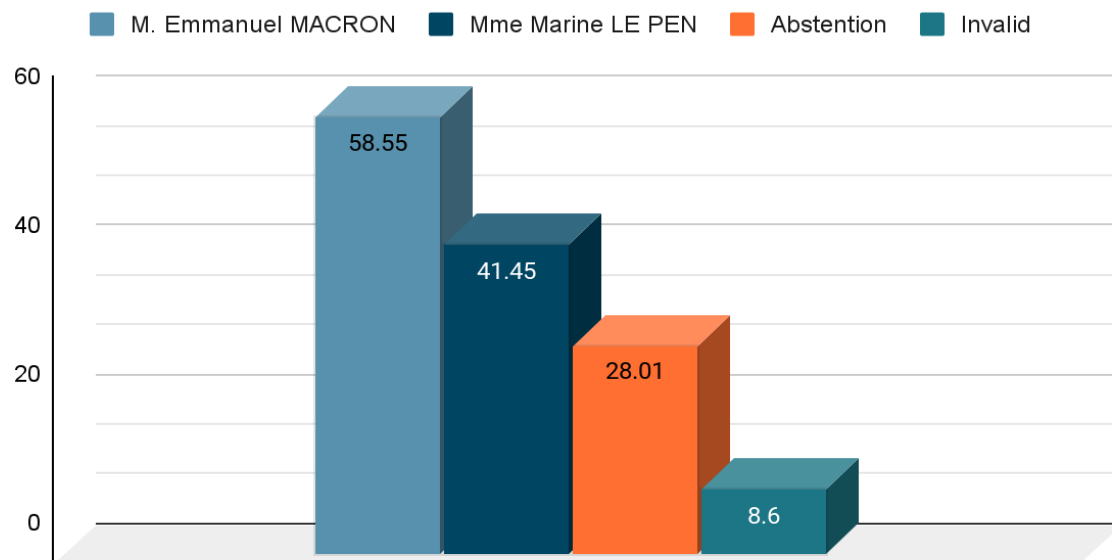
³ Xavier Le Normand, “Présidentielle 2022 : pourquoi les électeurs musulmans ont plébiscité Jean-Luc Mélenchon”, *La Croix*, 11/04/2022, <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Presidentielle-2022-pourquoi-electeurs-musulmans-plebiscite-Jean-Luc-Melenchon-2022-04-11-1201209823>

2022 French presidential election, First round results



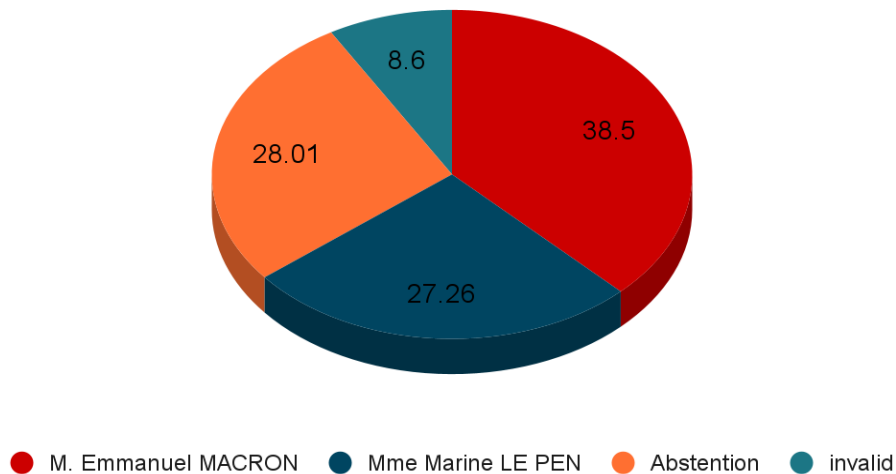
Source: [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__presidentielle-2022/\(path\)/presidentielle-2022/FE.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__presidentielle-2022/(path)/presidentielle-2022/FE.html)

2022 French presidential election, Second round results



Source: [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__presidentielle-2022/\(path\)/presidentielle-2022/FE.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__presidentielle-2022/(path)/presidentielle-2022/FE.html)

Results of the 2022 French Presidential election as a percentage of all votes including abstentions and invalid votes



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⁴ Source : <https://www.resultats-elections.interieur.gouv.fr/presidentielle-2022/FE.html>

Priorities for the French Public and Key Issues Affecting the Elections

During the election campaign, the most important issue was the economy and the cost of living. The low purchasing power of the French, who feel themselves in the middle of an economic crisis, was the most important issue of the election. And perhaps the difference between the 2022 elections and the preceding 2017 elections is that the issue of purchasing power has taken precedence over other policies. Polls showed that voters who voted for Macron were more concerned about health, the economy, the environment, and especially the war in Ukraine. On the other hand, it showed that the French people supported Le Pen on security, immigrants, and pensions. The polls also showed that voters were at the same distance from both candidates on the health system, social inequality, and terrorism.⁵

The table below shows the following - the proportion of voters for whom the issue played a 'decisive' role - conducted by IFOP to provide important clues as to which issues are decisive factors in the voting preferences of citizens in France: Respondents indicated that the most important factor was health (71%), as indicated in the table below. Especially during the Covid-19 outbreak, the poor performance of French health institutions, especially the inadequacy of masks, insufficient health equipment, hospitals, and the dire situation of nursing homes -Ehpad-, made the French uneasy about health. Even under normal circumstances, citizens have become increasingly frustrated with disruptions in healthcare in France. For example, for a cataract operation on the eye requires months of waiting, difficult access to specialists, and hours of waiting in emergency have also put health at the top of the agenda in these elections. Le Monde published an article called "Covid-19: what is really going on in Ehpad?" a public health scandal" the program "Pièces à Conviction" has conducted a remarkable investigation into this national drama

⁵ Cornelius Hirsch, "French presidential election runoff: What POLITICO's Poll of Polls is saying" *Politico*, April 22, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/heres-what-politicos-poll-of-polls-tells-about-the-france-presidential-election-runoff/>

about the situation in nursing homes (Ehpad). Philippe Juvin, head of emergency services at the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, in his statement on the outbreak: "We had to test everyone in nursing homes very quickly. More than 3,700 people died in the first week of April. Then, when masks and tests came, the number of deaths decreased." He was revealing that the French health system was incompetent and unprepared for the epidemic.⁶

However, in a world that became back to normal after the post-Covid vaccination programs, the Russia-Ukraine war changed the dynamics again during the election period. The rapid increase in energy prices in the wake of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the continuous deterioration of purchasing power has become the most important problem of the French people. The table below revealed that the second most important factor in voting was low wages and purchasing power (68%). In previous years, the most crucial issue for the French was "security". In these elections, security and crime were 60%; education 59%; the fight against terrorism 57%; the rise of energy and oil prices 56%; the fight against poverty 53%, and etc.

⁶ Alain Constant, « Covid-19 : que se passe-t-il vraiment dans les Ehpad ? » : un scandale de santé publique'', 18 novembre 2020, *Le Monde*, https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2020/11/18/covid-19-que-se-passe-t-il-vraiment-dans-les-ehpad-un-scandale-de-sante-publique_6060263_3246.html

Question : Chacun des éléments suivants a-t-il joué ou va-t-il jouer un rôle déterminant, important mais pas déterminant ou secondaire dans votre vote au second tour de l'élection présidentielle ?

Part de votants pour qui l'enjeu a joué un rôle « déterminant »

Base : aux votants.	Ensemble des votants 1 ^{er} tour 10 avril 2022 ⁴ (%)	Ensemble des votants 2 nd tour 24 avril 2022 (%)
La santé	71	68
Le relèvement des salaires et du pouvoir d'achat	68	66
La sécurité, la lutte contre la délinquance	60	60
La lutte contre le terrorisme	57	56
L'évolution du prix des carburants et de l'énergie	56	56
L'éducation.....	59	55
La lutte contre la précarité.....	53	52
La maîtrise du niveau des impôts	53	50
La lutte contre l'immigration clandestine.....	47	46
La protection de l'environnement, la lutte contre le dérèglement climatique.....	44	43

Source : Ifop-Fiducial pour TF1, LCI, Paris Match et Sud Radio Présidentielle 2022 – Sondage jour du vote : Profil des électeurs et clés du scrutin (2nd tour) 24 avril 2022, <https://www.ifop.com/publication/presidentielle-2022-jour-du-vote-t2/>

Legislative (parliamentary) Elections in France

In France, Presidential and Parliamentary/Legislative elections take place one after the other. The presidential race historically overshadows the parliamentary elections. The legislative elections are also held every five years, approximately two months after the presidential election. These elections determine the deputies in the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament. Candidates compete in two rounds to be elected as the representative of a constituency or neighborhood. Each deputy represents around 125,000 people, and in total there are 577 deputies, 11 of whom come from outside the mainland and overseas territories. To win in the first round, a candidate must win at least half of the votes cast or at least a quarter of the registered voters in the constituency. Otherwise, the candidate with the highest number of votes in the second round becomes an MP. To qualify for the second round, candidates must receive votes from at least 12.5 percent of registered voters. If only one of them achieves this, he or she will compete with the candidate closest to him or her. If none of the candidates receives 12.5 votes, the top two candidates compete against each other in the second round. The 12.5 percent rule for parliamentary elections means that every voter counts. The aim is to ensure that a candidate is elected with a clear majority in parliament. The National Assembly has the power to propose laws, amend laws, and initiate official investigations. If the ruling party, holding the Macron Presidency, has 289 seats or more, it will face less scrutiny. And it will not need to negotiate with the other parties for the law that it wants to implement. Politico's analysis shows that since June 2017 when Macron took over at the Elysée, because of his majority, his party has managed to do so by proposing dozens of laws. Even if some of the most controversial ones have been revised after interventions by the constitutional council.⁷ One of the important reforms for French President Macron's reform plans include raising the retirement age from the current 62 to 65. After realizing that it will be difficult for the French people, who are traditionally unionist and accustomed to social rights, Macron has stated that he

⁷ Peter O'brien, "How to watch the French parliamentary election like a pro" *Politico*, June 10, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/watch-france-parliamentary-election-pro/>

will raise the retirement age to 64 instead of 65. Again, it will be possible to pass the law only if he secures a majority in the Parliament.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of La France insoumise was seen as the new leader of the left after his success during the 2022 French presidential elections. A left-wing coalition was formed to support Mélenchon's candidacy, including the Ecologist, which was formed under the name Union populaire (UP). This alliance includes Pole-Europe Écologie Les Verts-, the French Communist Party and the Socialist Party, which have agreed to present joint candidates for the 2022 legislative elections. This initiative was thus called NUPES or NUP, a coalition of French left-wing political parties that participated in the parliamentary elections. Unlike in the presidential race, in the parliamentary elections the NUPES has gained the second-largest number of deputies, just behind the Macron-led alliance.

In the second round of legislative elections, neither party won a majority and Macron failed to win the 289 seats. The situation is creating a new and fragile circumstances that have not happened in France for 30 years. The RN, led by Le Pen, and the Nupes, led by Mélenchon, both emerged stronger from the parliamentary elections. The current Prime Minister, Elisabeth Borne, warned that "this unprecedented situation poses a risk for our country". Politically, some analysts have commented that "this situation presents a completely fragmented and difficulties in France".⁸ The Macron-led coalition fell from 345 in 2017 to 245 seats and failed to reach the 289 number in the second round of legislative elections in 2022, but still remained in first place. The left-wing group Nupes gained 131 and the far-right RN 89, seats. Again, we saw that all the polls predicted by French research companies and media before the 2nd round of legislative elections have turned out to be wrong. The biggest social earthquake for France in the parliamentary elections occurred when Le Pen won 89 seats. This success of the far right was perceived as a big surprise and shock in the country. No pollster predicted that the far right would be able to send so many deputies to parliament. All these results mean that parliament will be effectively paralysed, and Macron will find it difficult to pass many of the laws he has planned, including the liberal reforms he has long

⁸ Aubin Laratte, Tanguy de l'Espinay et Victor Alexandre, "Législatives : cinq cartes pour comprendre un second tour... inattendu", *Le Parisien*, 20 juin 2022, <https://www.leparisien.fr/elections/legislatives/legislatives-cinq-cartes-pour-comprendre-le-second-tour-20-06-2022-NO4GANJIWNGMDGPNIADK36E74.php>

been eager to introduce. The parliamentary elections also demonstrated that Macron's party has lost 103 seats in five years and that for the first time French politics has witnessed historic gains by the far right.

As a leader who believes that France needs urgent social and economic reform, Macron wanted to introduce radical reforms during his second term as President. Although he started his political career in a left-wing party, Macron worked as a liberal banker from September 2008 to May 2012 for the Rothschild family, which owns some of the world's largest financial companies.⁹ “Macronism” is roughly known as progressive, pro-European and pro-business, according to Clea Caulcutt, who published an article called “The End of Macronism” in response to Macron's failure to win a majority in the parliamentary elections. “Macronism was all about efficiency — it offered a new political template, ditched outdated ideological divides in an effort to get things done.” Caulcutt writes. she notes that there is a serious anti-Macron sentiment in society, especially with the yellow vest movement.¹⁰ Another interesting note about the elections was that older voters preferred Macron, while younger voters preferred Mélenchon, who is approximately 70 years old.

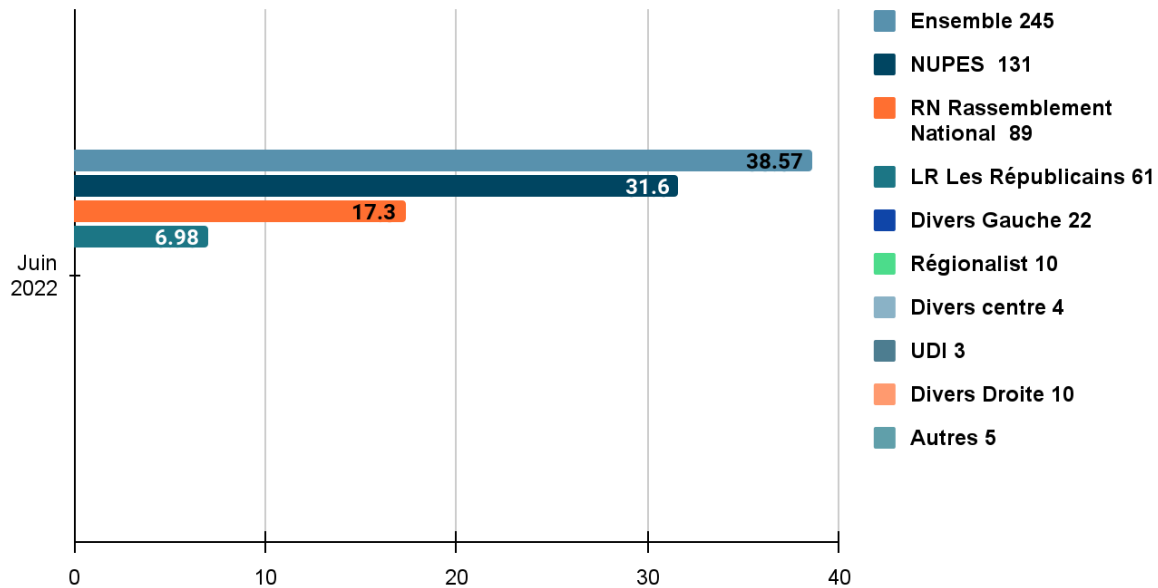
Even if they do not succeed in these elections, Les Républicains (LR), a French Gaullist and liberal-conservative political party on the political centre-right, potentially have a majority in the Senate. The Senate is an indirectly elected upper house that can block or delay the president's attempts to change the constitution. Despite being the motherland of the modern republic, Paul Taylor analyses that for 60 years the opposition in the French Parliament had little or no influence and was mostly male. The people have often shown their voice through strikes and street protests, he says.¹¹

⁹ Isabelle Chaperon, “Les années Rothschild d’Emmanuel Macron” *Le Monde*, 12 mai 2017, https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/05/10/les-annees-rothschild-d-emmanuel-macron_5125204_4854003.html

¹⁰ Clea Caulcutt, “The end of Macronism” *Politico*, June 23, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-end-of-macronism/>

¹¹ Paul Taylor, “France learns parliamentary democracy the hard way”, *Politico*, July 2, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-learns-parliamentary-democracy-the-hard-way/>

2022 French General Parliament (Legislative) 2nd Round Election Results



The Real Second Major Party in France: -Abstentions- The Hopeless Silent Majority Who Don't Want to Vote

In the second round of the presidential election, the number of abstentions rose to 13 655 861, exceeding the total number of those who voted for Le Pen, 13 288 686, making the abstentions the "second party" in France. In other words, the percentage of the abstentionist vote, which was characterized as the "third-largest party" in France in the 2017 elections, increased to 28.01% in 2022.¹² However, 8.6% of voters cast only blank ballots. Overall, the total votes of the top two candidates as a percentage of total registered voters gives us a different perspective to analyse the election results. Therefore, taking abstentions into account, Macron actually received the votes of only 38.52% of registered French voters in the 2022 elections. This means that he was re-elected president with less than 50%. In 2017, this figure was 43.61% of registered voters.

¹² "Résultats de l'élection présidentielle 2022", *ministère de l'intérieur*, [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult_presidentielle-2022/\(path\)/presidentielle-2022/FE.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult_presidentielle-2022/(path)/presidentielle-2022/FE.html)

However, the abstention rate seen in presidential elections has also been seen in parliamentary elections since 2007. This year, the abstention rate in the presidential elections, which was 26% in the first round and 28% in the second round, rose to a record high in the legislative elections, as voters grew frustrated and lacked confidence in politics. In France, the results of the first round of the legislative elections showed that turnout was 47.7%, a record low since the 5th Republic was established in 1958. In the second round, only 46% of French people registered on the electoral lists voted. This means that in the second round of the legislative elections, the abstentions actually constituted the largest majority, exceeding 53%, making it the "first party", so to speak. Traditionally, the legal spirit behind French democracy has ideally been to elect the president with at least 50% of the vote. However, this was last seen with Jacques Chirac, who won the presidential elections in 2002.¹³

Andrew Smith, professor of French politics at the University of Chichester, told France 24: “Abstention from the ballot box is a form of protest, a marker of disillusionment, and in much the same way RN’s performance was driven by a desire to protest as much as it was driven by support for their policies.”¹⁴ That shows French voters are politically hopeless and pessimistic. In its analysis, Le Monde newspaper described this situation as a “democratic crisis and the problem of abstentionism” in France.¹⁵

The low turnout in the French elections has also raised the question of social democratic legitimacy. Criticising the record low turnout in the last election, Jean-Luc Mélenchon described

¹³ “French election results in charts and maps: Abstention and Le Pen gain ground”, *Le Monde*, May 24, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2022/04/25/french-election-results-in-charts-and-maps-abstention-and-le-pen-gain-ground_5981592_5.html

¹⁴ Tom Wheeldon, “‘A seismic event’: Le Pen’s party makes historic breakthrough in French parliament” *France24*, 20/06/2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20220619-a-seismic-event-le-pen-s-party-makes-historic-breakthrough-in-french-parliament>

¹⁵ “Crise démocratique et abstention : « Le Monde » a consacré une journée spéciale à ces questions, à cinq jours du second tour”. https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/live/2022/04/19/derriere-l-abstention-un-biais-generationnel-une-action-protestataire-et-une-fracture-politique-temoignez-sur-la-crise-democratique_6122727_6059010.html

Macron as "the worst elected president of the Fifth Republic", implying that a situation has emerged in France that raises questions for a democratic society.¹⁶ Different proposals to solve this structural problem for the functionality of democracy, including "compulsory voting" options, have been presented by French institutes.¹⁷

In a survey, the French were asked "Why will I abstain?" The majority responded that they were protesting against the current political situation and boycotting the socio-economic conditions in the country by not voting.¹⁸ Frédéric Dabi, Managing Director of Ifop, a market research and polling company and one of the 5 largest institutes in France, has highlighted the dire situation following the record low turnout after the 1st round of the parliamentary elections: "With such a strong abstention, the death knell is ringing for everyone", drawing attention to the problem of democratic legitimacy.¹⁹

Participation in elections has actually been declining since the 2000s. Low turnout also poses problems for the social functionality of democracy. After the presidential elections, IFOP published the following table on why voters abstained. The table shows that 43% said they did not vote - to show their dissatisfaction with the political parties - 40% said they did not vote because none of the candidates defended or represented their ideas. 39% said they did not go to the polls as a manifesto (dissatisfaction) against the President and the government, 37% said they did not go to the polls because they believed that this election would not change anything in the situation in France, and 33% said they did not go to the polls because they believed that this election would not make any change in their daily lives.

¹⁶ <https://www.tf1info.fr/politique/resultats-election-presidentielle-2022-emmanuel-macron-est-il-desormais-le-president-le-plus-mal-elue-de-la-ve-republique-2217709.html>

¹⁷ "L'abstention : analyses et propositions", *Fondation Jean-Jaurès*, 03/11/2021, <https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/labstention-analyses-et-propositions/>

¹⁸ Jean amy "POURQUOI L'ABSTENTION EST LA SEULE RÉPONSE POSSIBLE", 17/04/2022 <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-amy/blog/170422/pourquoi-l-abstention-est-la-seule-reponse-possible>

¹⁹ Yannick Vely interview, "Exclusif - Frédéric Dabi : «Avec une abstention si forte, le glas sonne pour tout le monde»" *Match* 13/06/2022, <https://www.parismatch.com/Actu/Politique/Frederic-Dabi-Une-deuxieme-election-commence-avec-une-abstention-si-forte-le-glas-sonne-pour-tout-le-monde-1811459>

Les raisons de l'abstention (réponses « Déterminante » selon les personnes susceptibles de s'abstenir)



22 avril 2022

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of the 2022 presidential election, Hidalgo received a rather sad and disappointing 1.8% of the vote. This ended the left party's hopes once and for all.

However, La France Insoumise - founded by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who comes from the same left-wing background and stands on a more radical side - received 19.58% of the vote in 2017. Nevertheless, the Parti Socialiste did not approach Mélenchon and resisted the idea of an alliance with him for a long time. In the 2022 presidential elections, Jean-Luc Mélenchon achieved greater success, receiving close to 22% of the vote. Only a one-point difference in the first round prevented him from qualifying for the second round instead of the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen. Some analysts thought that Mélenchon could have won the presidential race against Macron if Mélenchon had remained in the second round instead of Marine Le Pen. Because even though millions of French voters did not want Macron, they preferred to vote for him when they were caught in the race between Le Pen and Macron in the second round. The majority of the French, at least for the time being, thought that an extreme right-wing party would upset their whole order and preferred to vote for the lesser of two evils.

Beside the Parti Socialiste, there is another left-wing party: the Green Party of France, known in France as Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV). This political party focuses on ecologist and environmental issues that are rising all over Europe, especially among the young idealist generation, is also becoming popular as an environmentalist party. The French Green Party was partially successful in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections and the 2020 French Municipal elections. However, in the presidential race under the leadership of Yannick JADOT, they failed to achieve their hopes at the ballot box, receiving only 4.63% of the vote in 2022.

The frustration of the left parties in the presidential elections, especially against far-right candidates like Le Pen and Zemmour, led the entire left to unite under one roof for the legislative elections. This new initiative, called the New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES or NUP), was a coalition of political parties on the French left. With his high vote share in the 2022 presidential race, the new leader of the left was now Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of La France Insoumise - the unbowed party of France. In fact, in 2018, Mélenchon stated that the greatest danger awaiting France was authoritarian liberalism and explained this in an article entitled

“Emmanuel Macron: authoritarian liberalism”. Mélenchon stated that the constitution of the Fifth Republic had mutated and become authoritarian, and that an alternative strategy could be developed for the new conditions created by a new constitution and a 'citizens' revolution' by introducing the concept of the Sixth Republic.²⁰

As a result of these developments, in the first round of parliamentary elections, Macron, together with other parties, large and small, also formed an alliance called the Ensemble - the ruling coalition. Macron's La République en Marche ! (LREM), his partners, notably Mouvement Démocrate led by former Justice Minister François Bayrou and Horizons led by former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, have formed an alliance ahead of the Parliamentary elections. The legislative elections were essentially neck and neck between Macron's Ensemble and the left-wing alliance Nupes, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. A few days before the second round, Macron called on the French to vote for stability in order to widen the gap, urging the French to vote for the country's stability, and referring to the emerging Russia-Ukraine war: “Don't add French instability to the world disorder.”²¹ In addition, ahead of the parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne called on voters to support Macron's coalition. She called for stability both on social media and local media in order to obtain a majority in parliament. “Next Sunday, in the face of extremes, you will ensure that France meets its future and its values by voting for the candidates of the presidential majority”²² she tweeted.

²⁰ Jean-Luc Mélenchon, “Emmanuel Macron : le libéralisme autoritaire”, 30.01.2018, <https://melenchon.fr/2018/01/30/emmanuel-macron-le-liberalisme-autoritaire/>

²¹ Xavier Demagny, "Ne pas ajouter un désordre français au désordre mondial" : Macron dramatise l'enjeu des législatives, 14 juin 2022, *Radiofrance*, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/ne-pas-ajouter-un-desordre-francais-au-desordre-mondial-macron-dramatise-l-enjeu-des-legislatives-8946864>

²² https://twitter.com/Elisabeth_Borne/status/1536100323110047744?s=20&t=Fu8yAnWJnm-2k5pgVoR3ew

The Rise of the Far Right in France

The term extreme right-wing league (or nationalist league) -*ligue d'extrême droite* (ou *ligue nationaliste*)- was used in France in the 1920s and 1930s to refer to the many political organizations that developed in opposition to the parliamentary republic and advocated far-right ideas. In the current spirit of the times, they were often involved in anti-Semitic and anti-Bolshevik movements, in his analysis of the French elections, Robert Zaretsky refers to the 1930s, when France was grappling with a global economic and financial crisis. He points out that at a time when Europe was facing the threat of war and the growing ambitions of authoritarian powers, the far right and fascist political movement known as the *ligues* was on the rise in France. “France has witnessed the rise of authoritarian and fascist movements, known as *ligues*, in its own country, just as it does now” he says, noting that history is repeating itself by drawing attention to the rise of the far right in France today.²³

The rise of the far right in France has increased in parallel with the increase in terrorist attacks in recent years. Islam, secularism, and the integration of the Muslim community have been the most contentious issues in almost every election in the last 20 years. All parties, especially far-right candidates, used these issues as a campaigning tool. Increased political propaganda and public pressure have led non-right-wing parties in the country to develop policies that would attract votes from people of this persuasion. In France, for example, the headscarf was previously banned in schools and public administrations in the name of *laïcité* (secularism), with the support of almost all parties. In a live televised debate with Macron in the run-up to the 2022 Presidential elections, far-right leader Le Pen went one step further and said that if elected president of France, she would ban the headscarf in public places.²⁴

²³ Robert Zaretsky, “The Popular Front of the 1930s offers parallels ahead of the country’s legislative elections.”, *Politico*, May 25, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/historic-echoes-france-new-left-alliance/>

²⁴ Marine Le Pen : “Il faut interdire le voile dans l'espace public”, *BFMTV*, 20/04/2022 https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/elections/presidentielle/marine-le-pen-il-faut-interdire-le-voile-dans-l-espace-public_VN-202204200677.html

Beside Le Pen, Eric Zemmour, a former journalist, and polemicist who announced his candidacy in December 2021, has become the most controversial far-right candidate of the elections. Zemmour's sociological focus, on which he has already written a polemical book, is on immigration, security, and identity. Zemmour campaigned intensively on culture/civilization wars, anti-immigration, and anti-Islam. Zemmour, essentially a male version of Le Pen, used more extreme rhetoric and exclusionary language to emphasize that France was facing a Muslim invasion. Zemmour's theory, also known as “Le Grand Remplacement”, was based on the idea that the West's problem of demographic decline, complemented by cheap immigrant labour, would eventually turn the original population into a minority. Zemmour's theory discusses the risk of a non-local culture (Islam is mainly foreign Muslim populations from sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb), which is increasing as a result of immigration, moving from minority to majority and replacing the local culture. Popularized by the far-right writer Renaud Camus, Eric Zemmour used this concept throughout his election campaign.

Both Le Pen and Zemmour ran an anti-immigrant and anti-Islam campaign. They both used extreme nationalist arguments and Islamophobic language. Zemmour has tried to convince voters that he wants to reform immigration policy, believing that "mass immigration" threatens French identity. Like Le Pen, Zemmour believes in policies that advocate the assimilation of foreigners in France, and not their "simple integration".²⁵ A data analysis of Zemmour's rhetoric by Stanford University's Cécile Alduy reveals that Zemmour's political arguments have a "morbid fascination with violence, war, death, conquest and domination". The word “war” is the third most used word in Zemmour's discourses, which develop discourse on the idea of conflict. According to Alduy, Zemmour's discourse tends to see enemies rather than races, foreigners and citizens.²⁶ It should not be forgotten that Le Pen's 89 deputies in the legislative elections, much higher than expected, was due to Éric Zemmour's call for everyone on the far right to “unite and join the national bloc”

²⁵ “Le programme d'Éric Zemmour”, <https://programme.ericzemmour.fr/>

²⁶ Alison Hird, “‘Conquest, domination’ at heart of French far-right presidential candidate’s discourse”, *rfi*, 19/02/2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20220317-war-death-conquest-domination-at-heart-of-far-right-presidential-candidate-zemmour-discourse>

and support Le Pen in the legislative elections.²⁷ A geopolitical assessment of the far right shows that Marine Le Pen gained more ground and significantly increased her votes in the North, East, South and overseas regions of France compared to the previous elections.

The most important result of the 2022 French presidential election was in fact the strong rise of Marine Le Pen, who received 41.45 percent of the French electorate. Although she did not win the presidential race, the 2022 elections were a historical victory for the far right. With the elections of 2022, right-wing and extreme nationalism, which has been on the rise since 2002, has now gained a place in parliament as a mainstream party in France. To see the change in the intervening 20 years; in 2002, Jacques Chirac was elected president with 82% of the votes and 25 537 956 votes in the second round. His opponent, Jean-Marie Le Pen received about 18% of the votes and 5 525 032 votes. In the intervening period, compared to her father, Madame Le Pen has increased the number of far-right voters by 8 million more than her predecessor.

French Elections and the Future of the European Union

French elections were held in the shadow of the war between Russia and Ukraine. It seems French voted Macron preferred stability in the face of rising oil prices and inflation. Nevertheless, in the Parliamentary elections, they left Macron alone and prevented him from gaining an absolute majority. As France is one of the two founding and important countries of the European Union (EU), the victory of the pro-EU Macron in the Presidency is crucial for the functionality of the EU. On the other hand, Macron's two strong rivals, Le Pen and Mélenchon, have developed serious rhetoric against the EU. For example, Mélenchon's program of “disobeying” EU rules could have been a critical threshold for the EU. The arguments in Le Pen's party program, such as immigration, identity, and integration, which she wanted to radically change, would not be compatible with the

²⁷ Justine Faure, "Il faut qu'il dégonfle sa tête" : Éric Zemmour peine à créer son "bloc national" pour les législatives, *TFI info*, 12 mai 2022, <https://www.tfi.info.fr/politique/elections-legislatives-eric-zemmour-reconquete-accumule-les-fins-de-non-recevoir-pour-constituer-un-bloc-national-a-droite-2217853.html>

EU legislation. In an article, Le Pen said she would fight for French law to be above international law and notably supreme over European law. Diplomats in Brussels were already asking what kind of problems await France and the EU in general if this happens.²⁸

What is clear is that the EU has been shaken by the UK's official departure from the European Union on January 31, 2020. The Union is also facing serious problems with two of its members, Poland, and Hungary. In the future, the EU could see the beginning of the end in the face of a French president who opposes the union and fuels the “Frexit” debate. However, the most recent development to inflame the EU debate was the text agreed by the four left-wing parties in coalition before the parliamentary elections. The left alliance issued a declaration saying that they were ready to “not comply” with EU rules. In addition, a text in the program of the New Popular Ecological and Social Union, which stated that “We will have to be ready to disobey some European rules”, sparked controversy. One analysis said that this initiative had shocked Europe.²⁹ As the debate continues, the French Minister for Europe, Clément Beaune, argued in an article in *Le Monde* that Jean-Luc Mélenchon is playing a false and dangerous game when he voices the idea of “European disobedience”. “France does not obey Europe, it builds it” he said, adding that the majority of the French people do not want to leave the Union.³⁰

In addition, the battle for masks and health equipment among EU Member States during the pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of the EU as a supranational organization. Aside from the bureaucratic and technocratic cumbersome structure of the Union, the pandemic has also shown us that the national interests of European countries are more important than the interests of the Union. It is also a sign that the EU is still not delivering what many Europeans wish and that the Union may evolve into a different platform in the coming years.

²⁸ Yves Adaken et Romain Bizeul, “Le programme de Marine Le Pen est-il applicable ?”, 22 avril 2022, <https://www.mediacites.fr/veracites-2022-analyse/le-programme-de-marine-le-pen-est-il-applicable/>

²⁹ Sarah Halifa-Legrand, “Désobéir à l’Europe, la petite bombe du programme de la Nupes”, *L’OBS*, 14/06/2022, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/elections-legislatives-2022/20220614.OBS59653/desobeir-a-l-europe-la-petite-bombe-du-programme-de-la-nupes.html>

³⁰ Clément Beaune, Clément Beaune : « La “désobéissance européenne”, un “gloubi-boulga” mensonger et dangereux », *Le Monde*, 06 mai 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/05/06/clement-beaune-la-desobeissance-europeenne-un-gloubi-boulga-mensonger-et-dangereux_6124972_3232.html

Conclusion

In general, the elections have shown us that France is sociologically divided into roughly 3 blocks. Firstly, the liberal capitalist can also be defined as the “elite bourgeoisie block”. This group is active especially in banks, finance and media and supported Macron, fought for stability and for the liberal economy. The second block is the “angry, worried” bloc. They are the desperate and abstaining voters who believe that the system is completely dysfunctional, and the country is controlled by elites, banks, and capital owners. This group can also be read as the group that has lost faith in democratic institutions by not participating in the elections. This group assumes that nothing is working properly in France and believe that the relationship between the state and citizens has weakened in daily life and therefore the spirit of the Republic has died. And the third group is the “block of extremes”, the masses gathered in extreme ideological camps such as the extreme right (Le Pen) and the extreme left (Mélenchon). These marginalized right and left masses believe that the only way to bring about change in France is through radical decisions. In these elections, both the far right and the far left reached significant numbers in parliament. Especially, the far right's 89 seats in the Parliament are an important threshold for French political history.

The elections show that the far right is on the rise in France. Two of the four candidates who received the highest number of votes in the presidential elections were Le Pen and Zemmour. In the second round of the presidential race, Le Pen received nearly 12 million votes, supported by the polemicist Eric Zemmour, whose arguments were the most popular in these elections. Compared to the presidential race in 2017, the radical right has achieved an additional 5 million voters in 2022. This makes it more likely that Le Pen or a leader close to the far-right ideology will become president of France in the next elections. This is likely to be a strong possibility if the economy deteriorates further and the purchasing power of the French declines, and if the disruptions in the health service continue. Le Pen's nationalist and inward-looking politics of the

far right, which is also seen in other European countries, will negatively affect important institutions such as the EU and NATO. Naturally, this will also put France, which has high tourism revenues and significant brand value, in a difficult situation globally. It is important to note that even 10 years ago, Zemmour's extreme ideas would have been marginalizing. The fact that a society like France, which is culturally distant from fascist ideas in particular, today highlights Zemmour in the media and normalizes his fascist arguments. This also helps us to understand the transformation of French society in the last decade.

The elections also reveal that France is going through a very difficult period, both politically and economically. The record low turnout shows that people have given up hope in politicians in a period of declining purchasing power and structural problems in the health service. In terms of the spirit of democracy, this record low turnout has sparked controversy in the country. The traditional protest culture and the mass demonstrations of trade unions in the country are important in showing that social anger can easily turn into street protests. We have seen that in the second round of the presidential race, students demonstrated widely, especially at the Sorbonne and other major universities, and were chanting "Ni Macron ni Le Pen". During these protests, students also criticized police brutality and protested their dissatisfaction with France's current political situation.³¹ The yellow vests, who had previously taken to the streets due to high oil prices, are likely to protest again with energy prices peaking with the Russia-Ukraine war. The rise in inflation and energy prices will further disturb the French, with lower purchasing power.

In short, the increasing far-right votes on the one hand and the leftist movement led by Mélenchon, who wants to run for power in the parliamentary elections on the other, will increase this division. There is also a mass of people who did not participate in the elections, showing their despair and distrust of politics at record levels. For France, a country of Revolutions, this record low turnout demonstrated the problematic functionality of democracy in the country.

³¹ Soazig Le Nevé, « Ni Macron ni Le Pen » : l'inconnue du vote des étudiants mobilisés dans l'entre-deux-tours, *Le Monde*, 13 avril 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/13/ni-macron-ni-le-pen-l-inconnue-du-vote-des-etudiants-mobilises-dans-l-entre-deux-tours_6122048_6059010.html

In France, one of the founders of the European Union and one of its two most important countries, anti-union rhetoric is now openly voiced by both far right and left-wing parties. For the EU, the assumption of Marine Le Pen's victory in the next French presidential elections and the statement by the left-wing alliance (Nupes) that they will not follow some European Union laws, indicate that danger bells are ringing for the Union. In this context, the French elections ultimately offer an important glimpse into the future of European politics: First, we may hear more voices of populist, far-right, anti-immigrant politicians across Europe. Second, the current high prices of oil and energy will be worsened by the weakening of relations with Russia. Energy will be one of the most important priority issues for Europe in the next 5 years. This risks a further decline in purchasing power in France and across Europe in the coming years. A possible economic recession and crisis with rising energy prices would accelerate the rise of the far right to power.

Sociologically, France has a cumbersome, bureaucratic structure that is invisible from the outside but is deeply embedded in the system. How it has adapted to the international liberal economic arena despite this cumbersome and bureaucratic structure is a subject for another study. For decades, every president has said that France needs reforms but has failed to do so. The country is struggling to adapt to a new digitized, fast, and solution-oriented world. Even opening a simple bank account was still a problem for most people until recent years. Permanent contract work (CDI), which is at the centre of every French person's life and the dream of every French person, is becoming increasingly difficult. Wages for the same professions are very low compared to, for example, Germany. Excessive taxes and the cumbersome functioning of the state are evident in almost every aspect of life. Even though France is a social state, it is not enough that it offers health care at a lower cost than for example the United States. People expect this service to be more functional, faster, and smoother. Some people have been waiting for cataract surgery for a year and a half, like the two retired elderly couples I met at the café in Paris. Or like a French friend of mine who lost his ID card and complained that he couldn't get a new one for months. While it is understandable that Macron wants to reform, however, it is a mystery how he will do it. Will it be to satisfy the banks and the wealthy, or will it be to bring the country in line with the spirit of the times without losing the concept of a welfare state?

France is divided between a liberal, reform-minded President, and the far right, who see the solution to its problems as nationalist and anti-immigrant, and the far-left alliance, which believes that the country can be saved with old left-wing arguments. France now needs to address all these problems by reinterpreting and functionalizing the basic principles of the Republic - *liberté, égalité, fraternité* - while at the same time reforming its bureaucratic, cumbersome state structure and adapting to the world. France must choose between its assimilationist policies or a multicultural society: Should France address the problems in the suburbs with a multicultural society that advocates the coexistence of different religions and cultures as a founding principle of the EU? Or should France continue to seek solutions to these problems with its assimilation policies?

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