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# France's party system in 2022

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**ABSTRACT**

The 2022 presidential election saw Emmanuel Macron win a widely-expected second term in a run-off against Marine Le Pen, confirming the demise of the pre-2017 party system. In the ensuing parliamentary elections, however, Macron's party lost its majority, and the divided opposition forces staged a partial recovery. Most notably, the 'republican front', which had hitherto limited the far-right Rassemblement National's access to elective office, crumbled. This article analyses the transformation and destabilization of France's party system through the lenses of France's electoral system, the evolution of socio-political cleavages, and the behaviour of key players before and during the election campaign.

**RÉSUMÉ**

La victoire attendue d'Emmanuel Macron contre Marine Le Pen au second tour de l'élection présidentielle d'avril-mai 2022 confirma la mort du système de partis d'avant 2017. Aux législatives de juin, cependant, la perte, par le parti présidentiel, de la majorité absolue, et le rebond partiel des formations d'opposition, créèrent la surprise. Surtout, le « front républicain » qui avait jusque-là fermé l'accès aux mandats parlementaires à l'extrême droite, s'écroula. Cet article analyse la transformation et la déstabilisation du système de partis français à travers trois grilles de lecture: le système électoral, l'évolution des clivages sociopolitiques, et les comportements des acteurs-clés.

Party systems in Western democracies are shaped by the institutional framework, including the electoral system; by patterns of electoral behaviour, themselves shaped by socio-political cleavages; and by the behaviour of political parties and candidates. In France, the key institutional components are the directly-elected executive presidency and the two-ballot system used to choose both presidents and deputies in the National Assembly. The first ballot in each case offers room for many contenders; the second is a run-off between just two candidates (at the presidentials), or two and much more rarely three or four (in the 577 parliamentary constituencies).

Until 2017, observers assumed that votes for the varied range of first-round candidates, in whichever election, would flow naturally into second-round support for two front-runners, a left-winger and a conservative. The interest lay in the details—differential mobilization within each camp, the statements of support (if forthcoming) from

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eliminated candidates, and the minority of voters switching between left and right between ballots. The existence of two camps of left and right rested both on the bipolarity encouraged by the electoral system and on social cleavages based on class and religion. The rise of the far right from the mid-1980s, itself shaped by long-term social change, disrupted but did not appear to destroy this 'normal' pattern: far-right candidates rarely reached second ballots and when they did, a 'republican front'—the refusal of most mainstream voters to transfer their votes to them—kept them out of reach of presidential, parliamentary, and even most local electoral offices. The two presidential elections when no left-winger reached the run-off (1969 and 2002) could be viewed as exceptional. Two leading Sciences-Po researchers could even suggest in 2007 that France was heading for an effective two-party system dominated by centre-left and centre-right (Grunberg and Haegel 2007).

The system seemed all the more permanent as parliamentary elections that directly followed presidential elections, as in 1981, 1988, and 2002, could be relied upon to deliver a parliamentary majority for the newly-(re-)elected president.[1] This expectation was locked in by the shortening of the presidential term from seven years to five, from 2002, which meant that henceforth a parliamentary election would normally follow *every* presidential election. And the parliamentary elections of 2007 and 2012 followed the 'confirmation' pattern, delivering solid majorities to the new presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, respectively.

Nevertheless, the system had come under growing strain from the 1980s, thanks to voter discontent at policy convergence between the mainstream parties of left and right and the continuing availability of a far-right alternative. It fell apart in 2017, when the presidential candidates of *both* the formerly dominant players—the centre-left Parti Socialiste (PS) and the centre-right Les Républicains (LR)—saw their candidates eliminated at the first round. The run-off therefore pitted the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen (whose father Jean-Marie had also reached the second round in 2002) against Emmanuel Macron, formerly Economy and Industry Minister in Hollande's outgoing Socialist government. Macron, who presented himself as a centrist, simultaneously of right *and* left, won the run-off with 66.1%; but Le Pen had almost doubled her father's second-round score of 2002, indicating a weakening of the 'republican front'.

True to past form, the 2017 parliamentary elections confirmed and amplified the presidential result. On a turnout of below 50% (the outcome was widely anticipated), Macron's brand-new party, La République en Marche (LRM), and its centrist allies of François Bayrou's Mouvement des Démocrates (MoDem), sent 350 deputies to the 577-seat National Assembly. The left was reduced to a rump of 73 seats (the Socialists had the biggest left-wing group, but the left's leading personality was its dominant presidential candidate, hard-left former Trotskyist Jean-Luc Mélenchon); LR, with 112 seats, became France's main, but diminished, opposition party; and Le Pen's far right elected just eight deputies. Macron had, apparently, carried France into a new political world in which the political centre, formerly squeezed and split between the two main blocs of left and right, now dominated both.

For how long, and how far? LRM remained a virtual party, whose one-click, no-fee 'members' of 2017 did not stay long (Macron mistrusted a highly-institutionalized party as a constraint). Its failure to penetrate in depth suggested that Macron had fragmented rather than reconstructed France's party system; hence Fourquet's 2019 description of

French politics as an 'archipelago' (Fourquet 2019). The territorial elections of 2020 and 2021 left the 'old' parties, and especially LR, in control of most of France's towns and cities and all of the regions and *départements* (Bréchon 2022). Nevertheless, the elections of 2022 were widely expected to be a 'confirmation' cycle: polls consistently showed a second Macron-Le Pen run-off, with Macron winning (Wikipedia 2022).[2]

The predictions were half right. Macron strengthened his first-ballot score in 2022 by 3.8%, and became the fourth Fifth-Republic president (out of eight) to secure re-election, with 58.5% in the run-off against Le Pen (see Table 1). Of Macron's second-round voters, 57%—up from 43% in 2017—said they had chosen him because they wanted him as president, not just to block his opponent (Martin 2022). Yet his result showed clear weaknesses. His improved first-round score owed much to a catastrophic performance by his closest competitor, LR's Valérie Pécresse; the far Right's total first-round vote rose 6.6% against 2017, thanks to a modest increase in Le Pen's first-round score plus votes for her new, virulent competitor Éric Zemmour; and above all, the president's second-round vote fell 7.6%, in a further weakening of the 'republican front'.

The parliamentary elections of 12 and 19 June then defied predictions by breaking with the old 'confirmation' pattern: all they confirmed was Macron's fragility. As in 2017, fewer than half the voters (46.5%) cast a valid vote in 2022. And, crucially, Macron's coalition, built around LRM and named Ensemble! for the occasion,[3] failed to ride back to power on his coat-tails; instead, it lost nearly 1.5 million votes and 100 seats (see Table 2). The left, meanwhile, more than doubled its seat tally by running a single candidate in each constituency under the banner of the Nouvelle Union Populaire, Écologique et Sociale (NUPES). LR recovered somewhat from the Pécresse debacle but still lost two-fifths of its 2017 votes and half its seats. But the real winners of June 2022 were Le Pen's Rassemblement national (RN), which broke with past poor showings at parliamentary elections and won 89 seats against eight in 2017.

**Table 1.** French presidential elections, 2017 and 2022 (% of valid votes cast).

| | | First ballot | | | Second ballot | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2022 | 2017 | *Gains/ losses 2022–2017* | 2022 | 2017 | *Gains/ losses 2022–2017* |
| Arthaud | Extreme Left | 0.6 | 0.6 | *0.0* | | | |
| Poutou | Extreme Left | 0.8 | 1.1 | *−0.3* | | | |
| Roussel (2022 only) | Communist | 2.3 | — | *+2.3* | | | |
| Mélenchon | Radical Left | 22.0 | 19.6 | *+2.4* | | | |
| Hidalgo (Hamon in 2017) | Socialist | 1.7 | 6.4 | *−4.7* | | | |
| Jadot (2022 only) | Green | 4.6 | — | *+4.6* | | | |
| ***Total Left/Green*** | | ***31.9*** | ***27.7*** | ***+4.2*** | | | |
| Macron | Neoliberal Centre | 27.8 | 24.0 | *+3.8* | 58.5 | 66.1 | *−7.6* |
| Pécresse (Fillon in 2017) | Centre-Right | 4.8 | 20.0 | *−15.2* | | | |
| ***Total Centre/Centre-Right*** | | ***32.4*** | ***44.0*** | ***−11.6*** | | | |
| Dupont-Aignan | Right | 2.1 | 4.7 | *−2.6* | | | |
| Le Pen | Extreme Right | 23.4 | 21.3 | *+2.1* | 41.5 | 33.9 | *+7.6* |
| Zemmour (2022 only) | Extreme Right | 7.1 | — | *+7.1* | | | |
| ***Total hard/extreme Right*** | | ***32.6*** | ***26.0*** | ***+6.6*** | | | |
| *Others (Lassalle (2017 and 2022), Asselineau, Cheminade) (2017 only))* | | *3.2* | *2.3* | *+1.1* | | | |
| | | **100.0** | **100.0** | | **100.0** | **100.0** | |

Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur.

**Table 2.** French parliamentary elections, 12–19 June 2022 and 11–18 June 2017: first-ballot votes, candidates qualified at second round, and seats.

| | % Registered Voters 2022 | % Valid Votes Cast 2022 | Candidates qualified for second round | Seats | Seats as % of total | *Gains/ losses seats 2022–2017* | % Registered Voters 2017 | % Valid Votes Cast 2017 | Candidates qualified for second round | Seats |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Far Left | 0.5% | 1.2% | | 0 | | *0* | 0.4% | 0.8% | | |
| NUPES (in 2017: PCF+LFI+PS +Greens) | 11.9% | 25.7% | 386 | 151 | *26.2%* | *84* | 12.1% | 25.5% | 142 | 58 |
| Other moderate Left including Left Radicals | 1.7% | 3.7% | | 0 | | *−15* | 1.0% | 2.1% | | 15 |
| Other Greens | 1.2% | 2.7% | | 0 | | *0* | 0.0% | 0.0% | | |
| Ensemble ! (Macronist majority: LRM+MoDem in 2017)) | 12.0% | 25.8% | 419 | 250 | *43.3%* | *−100* | 15.4% | 32.3% | 513 | 350 |
| Other centrists | 0.6% | 1.2% | | 0 | | | | | | |
| Les Républicains and Centre-Right allies | 5.2% | 11.3% | 87 | 62 | *10.7%* | *−68* | 9.0% | 18.8% | 300 | 130 |
| Other Right | 1.1% | 2.3% | 15 | 0 | | *3* | 1.3% | 2.8% | | 6 |
| 'Sovereignist' hard Right | 0.5% | 1.1% | | 0 | | *0* | 0.6% | 1.2% | 1 | 1 |
| Reconquête ! (Zemmour's party, far Right, 2022) | 2.0% | 4.2% | 0 | 0 | | *0* | | | | |
| Rassemblement National (Front National in 2017) | 8.7% | 18.7% | 208 | 89 | *15.4%* | *81* | 6.3% | 13.2% | 108 | 8 |
| Other far Right | 0.0% | 0.0% | | 0 | | *−1* | 0.1% | 0.3% | 1 | 1 |
| Others (various, regionalists) | 1.0% | 2.1% | 44 | 25 | *4.3%* | *17* | 1.5% | 3.1% | 13 | 8 |
| Totals | 46.5% | 100.0% | | 577 | *100.0%* | *0* | 47.6% | 100.0% | | 577 |

Sources*: Le Monde*; Ministère de l'Intérieur; Assemblée Nationale. Figures for parliamentary seats refer to National Assembly groups as constituted on 29 June 2022.

On 20 June 2022, for the first time in 60 years, there was no prospect of a stable parliamentary majority to govern France.[4] This new and unsettled political world is no easier to model than to operate. It remains structured by the electoral system and retains elements of bipolarity. As in every Western democracy, it has also been profoundly affected by globalization, the transition to a (largely) postindustrial society, and the resulting transformation of socio-political cleavages. Some authors (Amable and Palombarini 2018; Sainte-Marie 2021) have characterized France's re-formed electorate as structured by 'blocs' of voters, not wholly unlike Marx's social classes. While categorizing voters is necessary for any analysis, in the post-2017 context, the 'bloc' view gives a misleading impression of solidity. Invited to go to the polls four times in ten weeks, with a succession of different cues deployed—especially in 2022—by both candidates and parties, many voters have varied their answers, or given none. The untidy archipelago metaphor better captures the evolving Macronian party system.

To make sense of it, we begin with the simplest configuration, the forced bipolarity of the second round of the presidential election and its transformation since 2017. We then evaluate the apparent 'tripartition' of France's political space in the first ballot, where voters were freer to choose, in the light of long-term changes to cleavage patterns. A third section, focused more on the behaviour of political actors, deals with the complexities of the June parliamentary elections and with the biggest single change to the party system of 2022, the breakdown of the 'republican front' against the far Right.

## Two Frances: the presidential run-off, 24 April 2022

The second ballot of the presidential election, on 24 April 2022, saw a 'bourgeois' candidate prevail among higher social groups, the educated, and the retired, while his opponent attracted white- and blue-collar workers (see Table 3). This sociological breakdown harks back to the 1970s and 1980s (CEVIPOF 1989, 18)—but with the crucial difference that while Macron was clearly the 'bourgeois' candidate, the 'workers" candidate came, not from the left, but from the far right. All the indicators of occupation, self-declared class, life satisfaction, education, income, or financial security, offer a practically linear relationship between comfort, security, and the Macron vote on the one hand and difficulty, insecurity and the Le Pen vote on the other. The 'two Frances' (IFOP 2022), moreover, have drawn further apart since 2017; Macron's vote fell least among managers, professionals, and the retired; Le Pen gained most among the unemployed and people with a monthly income below €1,250. There was a territorial distinction to this vote, too: Macron did best (at 70% or more) in Île-de-France and prosperous regional centres, with 85% in Paris, Le Pen among France's often run-down small towns and villages (Martin 2022). Only religion, anchor of the left/right divide for most of the twentieth century, no longer played a major discriminating role: the preferences of Catholic voters in 2022 were close to those of the wider electorate (see Table 4). But strong Catholic voters are in any case rare: the regularly practising numbered just 6% of the population in 2012, compared with 35% in 1961. Only 'other religions'—chiefly Moslems, whose numbers remain small—leant strongly towards one candidate—or rather, strongly away from Le Pen (IPSOS-SopraSteria 2022a; Fourquet 2019, 25, 67, 139).

Strikingly, too, the 'bourgeois' candidate had become the preferred candidate of the left (see Table 4): 81% of left-wing identifiers, as well as 87% of centrists, backed Macron,

**Table 3.** Votes for Macron and Le Pen, French presidential election, second ballot, 24 April 2022, by occupation, education, and income (% of valid votes cast).

| | Macron | Le Pen | Macron losses against 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall vote | 58.5 | 41.5 | −7.6 |
| **Occupation** | | | |
| Management, professional | 77 | 23 | −5 |
| Intermediate professions' | 59 | 41 | −8 |
| Routine white-collar | 43 | 57 | −11 |
| Blue-collar worker | 33 | 67 | −11 |
| Retired | 68 | 32 | −6 |
| Unemployed | 36 | 64 | −17 |
| **Education** | | | |
| Lower than baccalauréat | 50 | 50 | −5 |
| Baccalauréat | 48 | 52 | −16 |
| Baccalauréat + 2 years | 58 | 42 | −11 |
| Baccalauréat + 3 or more years | 74 | 26 | −7 |
| **Monthly income** | | | |
| < 1,250€ | 44 | 56 | −11 |
| 1,250–2,000€ | 53 | 47 | −6 |
| 2,000–3,000€ | 56 | 44 | −8 |
| >3,000€ | 65 | 35 | −10 |
| **Life satisfaction** | | | |
| Satisfied | 69 | 31 | |
| Dissatisfied | 21 | 79 | |
| **Self-declared class** | | | |
| Comfortably off, privileged | 79 | 21 | |
| Upper middle class | 71 | 29 | |
| Lower middle class | 56 | 44 | |
| Working class | 44 | 56 | |
| Underprivileged | 35 | 65 | |
| **Financial position** | | | |
| Putting plenty of money by | 75 | 25 | |
| Putting a little money by | 68 | 32 | |
| Just about managing | 46 | 54 | |
| Living off savings or credit | 48 | 52 | |
| **Residence (by size of town)** | | | |
| Paris region | 73 | 27 | |
| *Total provincial towns* | 58 | 42 | |
| Large towns (100,000–2,000,000 inhabitants) | 65 | 35 | |
| Medium towns (20,000–99,999 inhabitants) | 54 | 46 | |
| Small towns (2,000–19,999 inhabitants) | 49 | 51 | |
| Villages of <2,000 inhabitants | 48 | 52 | |

Sources: IPSOS-SopraSteria (2017a, 2022a).

while 64% of right-wingers supported Le Pen. This dislocation of former left/right alignments is well established. Prefigured in France by the referendums of 1992 and 2005 on European integration (Fourquet 2011), it affects all Western democracies. One reason has been that religious practice is now too diminished to structure party systems as in the past. More complex has been the long-term detachment of the working class from its former left-wing loyalties: as Sainte-Marie (2021, 106) notes, the RN now has a stronger working-class vote than the Communists did in their mid-twentieth century heyday.

The most thorough interpretation of this change is offered by Pierre Martin (2018, 7–8, 52, 179–81), who argues that since the 1980s, what he calls the world revolution, like the two earlier revolutions of the Lipset and Rokkan canon (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), has generated major social cleavages—most obviously, between winners and losers of globalization—and thus voter alignments. The position of workers on the wrong side of

**Table 4.** Votes for Macron and Le Pen, French presidential election, second ballot, 24 April 2022, by religion and political positioning.

| | Macron | Le Pen | Macron losses against 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall vote | 58.5 | 41.5 | −7.9 |
| **Religion** | | | |
| Catholic | 56 | 44 | −7 |
| (regularly practising) | 54 | 46 | −12 |
| (occasionally practising) | 52 | 48 | −14 |
| (non-practising) | 57 | 43 | −5 |
| Other religion | 68 | 32 | −4 |
| No religion | 59 | 41 | −9 |
| **Positioning on Left-Right scale** | | | |
| Far Left | 57 | 43 | −20 |
| Left | 82 | 18 | −13 |
| Somewhat Left | 85 | 15 | −6 |
| *total Left* | 81 | 19 | −11 |
| Centre | 87 | 13 | −2 |
| Somewhat Right | 67 | 33 | −9 |
| Right | 29 | 71 | −18 |
| Far Right | 2 | 98 | = |
| *total Right* | 36 | 64 | −12 |
| No party | 47 | 53 | −1 |

Source: IPSOS-SopraSteria (2022a).

globalization has trumped their left-wing attachments. Gone forever, thanks to deindustrialization, are the big battalions of miners, factory workers, or dockers, sharing secure employment (bitterly fought for), a strong collective identity sustained by union membership, a Marxist-inspired belief in their own historical role, and left-wing loyalties. Numerically diminished, atomized (Martin 2018, 163–4; Algan et al. 2019, 33), and often driven into the precarity of agency work or fixed-term contracts, the working class has not disappeared; but the 'typical' worker of the twenty-first century is quite likely to be a driver, a warehouseman, or an office cleaner (Terra Nova 2011). The number of blue-collar workers thus construed falls slightly below 20% of the working population; however, added to the 27.5% who fall into the (often female) white-collar categories (public- and private-sector clerical workers, hairdressers, home helps, baristas, or supermarket cashiers), with comparable incomes and similar (or indeed the same) residences, the total of the so-called *classes populaires* amounts to nearly half the total (Sainte-Marie 2021, 78–9).

Two other experiences shaped the outlook of the *classes populaires* from the late twentieth century. One was growing competition with immigrants, and their descendants, for jobs, housing, and welfare. That encouraged the politicization of the immigration issue by right-wing parties, by the Communists (albeit briefly), but most consistently by the far right, which made the scapegoating of immigrants and ethnic minorities its core selling-point (Martin 2018, 70–1). Remarkably, its voters now no longer need to live in close proximity to ethnic minorities to resent them (Le Bras 2022, 33). Second, the *classes populaires* have increasingly been physically separated from their better-off compatriots. A new political geography has largely superseded the ancient divide between Catholic (and right-wing) versus secular (and left-wing) France. It separates Paris and prosperous regional capitals from regions, small towns, and rural areas that perceive themselves as in decline; or desirable locations, with correspondingly high property values, from others

more distant from jobs, or services, or places of leisure, whose inhabitants are correspondingly car-dependent (Algan et al. 2019, 118–22; Le Bras and Fourquet 2017; Guilluy 2019; Fourquet 2019, 287–91, 301–3; IFOP 2022, 9–16). In other contexts too, as Fourquet (2019, 100–5) has observed, social mingling has diminished, whether in France's school and higher education systems, or through the decline of children's holiday camps or the end of compulsory military service.

Other reasons for the severance of relations between the *classes populaires* and the left were more directly political. Deindustrialization wrecked the institutional links between mass, unionized labour and the Communist Party from the 1980s. The Socialists failed to pick up the pieces. As globalization and declining growth (from 4% from 1950 to 1973, to 1.6–1.7% from 1973 to 2007, to −0.1% from 2008 to 2015) limited the scope for national redistributive policies, the PS in government, like its western European counterparts, implemented supply-side, often anti-labour, measures to improve national competitiveness (Piketty 2018, 55; Martin 2018, 52). On the question of Europe too, the PS, France's pro-European party *par excellence* from the 1980s, cut loose from the *classes populaires*: only 39% of blue-collar workers voted 'Yes' in the 1992 referendum, and only 21% in 2005 (the figures for white-collar workers were 47% and 33% respectively) (Fourquet 2011). Meanwhile, the increasingly upper-middle-class PS organization steadily closed off its strategic positions to the remaining working-class activists (Fourquet 2019, 107). And PS strategists wondered whether they should not drop working-class voters altogether and focus instead on the educated middle classes and their 'post-material' concerns such as gender equality, anti-racism, and ecology (Martin 2018, 170–1; Amable and Palombarini 2018, 39–41, 214; Terra Nova 2011).

To France's orphaned *classes populaires* (Perrineau 2019, 181) the mainstream right-wing parties and their free-market economic policies could offer little succour; the far right, which had made immigration its central issue under Jean-Marie Le Pen, apparently could, and its share of the blue-collar vote rose from 16% in 1988 to 27% in 1995 and 30% in 2002 (IPSOS 2002). When, in 2017, Marine Le Pen gave the party a more apparently left-wing social and economic policy and staked a claim to represent traditional French republican values, her share of the blue-collar vote rose to 37%, 13 points ahead of Mélenchon's (Perrineau 2016, 64–5: IPSOS-SopraSteria 2017b), and especially strong among those with low levels of life satisfaction and of trust in others (Algan et al. 2019, 14–15, 54, 59–62). The predominant appeal of the far right for the *classes populaires* had become a fixed point of French electoral politics.

Macron attempted to uproot it. With both of the long-established social cleavages that had structured France's party system either marginalized (in the case of religion) or twisted out of recognition (in that of class), Macron in 2017 could convincingly claim that the left–right divide was irrelevant, and the party system dysfunctional, while the 'real' cleavage lay between conservatives of both camps and progressives seeking to embrace modernity (Macron 2017, 42–5, 238). This message helped him win, not just two-thirds of the second-round vote in 2017, but 44% support from blue-collar workers and 54% from white-collar *employés* (IPSOS-SopraSteria 2017a).

That Macron failed to turn this into a durable restructuring of the party system owes something to the wearing effect of a presidency marked by crisis (most notably Covid), but more to his own record. His early reforms—scaling back France's wealth tax to insignificance, cutting taxation of income from capital to a flat 30%, reforming French

labour law to cap compensation for unfair dismissal, reducing housing benefit, freezing pensions and raising taxation on them—earned him an enduring reputation as the 'president of the rich' (Jospin 2020, 80; Amable and Palombarini 2018, 170)—and obscured his relatively good record on unemployment. Indeed, during his first term, the LRM parliamentary group itself lost 44 of its 314 members, mostly disillusioned centre-left Deputies (Rozenberg 2021, 41; Bréchon 2022, 184 n.). When the French were asked who had gained and who had lost from the Macron presidency, seven out of ten said they personally had lost out, and that only business leaders had won (IFOP-Fiducial 2021). Macron governed more to the right than to the left (Endeweld 2018, 421–7; Corcuff 2020, 646–9; Martigny and Strudel 2022, 164, 170–6). LRM entered over twice as many alliances with the right as with the left at the 2020 municipal elections; Macron's support for green policies was rhetorical and then barely even that (Llorca 2021, 144–6); and, having promised an 'exemplary Republic', he proceeded to lose eight ministers to corruption charges (Jospin 2020, 56; *Mediapart*, 5 April 2022).

Just as important, Macron proved personally offensive to the *classes populaires*. His rhetoric included seemingly contemptuous references to 'people who are nothing' and invitations to the poor to 'cross the road' to seek employment (Perrineau 2019, 58; Rouban 2021, 75). But the definitive break came late in 2018 over the *gilets jaunes* unrest. Typically car-dependent inhabitants of rural, small-town, and peripheral France, the *gilets jaunes* started by protesting against lower speed limits and increased petrol and diesel duties, and continued with occupations of roundabouts at the edges of towns, and large, unruly demonstrations in major cities, marked by violence from both demonstrators and the police (some demonstrators lost eyes or hands). The roundabouts became unlikely hotbeds of political debate, outside any institutional or party framework; the *gilets jaunes* called for Macron's resignation, the dissolution of Parliament, and constitutional changes including the abolition of the Senate, the recall of elected officials and the introduction of the citizen-initiated referendum (Perrineau 2019, 85). Macron's response—to take the pressure off by conceding the fuel duty demands, to stage-manage a 'great national debate' on the wider issues, and then to bury its results—confirmed the *gilets jaunes*' suspicions about his sincerity (Perrineau 2019, 146–57; Le Bret 2022, 9–10).

Among the wider population, and even after the violence, the movement commanded majority support, or at least sympathy—which was also both socially and politically differentiated. A year after its launch, in November 2019, 44% of the highest occupational groups declared support, or sympathy, for the *gilets jaunes*, but 70% of blue-collar (and 56% of white-collar) workers; 85% of supporters of Mélenchon's La France Insoumise party (LFI) and 78% of RN sympathizers did so, but only 49% of Socialists and 17% of LRM supporters (IFOP-Fiducial 2019). If one event in Macron's first term truly severed links between the president and the *classes populaires*, it was this; as Sainte-Marie (2021, 177) observes, Macron's style had inspired real hatred.

Nor was Macron's pitch in 2022 likely to produce much of a reconciliation. It focused on a return to full employment (but unemployment, perhaps unfairly, had sunk down the list of voters' concerns), compulsory work for those on long-term welfare[5], and a rise in the pension age to 65. This last would be especially burdensome to the unskilled who, having started work young, had a lifetime's manual labour behind them. Alongside that, the president's attempt, between ballots, to re-demonize the far right (despite his own earlier concessions to its rhetoric (Corcuff 2020, 117–32)) and to present the run-off as

a referendum on ecology and Europe (Martin 2022) cut little ice with either blue- or white-collar workers.

In the short term, on 24 April, the bipolarizing electoral system, the vestiges of the 'republican front', and an effective if minimalist second-round campaign gave Macron a somewhat larger majority than expected. But Macron had largely forfeited the confidence of the *classes populaires*, and if, in Piketty's parlance (2018, 56), most of France's 'internationalists' of all stripes had come together against the 'nativists' behind Le Pen, his 58% was a highly composite coalition, prone to fragmentation.

## Three blocs? The first presidential ballot, 10 April 2022

This can be seen most obviously from the result of the first ballot two weeks earlier (see Table 1). The configuration here suggests, not 'two Frances', nor a bloc of right and left, but a three-way division between the left-plus-Greens, the authoritarian, nativist right, and the liberal centre/centre-right. These three ensembles, of roughly equal size in 2022 (though not in 2017), and sociologically quite distinct (see Table 5), did not flow readily into the bipolar run-off.

This three-way division, however, entails a sleight of hand. Pécresse's voters do not automatically fit into the 'centre' group. But Macron's success in absorbing much of the LR electorate, albeit temporarily, his endorsement by Nicolas Sarkozy, LR's one surviving ex-president, and the resulting exiguity of Pécresse's score, all suggest some justification in attaching her supporters, provisionally, to those of the president. With that reservation, the central grouping, like Macron at the run-off, appealed to comfortably-off, urban, educated voters in higher social categories, most of them satisfied with life. Both Macron and Pécresse polled well among the dwindling pool of Catholics. Macron's gains against 2017 here (15 points among the regularly practising) reflect his success among François Fillon's electorate of 2017: his support rose 16 points among LR sympathizers, 14 points among the over-70s and 12 points among retired people. In contrast, he lost 13 points among Socialist sympathizers. Geographically, Macron's vote grew in areas like the former solid right-wing Alsace and the 'inner western' *départements* of Mayenne, Maine-et-Loire, or Ille-et-Vilaine, while falling back in more historically left-wing southern and central *départements* (*Le Monde*, 12 April 2022).

The far-right vote, grouping Le Pen, the 'sovereignist' Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, and Zemmour, similarly resembles the structure of Le Pen's second-round support. Even with the inclusion of the middle-class Zemmour, the far right attracted poorer, less educated people from lower occupational categories, of working age more than the retired, dissatisfied with their lives, living in small-town and rural France more than in cities, slightly more likely to be non-practising Catholics than their adversaries, and including nearly a third of LR sympathizers. Geographically, as Fourquet (2022a) has noted, the elections of 2022 marked a step change for the far-right vote, which moved outward from traditional bases in north- and south-east France and the Languedoc coastline, where the far right now dominates, to new areas, for example on the Atlantic coastline and in Brittany, where the presence of first- or second-generation immigrants, a rise in crime and violence towards the police, the withdrawal of 'uneconomical' public services, or the rise in the cost of diesel—all issues on which the RN campaigned—were perceived strongly and negatively (*Le Monde*, 12 April 2022).

**Table 5.** Three leading candidates, three 'blocs': French presidential election, first ballot, 10 April 2022: social breakdown by % of votes cast.

| | Mélenchon | *Total Left/ Green* | Macron | *Total Centre/ Centre-Right* | Le Pen | *Total Far Right* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **France total** | 20.3 | *30.7* | 28.5 | *33.3* | 23.6 | *32.8* |
| **Sex** | | | | | | |
| Male | 21 | *30* | 27 | *32* | 23 | *34* |
| Female | 20 | *32* | 29 | *33* | 24 | *32* |
| **Age** | | | | | | |
| 18–24 | 31 | *42* | 20 | *22* | 26 | *34* |
| 25–34 | 34 | *42* | 23 | *26* | 25 | *30* |
| 35–49 | 22 | *35* | 24 | *26* | 28 | *35* |
| 50–59 | 22 | *29* | 24 | *27* | 30 | *40* |
| 60–69 | 17 | *29* | 30 | *34* | 22 | *33* |
| 70 and over | 9 | *20* | 41 | *53* | 13 | *25* |
| **Occupation** | | | | | | |
| Management, professional | 25 | *36* | 35 | *41* | 12 | *19* |
| Intermediate professions' | 25 | *37* | 28 | *31* | 24 | *28* |
| Routine white-collar | 25 | *35* | 17 | *19* | 36 | *44* |
| Blue-collar worker | 23 | *29* | 18 | *20* | 36 | *48* |
| Retired | 11 | *22* | 38 | *47* | 17 | *28* |
| Unemployed | 34 | *42* | 12 | *13* | 29 | *42* |
| **Monthly income** | | | | | | |
| < 1,250€ | 28 | *37* | 14 | *16* | 31 | *45* |
| 1,250–2,000€ | 25 | *37* | 23 | *26* | 26 | *34* |
| 2,000–3,000€ | 19 | *28* | 27 | *32* | 27 | *37* |
| >3,000€ | 18 | *28* | 35 | *41* | 19 | *27* |
| **Self-declared class** | | | | | | |
| Comfortably off, privileged | 9 | *14* | 53 | *63* | 8 | *21* |
| Upper middle class | 17 | *29* | 38 | *44* | 15 | *24* |
| Lower middle class | 19 | *29* | 28 | *33* | 25 | *34* |
| Working class | 28 | *40* | 16 | *19* | 29 | *39* |
| Underprivileged | 27 | *33* | 13 | *14* | 37 | *49* |
| **Sense of prosperity** | | | | | | |
| Putting plenty of money by | 23 | *35* | 42 | *43* | 11 | *20* |
| Putting a little money by | 18 | *29* | 36 | *41* | 19 | *27* |
| Just about managing | 24 | *34* | 19 | *24* | 30 | *38* |
| Living off savings or credit | 19 | *27* | 22 | *26* | 28 | *45* |
| **Education** | | | | | | |
| Lower than baccalauréat | 14 | *24* | 23 | *28* | 35 | *45* |
| Baccalauréat | 22 | *29* | 26 | *30* | 27 | *37* |
| Baccalauréat + 2 years | 17 | *27* | 31 | *37* | 23 | *32* |
| Baccalauréat + 3 or more years | 26 | *39* | 33 | *38* | 13 | *20* |
| **Size of town** | | | | | | |
| Population <2,000 | 20 | *32* | 25 | *28* | 27 | *36* |
| Population between 2,000 and 9,999 | 18 | *29* | 23 | *25* | 28 | *40* |
| Population 10,000 to 49,999 | 17 | *27* | 31 | *38* | 24 | *31* |
| Population 50,000 to 199,999 | 16 | *25* | 36 | *42* | 24 | *32* |
| Population 200,000 and over | 23 | *32* | 29 | *35* | 20 | *30* |
| **Religion** | | | | | | |
| Catholic | 11 | *19* | 32 | *39* | 27 | *39* |
| (regularly practising) | *6* | *16* | *35* | *48* | *9* | *33* |
| (occasionally practising) | *14* | *22* | *30* | *39* | *20* | *36* |
| (non-practising) | *10* | *18* | *32* | *38* | *30* | *40* |
| Other religion | 36 | *47* | 22 | *29* | 13 | *22* |
| No religion | 30 | *42* | 25 | *27* | 21 | *28* |
| **Life satisafaction** | | | | | | |
| Satisfied | 17 | *27* | 38 | *43* | 19 | *27* |
| Dissatisfied | 30 | *35* | 6 | *7* | 35 | *53* |
| **Party sympathy** | | | | | | |
| La France Insoumise | 94 | *96* | 1 | *1* | 3 | 3 |
| Parti Socialiste | 33 | *65* | 29 | *29* | 5 | 5 |

(*Continued*)

**Table 5.** (Continued).

| | Mélenchon | *Total Left/ Green* | Macron | *Total Centre/ Centre-Right* | Le Pen | *Total Far Right* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EELV | 29 | *82* | 14 | *15* | 2 | 2 |
| La République en Marche—Modem | 3 | *5* | 91 | *92* | 2 | 2 |
| LR-UDI | 1 | *2* | 25 | *62* | 21 | 32 |
| Rassemblement National | 1 | *1* | 1 | *1* | 93 | 97 |
| Reconquête! | 0 | *0* | 0 | *0* | 7 | 97 |
| No party | 19 | *28* | 30 | *33* | 25 | 31 |

Source: IPSOS-SopraSteria (2022b).

The first-round voter profiles of the centre and of the far right thus broadly resemble those of the 'two Frances' of the run-off. Of greater interest is the left-wing and Green family, diverse but dominated by the figure of Mélenchon. Like Le Pen (though unlike the left as a whole), Mélenchon exceeded his average among blue- and routine white-collar workers, and even did better than Le Pen among the poorest—with €900 or less per month (Fourquet 2022b, 11). Like Le Pen, Mélenchon (and the left) attracted the unemployed and voters dissatisfied with their lives; and both polled badly among the comfortably-off, the elderly, the retired. But the differences with the far-right vote are equally important. Catholics, especially the regularly practising, predictably shunned Mélenchon and the left. Left-wing voters were more educated than the average, and much more so than those of the far right; among voters with three years more than the Baccalauréat, they even outpolled Macron. Most strikingly, Mélenchon was unashamedly pro-immigrant. Having taken a strong stance against what he viewed as the 'Islamophobia' not only of the far right but of Macron and his governments, he was rewarded with as much as 69% of the Moslem vote, polling correspondingly well in strongly Moslem areas like Seine St-Denis, the Lyon suburbs, or French nationals living in the Maghreb (IFOP-Fiducial 2022a, 6; Fourquet 2022b, 9; *Le Monde*, 28 April 2022). Geographically, Mélenchon and the left underperformed (and indeed lost votes) in rural and small-town France where Le Pen thrived, but outvoted the far right in big cities and in suburbs dominated by social housing, making significant gains here (Fourquet 2022b, 6). Where they did win rural votes, it was often in areas like the Larzac or the Vercors where a neo-rural culture of the 'alternative' left had taken root since the 1960s (Fourquet 2022b, 12). Finally, relations between Mélenchon and the left have inevitably been marked by competition. In 2022, Mélenchon gained some 10 points among PS sympathizers, contributing to the humiliation of the hapless Socialist candidate Anne Hidalgo; and he did correspondingly well in regions of recent Socialist strength like Brittany.

Although its hegemony among the working classes is long gone, the left's electorate can in no way be described as 'bourgeois'; in occupational terms, indeed, it is the most cross-class electorate of any. Educated, urban, open to migrants, these voters struggle economically, which helps explain their dissatisfaction with life. By definition drawn neither to Macron's neoliberalism nor to the far right's nativism, this electorate does not readily fit into the straitjacket of the 'two Frances', and when forced to do so by the electoral system, it fragments.

If class is a good predictor of the division between the 'two Frances', with working-class attributes predicting an RN vote (Sainte-Marie 2021, 105), it clearly fails to account for the (at least) three-way division of the electorate in the freer context of first ballots. Religious allegiance among both Catholics and Moslems, though of interest as it clearly differentiates the three leading candidates, involves too few voters to play its former role of a major, structuring divide. What else is there? In seeking a second cleavage, alongside the old left/right separation between advocates of an interventionist and protective state and those of free markets, which used to divide voters along class lines and no longer really does, we are spoilt for choice: the post-material values (such as the environment and rights of women and minorities) of educated post-war generations and the right-wing reaction against them (Ignazi 1992); the 'ethnocentricity' of the far right and the 'openness' of its adversaries (CEVIPOF 1990); the distinction between more and less trusting individuals, and its impact, for example, on expectations of what the state can do to redress injustices (CEVIPOF/Opinion Way 2022; Algan et al. 2019, 69–72); or the role of education and geography in radicalizing dissatisfied voters in opposite directions, towards the radical right or left (Bolet 2022). Perhaps most convincing, again, is Pierre Martin, who, following Lipset and Rokkan, argues that the 'world revolution', like the national and industrial revolutions before it, has generated, not one, but two types of opposition. Neoliberal centrists, fully in support of globalization (and of a liberal EU) thus face *both* conservative-nativist groupings who reject the world revolution altogether *and* left-wing ecological and socialist democrats who accept the premise of globalization and Europeanization but seek alternative, more egalitarian ways of implementing them (Martin 2018, 13–14 and 256–61). This view of a three-way division of the French (and other) political spaces is broadly shared, from a rather different starting-point, by Amable and Palombarini (2018, 13); and it appears to correspond quite well with the results of 10 April 2022.

Helpful though Martin's schema is, it hardly exhausts the possibilities. Both Piketty (2018, 128–9) and Rouban (2021, 109) suggest a four-way divide along the two dimensions of economic and cultural liberalism where the Macron camp (economically and culturally liberal) is flanked not only by the economically statist (or, for Piketty, 'pro-poor') but culturally open left and the economically statist and culturally closed far right, but also by a fourth grouping, economically liberal but culturally closed, corresponding to Fillon's voters in 2017. This last group, though eclipsed by the Pécresse disaster, has not disappeared—as the parliamentary elections would show.

The division of voters into electoral 'blocs' is, of course, far neater than the range of voter attitudes revealed by surveys. Depending on the question, RN voters, for example, may appear as extreme outliers (in their views on globalization or France's EU membership); or as sharing the attitudes of LR supporters but more intensely (on societal questions such as the death penalty, or in their views of 'foreigners', 'immigrants', or the incompatibility of Islam with French values); or as close to the Macron centre (on the usefulness of state 'hand-outs' or the need to give firms more freedom); or close to the left (on the need to protect workers better, or to take from the rich to give to the poor to ensure social justice); or, finally, close to the hard left (sympathizers of both RN and LFI are angrier than others, more convinced that politicians are corrupt, and more tempted than others by the idea of a non-democratic regime) (IPSOS-SopraSteria 2021).

**Table 6.** Vote transfers between the first and second ballots, presidential election, 2022 (as percentage of first-ballot vote).

| Vote at 1st ballot | Mélenchon (LFI) | Jadot (Green) | Macron (LRM) | Pécresse (LR) | Le Pen (RN) | Zemmour (Reconquête) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vote at 2nd ballot | | | | | | |
| Macron | 42 | 66 | 98 | 53 | 3 | 10 |
| Le Pen | 17 | 6 | 1 | 18 | 91 | 73 |
| Spoilt or abstention | 41 | 29 | 1 | 29 | 6 | 17 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: IPSOS-SopraSteria (2022b).

This suggests a more complex pattern of affinities and antipathies between sympathizers of different groupings than indicated by the notion of 'blocs'. The pattern of vote transfers between the first and second ballots confirms this (see Table 6). Its most striking feature was the weakening of the 'republican front' against the far right which had held well against Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002 but was already showing signs of strain in 2017. Communist, Socialist, and Green candidates all called, however reluctantly, for a Macron vote at the run-off, but Mélenchon went no further than demanding that 'no vote should go to Le Pen'. Of his 7.7 million voters, 17% ignored him and backed Le Pen anyway, another two-fifths abstained or spoilt their ballots, while only a minority—42%—switched to the president (cf. also *Le Monde*, 4 May 2022). Of Pécresse's 1.7 million supporters, just over half backed Macron, but 18% preferred Le Pen, and 29% returned no valid vote. Even among Jadot's 1.6 million Green voters, only two-thirds supported the incumbent. Slightly more wholehearted, in the opposite camp, were the Zemmour voters, nearly three-quarters of whom voted for Le Pen—but this was still a rather low transfer between two candidates so ideologically close (*Le Monde*, 4 May 2022).

If this pattern of transfers was confused at the rather clear-cut contest of the presidential run-off, it would become very much untidier eight weeks later, at the more complex second ballot for the parliamentary election.

## The parliamentary election and the collapse of the 'republican front'

Of the six parliamentary elections hitherto held in the wake of a presidential election, five (1981, 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2017) had given the president an overall majority; one (1988) had fallen 14 seats short. In June 2022, however, Macron's Ensemble! coalition, with just 250 deputies, was fully 39 short, and with fewer chances than in 1988 of finding stable allies (see Table 2). In outlining the main reasons for this unprecedented result, we focus on the behaviour of candidates and parties, especially over the seven weeks between elections. Much the most significant and most complex development was the collapse of the 'republican front', determined both in those final weeks and in the longer term.

First, Macron, as a re-elected president (the first since Chirac in 2002) frittered away any possible 'state of grace' that his victory might have procured. By early June, only 39% of the French were satisfied with his record since re-election, compared with 58% in 2017 (IPSOS-SopraSteria 2022c). With a heavy international schedule (the Ukraine war commanded his attention, especially as France held the EU presidency in the first half of

2022), the president did little campaigning. Moreover—and it is a measure of how little effort had gone into building a strong party apparatus over five years—instead of recruiting an energetic, political prime minister to win a new parliamentary majority, he waited until 16 May, and then appointed the colourless former Transport Minister Élisabeth Borne, who had never won elective office and proved incapable of galvanizing her troops.[6]

Second, the left (LFI, Communists, Socialists, and Greens) joined forces in the NUPES alliance to turn the constraints of the electoral system to advantage. In 2017, the high threshold required to qualify for the second ballot in a parliamentary constituency (the first-round votes of at least 12.5% of registered electors, meaning 25% of votes cast if abstentions reached 50%) had excluded all but 142 candidates of the divided left from the run-off; in 2022 it threatened parliamentary annihilation to Socialists, Communists, and Greens alike, given their presidential candidates' lamentable scores in April. To the rescue came the truculent, domineering Mélenchon. Though hardly his left-wing competitors' favourite choice for alliance leader, he made them an offer they could not refuse: a single left-wing candidate in each constituency, with LFI taking the lion's share (on the basis of Mélenchon's first-round presidential result), but with enough winnable constituencies for each of the four partners to stand a chance of winning the 15 seats necessary to form a parliamentary group, qualifying them for important National Assembly rights and finance. The NUPES presented some 500 agreed joint candidates on 7 May, and a 650-point programme of radical change (in which divisive issues like Europe and nuclear energy were fudged) ten days later (*Le Monde*, 7 and 19 May 2022). The deal provoked fierce opposition and dissident candidacies among some Socialists and Greens, and won the left few extra votes. But the NUPES did its job: on 12 June, 386 left-wing candidates qualified for the run-off, and 150 were elected a week later. In 2017, some 'Macron-compatible' left-wingers had been tempted into presidential majority; now, few if any NUPES deputies were likely to jump ship.

Third, Les Républicains recovered, partially, from Pécresse's trouncing of 10 April. This was predictable, given the importance at parliamentary elections of local networks, of which LR, with the presidencies of seven out of France's 12 regions, and 64 out of 96 *départements*, had plenty. And although some 85% of LR candidates were eliminated at the first round, the 87 who remained were well placed, with 64 of them winning in the second. After the near-death experience of April, this was a welcome result. Like their NUPES counterparts, most of the remaining LR deputies were immune to the gravitational pull of the presidency, the 'Macron-compatible' ones having already joined the presidential majority. On this basis, LR in June appeared harder than in April to assimilate to the same 'bourgeois bloc' as Macron's Ensemble!

Fourth, Macron's vanishing majority suffered from a strong performance by the far right. Again, this was predicted (Harris Interactive Toluna 2022a), but it still broke with the RN's past record. Traditionally, this most presidential of parties had lacked the network of credible local candidates to win parliamentary constituencies; in 2017, it had won just eight, with a mere 13.2% of the first-round parliamentary vote. In 2022, however, a low-key, candidate-centred, grass-roots campaign, with greater attention paid over years to candidate development, paid off: with 18.7% of the first-round vote and 208 candidates qualified for the run-off ballot (100 more than five years earlier, and 110 of them front-runners), the RN on 12 June was poised to win seats in significant numbers.

Fifth, the Macron camp's shambolic campaign was never more confused than in its response to the unexpectedly good showing of its adversaries, especially NUPES. The president, in a brief campaigning moment, lumped the 'extremes' together, claiming they 'proposed to add crisis to crisis' (*Le Monde*, 9 June 2022). On the evening of the first ballot, Borne made the same amalgam, before calling, with her party, for a case-by-case approach to the run-off according to the 'republican' credentials of each NUPES candidate (*Le Monde*, 13 June 2022); and on 14 June Macron, about to fly to Bucharest and Kiev, gave a solemn warning from Orly airport 'no vote should be lacking for the Republic' (*Le Monde*, 14 June 2022). This *moi ou le chaos* appeal did not convince (enough) voters and may have proved counter-productive in its identification of Ensemble! as France's *only* republican grouping.

Sixth, and, finally, the 'republican front', which had kept all but a handful of far-right candidates out of the National Assembly since 1988, now broke down. Of the 564 second-ballot 'duels' that took place in June 2022, 107 pitted an RN candidate against a Macronist, who 'should', under a republican front, have attracted voters of the eliminated NUPES and LR candidates; and in 62 seats, an RN hopeful faced a NUPES candidate, whom disappointed Ensemble! and LR voters 'should' have supported. Although figures from different polling organizations differ, it is clear that in both scenarios, the republican front operated to a very limited degree. Only 31–37% of NUPES voters backed the Ensemble! candidate against the RN at the run-off: between 11% and 24% voted RN; 45–58% abstained or spoilt their ballots; and the RN won 53—half—of the 107 constituencies. Among Ensemble! voters, 16–41% backed a NUPES candidate against an RN opponent, 1–18% voted RN, and 48–72% refused to choose; the RN won 34 of the 62 constituencies. Voters for defeated LR candidates were rather more likely to back Ensemble! against the RN (41–49%), but not NUPES (*Le Monde*, 22 and 23 June 2022; Harris Interactive Toluna 2022b). The overall result was that the RN multiplied its parliamentary representation by a factor of eleven.

The breaking of the republican front can in turn be explained by six factors. Over the long term, Le Pen and her party had worked patiently (as her father never had) to de-demonize the RN and to recruit and train better candidates, without conceding any significant element of their core nativist message. Second, Le Pen was helped by the growing willingness of politicians and commentators from other horizons, left and centre as well as moderate right, to adopt 'mainstream' RN themes, especially on national identity, and articulate them as their own (Corcuff 2020 and 2021). Third, the brief appearance during the campaign of the more extreme Éric Zemmour as a serious candidate made Le Pen and the RN appear as relatively moderate. Fourth, the loathing that Macron inspired among the *classes populaires* led some voters, even coming from the left, to vote RN to deprive the president of a parliamentary majority; here, as Jérôme Jaffré put it, was the 'electoral transposition of the *gilets jaunes* movement' (*Le Monde*, 23 June 2022). Fifth, five years of Mélenchon's tirades against Macron, whom he now called 'the worst-elected president of the Fifth Republic', clearly provoked a similar distaste among Macron's supporters. Ensemble! voters might back a moderate Socialist or a Green against the RN, but baulked when an LFI candidate carried the NUPES colours. In other words, both an anti-Macron dynamic and an anti-Mélenchon dynamic competed with, and gravely weakened, that of the republican front. Added to these medium- to long-term causes was the behaviour of candidates between 12 and 18 June. Of defeated

NUPES candidates in the Ensemble!-RN run-off constituencies, only 14 (just one from LFI) called on voters to support Macron's coalition, against 71 who simply declared *against* any vote for the RN, two who called for abstention and 20 who remained silent; of the defeated Ensemble! candidates, 16 issued a clear call for a left-wing vote, 16 declared *against* an RN vote, 12 recommended abstention, and 17 remained silent (*Le Monde*, 20 June 2022). Broadly comparable on each side, the figures, again, fell massively short of an effective republican front.

The parliamentary elections not only failed to deliver a presidential majority; they also produced a National Assembly much closer than its predecessors to reflecting the first-ballot vote. Certainly, Ensemble! was still heavily over-represented, but this was chiefly at the expense of the smallest groupings with less than 5% of the vote. The Left and LR both won seats in near-perfect proportion to their votes; even the RN, so massively penalized for its isolation hitherto, was only 3.3 points away from proportionality. Thus it was not only the republican front that was broken in 2022 but also, for the moment, the capacity of the electoral system to conjure a clear majority from dispersed votes.

## Conclusion

How should we interpret the French party system in the light of the three approaches outlined at the start of this article? First, the party system remains structured by France's electoral and institutional systems, but for the moment rather less than hitherto. The two-ballot electoral system still matters as a framework for party competition but has lost, for the moment, its capacity to deliver a bipolar majority party system or the powerful republican monarchy that dominated it from the Élysée; Macron in his second term is a weakened president. Second, the major explanation of this loosening of bipolarity was the dislocation of the socio-political cleavages which had underpinned, albeit increasingly shakily, the pre-2017 system. It is not that the old division between left and right has lost its meaning, but rather that it has lost its old capacity to structure French politics. The four-way split between, on the one hand, supporters and opponents of economic liberalism and, on the other, supporters and opponents of globalization, Europeanization, and cultural liberalism is more complex, harder to fit into the bipolar schema encouraged by the institutional system, and less promising as material from which to build majority coalitions. Third, politicians still have the capacity to maximize or damage their own fortunes. Macron's success in eviscerating Pécresse's campaign helped to deliver his clear first-ballot lead and position him favourably for the run-off. Le Pen's persistence in de-demonizing her party, her success in raising her game from the uneven performance of 2017, and the focus on credible parliamentary candidates all helped break down the 'republican front' and produce the far right's biggest-ever parliamentary group. Mélenchon's willingness to place the left's deep divisions in abeyance and negotiate the NUPES in just two weeks delivered a major tactical success for the left. Macron's complacency and immobility in the wake of his re-election helped cost him his parliamentary majority. None of these actions was inevitable; all shaped the result.

If the elections of 2022 have 'confirmed' the party system change set in motion by a disruptive president in 2017, it has been in a distorted, and (for Macron) nightmarish manner. Instead of the party of 'the Republic and of Reason', in Europe Minister Clément Beaune's words (*Le Monde*, 23 August 2021), drawing 'progressive' ideas—and people—

from right and left to rule serenely between two diminished, irrelevant extremes, France has a shrunken and relative presidential majority struggling to pick temporary partners from three hostile and unexpectedly large opposition camps. If anything, this resembles polarized pluralism, the model developed by Sartori (1976) for the unstable post-war regimes of France and Italy: a ruling coalition holding a narrow parliamentary majority, hemmed in by 'anti-system' parties of left and right which thrive by outbidding the governmental parties on any and every issue and sowing dissent between them. The NUPES may not be as 'anti-system' as the big post-war Communist parties, nor (perhaps) the RN to the same degree as Italy's neo-fascists; but neither is available for government. Nor, so far, is LR. Macron's own Ensemble! grouping is certainly less unstable than the post-war French and Italian coalitions; but it will nevertheless be subject to growing tensions between its major components—Macron's own Renaissance (the new name for LRM), Bayrou's centrists, and former prime minister Édouard Philippe's right-wing Horizons party. Policy disagreements in an adverse economic environment will be compounded by the struggle to succeed Macron, whose presidency, constitutionally, must end in 2027.

Of the radical camps, much the more dangerous was the RN. 'If we don't get a grip', Macron the candidate had written (2017, 44), 'then next May, or in five years, or in ten years, the Front National will be in power'. His turbulent first *quinquennat* made that eventuality more, not less likely. The electoral cycle of 2022 brought the far right to record levels at *all four* ballots and gave it parliamentary representation on an undreamt-of scale—'the avant-garde of the new elite which will take responsibility for the country when the Macron adventure has ended', as Le Pen called her Deputies (*Le Monde*, 21 June 2022). The normalization of the RN, rendered possible by the collapse of the republican front, will be accelerated by its positions in the National Assembly (where two RN deputies are now vice-presidents); new opportunities will open up to put down local roots, most obviously in the municipal elections of 2026; and the RN's presidential candidate (whether Le Pen again, or the party's young and able president, Jordan Bardella) will be a serious, possibly the leading, contender for 2027.

For the left, despite the tactical success of the NUPES project, the prospects are less optimistic. There are twice as many deputies as in 2017 but no significant electoral breakthrough, and no certainty that the alliance will survive five years of opposition. The NUPES 'intergroup' in the National Assembly may consolidate the alliance, or prove an empty shell. Policy differences between the constituent parties have been papered over; they will reappear, and the unity of the NUPES will be tested, at the 2024 European elections, held on proportional representation.

Meanwhile, the other 'old' political force, LR with its centrist allies, retains significant strengths—the largest group in the Senate and the strongest position of any party in France's regions, *départements*, and towns—but is still diminished and uncertain of its role. Formerly the biggest opposition force in the National Assembly, it now has fewer deputies than either the RN or LFI. Finding a role as France's *third* opposition force, and defining an identity between the presidential coalition and the RN that can be shared by moderates like Pécresse or Xavier Bertrand and hardliners like Éric Ciotti or Laurent Wauquiez, will test its unity.

Over two-thirds of the French, according to a post-election poll (IFOP-Fiducial 2022b) welcomed the new hung parliament because it would lead to 'more debate and force the

government into more dialogue with the Assembly'. It remains to be seen how long their patience will last. Even with a stable majority, Macron would have faced a uniquely difficult second term. Aside from the generalized crisis of capitalism which he himself had discerned as a candidate (Macron 2017, 66), an equally general and long-term loss of public confidence in institutions, even deeper than elsewhere in Europe (Rouban 2021, 48–9) and the deepening climate emergency, France faces the challenges of the Ukraine war, its possible escalation, and its economic fall-out in the shape of stagflation and resultant strains on both the public finances and the euro, as well as a health system still reeling from the Covid crisis. Each of these challenges will entail unpopular policy choices. But it is far from certain that Macron, or the Borne government, has the legitimacy, or indeed the parliamentary numbers, to implement them. For the Fifth Republic, this is uncharted territory, and fertile ground for right-wing populists, organized and ready.

## Notes

1. A partial exception was 1988, when Mitterrand's Socialists, though 14 seats short of an absolute majority, still became France's governing party.
2. Wikipedia's use is amply justified in this case, as it offers the figures from every poll in the run-up to both ballots of the election, with links to each.
3. Ensemble! included LRM (renamed Renaissance late in June 2022), plus former Prime Minister Édouard Philippe's party Horizons and François Bayrou's MoDem.
4. There was no stable majority between 1958 and 1962 either, but the perils of the Algerian war and General de Gaulle's exceptional personal legitimacy proved effective substitutes.
5. The *Revenu Social d'Activité* was already, in theory, linked to finding work—but France's employment offices had been unsuccessful in helping claimants find it. Cf. *Le Monde*, 31 March 2022.
6. As a politician, Borne proved a quick learner—but not until after the elections (*Le Monde*, 21 September 2022).

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