

French legislative elections: first round 12 June



by Nidra Poller

OFFICIAL RESULTS for the top four parties:

Party label	Percentage of total votes cast	Predicted number of seats According to last polls before the 2 nd round
Ensemble (Emmanuel Macron)	25.75%	270-300
Nupes (Jean-Luc Mélenchon)	25.66%	160-190

Rassemblement National (Marine LePen)	18.68%	25-45
Les Républicains	10.4%	50-70

Only 5 candidates out of the 577 districts that will choose their deputies won on the first round

PREDICTIONS: Ensemble will obtain a relative majority, but not the absolute majority that the re-elected president Emmanuel Macron would have hoped for. Nupes will not obtain a majority, Jean-Luc Mélenchon will not be “elected” prime minister. These percentages do not automatically translate into a comparable number of deputies. Each contest is local, countless factors are at play.

Q: Is it true that NUPES had more votes than Ensemble?

A: It’s debatable. NUPES accuses the Interior Minister of manipulating the figures to hide the NUPES victory. The ministry replies that some candidates claimed by NUPES were not really affiliated or had discarded the label.

If, as expected, the balance of power in the parliament remains roughly the same after the second round, this squabble over percentages will count for little in the coming years.

More important, is the low percentage of participation: 52.9% of registered voters went to the polls. While Ukrainians risk their lives to defend their democracy, citizens of democratic countries don’t even bother to vote.

Q: Could you sum up the overall political climate after this round?

A: Triumphant losses, low key victories, and disappointment all down the line. The temptation of the extremes is disturbingly strong.

ENSEMBLE [together] The party of the re-elected president did not win an absolute majority in the first round and doesn't have much chance of achieving it in the second and final round. This means the president will have to count on votes from one or several parties to pass legislation. Which is not bad for the general welfare but is cast as a disappointment because the newly elected president is expected to obtain a parliamentary majority in a "logical" vote of confidence. According to opinion polls, the voters' intention was precisely to deprive the president of that rubber stamp.

NUPES, the left-wing populist party cobbled together by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, building on his surprisingly high score (21.95%) in the presidential election and the disastrous results of other leftist parties, is profoundly disappointed. Consequently, the ringleader of that unlikely political circus immediately declared Emmanuel Macron "beaten and defeated." The campaign slogan of NUPES (that no one knows how to pronounce in French, but anyone can see it's one step away from DUPES) is "Jean-Luc Mélenchon for Prime Minister. Too important to run for a lowly MP position, Mélenchon decided his party would win a comfortable majority of seats in the Parliament, thereby forcing Macron to appoint him Prime Minister. It didn't happen. But his true believers are more optimistic than ever. Mélenchon promised a "déferlement" for the second round, a surge, an irresistible wave that will truly knock Macron down and out. The chances are nil.

And it would seem that Mélenchon knows it. His "victory" speech was more like a dirge. His usual bluster was gone. He seemed weary, listless, lusterless. His predictions of a dazzling future were sad, depressing. On the upside, his bouncy supporters made ridiculous claims of immediate revolutionary transformation: Vote for us next Sunday and on Monday the minimum wage will soar, the cost of living will drop, all your wishes will be fulfilled. "We're ready to govern." The next day they explained Mélenchon's obvious

sadness as solemnity. Friday, on the last day of campaigning before the second round, Mélenchon boasted that he wouldn't be criticizing the president heretofore because on Monday he'll be Macron's Prime Minister and they will show a united front in the international arena.

Two political careers fizzled out this week: Zemmour's flash in the pan and Mélenchon's lifelong role as Chief Opposition Orator.

RASSEMBLEMENT NATIONAL, in the image of its leader, Marine Le Pen, is neither here nor there. With a significant increase in the potential number of deputies, the party can claim success. Monotonous Marine is again going through the motions, strolling through indulgent outdoor markets, smiling, grinning, and posing for same o same o selfies, declaring victory over fellow populists: Mélenchon is not going to be prime minister, I told you so, Zemmour is over and out, as he deserves, and here I am, Marine never to be president, Marine true to form, Marine over and over again. Her lieutenant Jordan Bardella proudly proclaims RN is France's leading party and main opposition. How does RN get to be the leading party as it consistently comes in second? Simple, says Bardella: it's the only solid party with no coalitions, no adulterations. 100% Pure. And RN will probably be true to its no-show no-vote reputation, earned at both the European and the national parliament.

LES RÉPUBLICAINS may lose one third or more of the deputies serving in the current legislature. They had hoped against hope to take advantage of a solid presence on the local level to bounce back after the drastic defeat of their presidential candidate, Valérie Pécresse, Apparently the wind is not in LR's sails. The parliamentary Right is left with a small piece of the pie. However, Macron will need those votes to pass important legislation that is fiercely rejected by both Left and the Right-wing populists. This will give LR some bargaining power to move the government in the direction of

law & order, *laïcité*, immigration control, free market economics, defense of national identity ...

RECONQUÊTE: Eric Zemmour. the only candidate of his short-lived party with any chance of becoming an MP, was eliminated in the first round. Terminus for his political career. He'll go back to being a kibitzer. If the public and the media will have him. He had chosen a district where he had a good score in the presidential election but it wasn't enough to carry him further. Consequently, Zemmour came to the logical conclusion that his party was the only one that could save the nation, and the entire Right wing should line up behind him. A fistful of commentators with solid conservative reputations agreed: the Right should follow the example of the Left. A smattering of no-future parties—Communist, Greens, Socialists, etc. threw their principles overboard and lined up behind Mélenchon's extreme France Insoumise agenda. The cocktail was so exciting that the ousted antisemitic labor leader Jeremy Corbin came to Paris to campaign for a NUPES candidates in Paris. She is leading with 47 % of the votes in her district. The likely winner in my district is a NUPES Green candidate that sailed in the infamous Gaza flotilla.

Temptation of the extremes

I witnessed a stunning example of the temptation of the extremes last week in the aftermath of the lukewarm results for Ensemble. Journalists on one of the all-news channels, LCI, went into a hysterical flurry against the president's party. They didn't campaign, the candidates are tasteless and colorless, Macron is AWOL and now he's going off on a jaunt to Macedonia when he should be here campaigning. Quelle idée, quel timing, c'est scandaleux. His Prime Minister (Elisabeth Borne née Bornestein, daughter of a Jewish résistant of Russian origin) is a dull technocrat. Look at Mélenchon's Nupes, there's a party that knows how to campaign, what energy, what pizzazz, these guys and gals are FUN, look at Obono with her ethnic headdress and big earrings, what a cast,

how colorful... Hey there, Ensemble, you better get your act together.

Macron in Kyiv

Leaving his party to fend for itself, President Macron traveled to Romania, Moldavia, Ukraine and Poland, joined by the German Chancellor Scholz, the Italian Consigliere Draghi, and the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis. The European leaders made long old-fashioned train journeys, bearing the message of unambiguous support for Ukraine and welcoming its bid for EU membership. Emmanuel Macron, as rotating president of the European Commission until the end of the month and newly re-elected French president, announced that his country will add 6 Caesar canons in addition to the 12 already supplied. In stronger terms than he had previously expressed, the French president declared wishes for a Ukrainian victory, with the restoration of its territorial integrity, including Crimea. Then, in his typically French manner, the president added that if and when Ukraine should decide, on its own terms, that it would be ready to negotiate, France would be there to guarantee its security, which is inseparable from the security of the continent.

Commentators granted a certain dignity to the exercise, though reminding all concerned that the primary concern of French citizens is the cost of living.

We will see on Sunday whether the president's fulfillment of his international responsibilities has any influence on French voters.