

France: the 2024 European Parliament elections – a pre-presidential election?

*Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National is predicted to be the big winner from France's European Parliament election. **Marta Lorimer** writes that while many will be tempted to interpret the outcome as a sign that Le Pen could win the 2027 presidential election, it would be ill-advised to read too much into the results.*



This article is [part of a series](#) on the 2024 European Parliament elections. The EUOPP blog will also be co-hosting a panel discussion on the elections at [LSE on 6 June](#).

European Parliament elections ([as others in this series have noted](#)) are rarely about Europe, and this year's European election in France seems to conform to this model. Considerations about the composition of the future European Parliament play second fiddle to speculation about their implications for domestic politics.

The result is presented as a foregone conclusion: Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National will do very well, President Emmanuel Macron's Ensemble coalition will do poorly. Uncertainty mainly concerns how badly Macron will lose, how well Le Pen will do, and how their results will affect the second half of Macron's presidential term.

A president in crisis

The outlook for Macron and his party, led in this campaign by Valérie Hayer, is bleak. In the [latest poll released by Ipsos](#), the presidential party is trailing at 17%, significantly below its 2019 result of 22.24% and the presidential coalition's 2022 legislative election result of 25.75%.

Macron has at least tried to make these elections about Europe. On 25 April 2024, he delivered a [wide-ranging speech on the future of Europe](#) at the Sorbonne University. Like in his previous Sorbonne speech in 2017, Macron detailed a vision for Europe's future. This time, however, the speech also served the more prosaic objective of mobilising his core pro-European electorate in view of the upcoming EU election.

Macron will need to mobilise this base if he is to counter his lack of popularity with the French electorate at large. His coalition's inability to secure a parliamentary majority in the [2022 legislative election](#) has made it hard for the government to legislate without using the controversial 49.3 procedure, which allows a law to be passed without a vote. The first half of his second mandate has also been defined by the approval of a very divisive pension reform and of an immigration law described by the far right as an "ideological victory".

Many will interpret a negative outcome as a scathing judgement on Macron's presidency, and a loss in the European elections would be particularly painful for a French president who has endeavoured to present himself as a truly European leader. A poor result will also do little to reassure those who worry about the future of Ensemble. Macron will not be running for re-election in 2027, and a poor showing in this election will only create further uncertainty concerning the future of the political movement he founded in 2017.

A surging far right

The electoral outlook is much better on the far right, where Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National, led by recently anointed party leader Jordan Bardella, is expected to come out a winner. Historically, European elections have wielded positive results for the Rassemblement National, but this year the party looks set to achieve its best result yet. The same Ipsos poll that put Macron at 17% puts it at 32%, well ahead of all its competitors.

Several factors help explain the Rassemblement National's strong showing. The party

has a loyal core of voters, and benefits from having been [singled out](#) as Macron's main opposition. It is also reaping the benefits of a successful strategy of normalisation. Since it secured an unprecedented number of MPs in the 2022 legislative election, the party has been able to enter the corridors of power and become a "normal" element of French politics. Finally, the election of a 28-year-old at the helm of the party helped renew its image and dissociate it from the extremism that defined it until recently.

If confirmed, such a strong showing would be a boon for the party and further confirmation of the success of Marine Le Pen's strategy of normalisation. It will further entrench the Rassemblement National's status as the main opposition to Macron, which will only feed into claims that it is the only credible alternative to the presidential party.

Left-wing reconfiguration and right-wing scrambles for survival

Although it is easy to frame the contest as one between Macron and Le Pen, the election could still deliver some surprising results. The Left seems to be undergoing some reconfiguration. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise, led by Manon Aubry, is trailing at 7%, closely tied with the Greens, who are at 6.5%.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Parti Socialiste-Place Publique list, led by Raphaël Glucksmann, is polling at 14%. Just a few years ago the Parti Socialiste was nearly wiped off the electoral map, but in this election, it seems to be attracting both disillusioned Macron voters and former Mélenchon and Green voters. Closing the gap with the presidential party would represent a very heartening result for a party that looked destined to disappear just a few years ago.

The remaining parties on the right are engaged in a scramble for survival. Centre-right Les Républicains are struggling to find their footing, squeezed as they are between Le Pen and Macron, and are currently polling at 6.5%. Eric Zemmour's Reconquête is trying to stay relevant in the face of a dominating Rassemblement National. Failure to secure any seats would likely spell the end for the party – and hovering as it is around the 5.5% mark (just over the electoral threshold of 5%), the scenario is plausible enough to worry the party's leadership.

Whatever the results end up being, many will be tempted to interpret the outcome of this election with the 2027 presidential election in mind, and possibly even make some bold

predictions about a Le Pen presidency becoming increasingly likely. One should, however, be wary of doing so. In the absence of actual knowledge of the candidates who will be running in 2027, and the context in which they will be contesting the election, any extrapolation is ill-advised. The European elections can tell us, at best, where French politics is now. They offer very poor guidance concerning where it will be in three years' time. However, parties are likely to learn some lessons from the elections – what remains to be seen is which ones they learn.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [Obatala-photography / Shutterstock.com](#)
