

The French legislative election: Outlook for the first round on 11 June

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Following the election of Emmanuel Macron in May, French voters will be called to elect their new parliament on 11 and 18 June. While legislative elections are often considered to be ‘second order elections’ in the French system, [Marta Lorimer](#) argues that this year’s elections will be particularly important because they will determine whether Macron will have the parliamentary majority he needs to push forward his reform programme, and will provide a true measure of the President’s success.



The legislative elections in France are often considered to be ‘second order elections’. They attract fewer voters than the presidential election, and, especially since the introduction of the five-year presidential mandate, which led them to take place only a few months after the presidential election, are expected to grant a majority to the newly elected president.

In the run-up to and immediate aftermath of Emmanuel Macron’s victory, however, the legislative elections have acquired a much higher level of interest. In fact, several commentators have pointed out that to govern, Macron will need a parliamentary majority, and that this might be very difficult to achieve with a recently created party. Indeed, Macron’s party, *La République en Marche* (LREM, formerly *En Marche!*), was only created a little over a year before the election, and it lacks many of the resources associated with larger parties.



Celebrations for Macron’s presidential election victory at The Louvre. Credits:[Lorie Shaul](#)
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The legislative elections will allow for a final assessment of the real possibilities of Macron’s presidency. If he manages to put together a healthy majority, he will be well placed to push forward his programme of government. If he fails to reach an absolute majority in parliament, however, his reform agenda is likely to face several potential hurdles.

The voting process

Just like in the presidential election, there are two rounds of voting. Candidates need to either win a majority in the first round (and the support of 25% of registered voters), or a plurality in the second round. Unlike in the presidential election, where only the first two candidates make it through to the second round, in the legislative election, all candidates that receive support from more than 12.5% of registered voters (*inscrits*) make it into the second round.

While this usually translates into two candidates for the second round, in a scenario with several candidates polling at similar levels (as was the case for the presidential election, where four candidates were polling at around 20%), depending on participation, the system can lead to a series of 'triangulaires' or even 'quadrangulaires' in which three or four candidates could make it into the run-off.

The polling

For the time being, the polls being published should put a smile on the President's face. According to the latest [CEVIPOF survey](#), LREM seems to be benefitting from the positive dynamic engendered by the presidential campaign and by an (almost) flawless first month in office for Macron. While he has faced some issues, especially concerning the probity of his minister and firm supporter Richard Ferrand, he has also been able to convey a 'presidential' image and make a start on a number of his electoral promises, particularly with regard to the introduction of a 'moralisation law'.

Projections by the polling institute [IPSOS](#) give LREM between 385 and 415 seats, well above the required majority of 289. While the conservative *Les Républicains* are expected to cling on but lose around half of their seats (retaining between 105 and 125 seats), the same cannot be said for the socialists, who risk being wiped out (25 to 35 seats). As far as Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise* (12-22 seats) and the *Front National* (5 to 15 seats) are concerned, they may remain victims once again of the majoritarian electoral system and a negative dynamic in the aftermath of the presidential contest. Le Pen, in particular, has very few reasons to be happy: she was hoping for the presidential election to be a launch pad for the legislative elections, but her poor performance in the final debate, as well as her uninspired campaign seem to have scared off several voters.

An optimistic outlook for Macron

The importance of the kind of result predicted by IPSOS should not be underestimated. Macron's participation in the run-off during the presidential election was quite extraordinary, but it was largely the effect of a stroke of luck combining with a well-ran campaign. He was the right man at the right moment, and truly benefitted from the collapse of the established parties. His victory against Le Pen was less surprising. Le Pen still bears the marks of her party's toxic image, and her campaign was poorly run overall. To translate this personal victory into a victory for a new party, however, is something else, and does point towards a significant recomposition of French political life.

The first results from French voters living abroad, who already voted in the first round on 4 June, seem to confirm LREM's positive outlook. While the vote was expected to be favourable for Macron (and results should not be considered as representative of national dynamics), candidates for the presidential majority came first in 10 constituencies out of 11, and often with scores above 50%. However, due to a very low turnout (19.1%), none of them managed to be elected directly in the first round.

While the final results are still difficult to estimate, especially given the unprecedented scenario of a new party running to win, the effect that turnout could have on the number of 'triangulaires' and the varying local dynamics that will mark this election, it looks increasingly likely that Emmanuel Macron may well be able to govern France, and not just preside over it.

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