

# Analysis of the French snap election

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## 1. Abstract

The paper aims to cover the current political situation that has unfolded in France due to the snap elections announced by Mr. Emmanuel Macron, the French President, on 9th June 2024. The paper discusses the leading political parties and blocs in France that would form the government in the National Assembly. It also talks about their ideological differences that would act as a hurdle to forming a coalition and would ultimately lead to political paralysis. With the current ongoing economic crisis in France due to the increasing deficit which has crossed EU limits it is important to tackle these issues so that they are not worsened. Moreover, there is also a divide among the parties on their stance on immigration policies and their relationship with the European Union (EU). Lastly, the snap elections were ill-timed due to the clash with the Paris Olympics and France would end up facing repercussions, one of them losing the trust and global standing they enjoyed. The paper discussed all of these issues in detail and also recommended suggestions such as forming a temporary alliance, intervention by the EU, and political transparency.

Keywords: France, Election, Coalition, Crisis and Governance

## 2. Glossary

- I. Assemblée Nationale: The lower house of the French Parliament, where laws are proposed, debated, and voted on.
- II. Article 12: A provision that allows the French President to dissolve the National Assembly before the end of the five-year term, subject to certain constraints.
- III. Article 49.3: Enables the government to push a bill through the National Assembly without the need for a parliamentary vote and can be blocked by a vote of no confidence.
- IV. Hung Parliament: A situation where no party has an absolute majority in the Parliament, making it difficult to pass legislation.
- V. Droit de Sol: the principle of giving French citizenship to any person born in France, regardless of their parent's nationality.
- VI. New People Front (NFP): A left wing political coalition in France that includes parties like the French Unbowed, Socialist Party, Greens, and Communist.
- VII. Renaissance Party: The Centrist political party led by Emmanuel Macron.
- VIII. Reassemblent Nation (RN): The far right political party in France, led by Marine Le Pen, known for its nationalist and anti-immigration policies.

## 3. Introduction

A Snap election is an election that is called earlier than one that has been scheduled. A Snap Election is normally called by the party or person who is in power and is generally done to increase the majority seats in the parliament. However, a Snap Election could also backfire as there always remains a possibility of losing the majority in the parliament.

To better understand snap elections it is important to know about the French Constitutional system. France operates under a semi-presidential system where the government determines and executes the policy of the nation. The President makes sure the Constitution is upheld, appoints the prime minister, assumes 'exceptional powers' in case of a threat to an institution, etc. Additionally, the President has the executive power to dissolve the Assemblée Nationale. The National Assembly, or Assemblée Nationale, is the lower house of Parliament, responsible for passing laws and holding the government accountable. Elections in France are normally held after five years but the President can call for an early election.

The Snap elections which were announced by French President Emmanuel Macron on 9 June 2024 led to elections in France on 30th June and 7th July. The purpose of the elections was to bring clarity into the country after the centrist party led by the president faced a crushing defeat in the European Parliamentary elections. However, the intended moment of clarity has led to a temporary state of confusion in the country. The reason behind it is simple: The French history of unanimous victory in the elections. Whether it be in 1970 when the conservative party was able to dominate a 46.4% vote share in the general elections or the 2017 general elections where Mr. Macron of the centrist party won by a sweeping victory maintaining a vote share of 66.1%.

The popularity that Emmanuel Macron was able to maintain in the 2017 French general elections was due to his pro-European Union and pro-business motto. His party, the Centrist party, acted as a middle ground between the two extremes – the New People Front of the left and the National Rally of the right and acted as a source of quick action and hope for the French people. However, this meteoric rise of the French President with the support of his centric party which once boasted popularity is now waning. Various reasons have led to this such as the fuel price hikes in 2018 which led to the 'yellow vest' protest, one of the biggest protests in French history. However it is because of Macron's swift action in adopting an approach to pass reforms that has led him to use Constitutional powers to circumvent the National Assembly, and in doing so, he weakened French democracy (Donadio, 2024). This has led people to reconsider who they vote for.

The three most powerful blocs are –the far right, the left-wing alliance, and Mr. Macron's centrist coalition. All of these blocs have a different approach to some of the key problems that prevail upon France.

- *The Far Right*

The far right also known as the Reassemblent National (RN) plans to replace the real estate wealth tax with a financial wealth tax, repeal the only health insurance available to undocumented immigrants, bring the legal retirement age back to 62, set French energy prices based solely on production in France and their stance on Ukraine remain ambiguous (Baruch & Sénécât, 2024).

- *The left-wing Alliance*

The left wing alliance also known as the New People Front (NFP) plans to tax the wealthiest and make the income tax more progressive by increasing the number of tax brackets from 5 to 14 (Baruch & Sénecat, 2024), repeal the asylum and immigration laws, bring the retirement age to 60, cancel the scheduled increase in energy prices and they have shown support to the Ukrainian people.

- *Macron's centrist coalition*

The centrist coalition led by Macron's Renaissance party plans to make no changes in the current taxation scheme, they have fully stood in support of Ukraine, promised lower electricity prices, the party wants to stick to its current pension scheme and maintain the retirement age to be 64 and implement the unemployment insurance reform.

#### **4. A shock in the form of a snap election**

Article 12 of the French Constitution allows the president to end the Assemblée Nationale's term early. This is what happened in France when President Macron announced snap elections which has led to the end of a five-year term which was scheduled for 2027, to end in 2024. There were two rounds of voting, one on 30th June and the other on 7th July in which 577 constituencies contested, one for each seat in the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament.

The Article 12 of the Constitution mentions three constraints to avail snap elections:

1. Only the President of the Republic can dissolve the Assemblée Nationale.
2. At least one year must have elapsed between the previous parliamentary elections and the dissolution.
3. The president must consult the prime minister and the presidents of the two chambers of Parliament before declaring the dissolution.

During the process of snap elections, Current legislative projects are suspended altogether. Bills in progress can be revisited in the next legislature if the new government presents them to the new Assemblée Nationale (Audureau, 2024).

##### **I. The politics behind a snap election**

During the 2022 French general elections, Emmanuel Macron's centrist coalition Ensemble was able to finish first in the race with 245<sup>1</sup> seats however it fell short of the 289 seats needed to form a majority. Even more important is the fact to note that in the 2017 general election

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<sup>1</sup> [Analysis: Macron's centrist plan for French politics has resulted in a land-grab by fringe parties | CNN](#)

Ensemble was able to maintain its majority by winning 66.1%<sup>2</sup> of seats. This decline in votes not only reflected waning popularity but also acted as a hindrance for Macron to pass any reforms in the National Assembly.

This is exactly what ensued over the years. One of the most prominent incidents was the pension reforms. The centrist party has wanted to increase the retirement age from 62 to 64 and require people to work for 43 years—up from 42 earlier to receive a full pension, however, due to the inability to win majority seats they have faced retaliation in passing the bill. The retaliation was both from the far-right and far-left which made it further difficult for Mr. Macron to form a coalition that would allow him to form a majority. He even faced no confidence votes which he survived. Yet the centrist party was adamant about passing the bill and Macron did so by availing the Article 49.3 of the French Constitution which allows the government to pass a bill without a National Assembly vote. Many politicians and even citizens deemed this action to be un-democratic and further lessened popularity among the masses.

Moreover, in the 2024 European elections, where citizens of the European Union countries elect their representatives as members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Macron's Renaissance faced defeat. There are a total of 720 seats in the EU elections out of which France had a total of 81 seats. RN was able to win 30 seats however the centrist coalition led by Macron won only 13 seats, facing a crushing defeat. This defeat in the EU elections further highlighted the fact that Macron was slowly losing the popularity and majority he once enjoyed.

The results of the EU elections are important as they often reflect a broader public sentiment and often reflect where political parties stand and how powerful they are. Losing seats in the EU elections can signal a shifting of power. The strong performance of RN in the EU elections signaled the growth of nationalist sentiment in France, which did end up happening as the seats RN was able to win had increased since the previous election.

This led him to announce snap elections because he believed there was a need for clarity in the French parliament. Macron has stated this is because he believes that the people of France need to speak and give their majority votes to the party whose ideals they want to adopt. However, many politicians have stated that a reason Macron adopted this step was because he believed that RN would not have the same popularity in France as they enjoyed in the EU and would not win the popular vote.

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<sup>2</sup> [How France Voted - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/07/europe/france-elections.html)

## II. The result and analysis of what people want

Due to the growing popularity of the right wing, it was believed before the elections that Marine Le Pen's RN would be able to win majority seats. However, the election results that unfolded after the two rounds of voting were quite unexpected. The New Popular Front (NFP) was able to win 182<sup>3</sup> seats (31.5%) finishing first in the race. In the NFP coalition, the Left Unbowed dominated. Although the NFP was able to win the maximum seats they failed to form a majority by a margin of 101 votes. This was followed by Macron's centrist coalition Ensemble which won 168 seats (29.11%) and then by Marine Le Pen's National Rally which won 143 seats (24.7%). The election results were surprising because of two primary reasons, firstly the RN was not able to win majority votes in the country although the amount of votes they received has seen a huge jump since the 2017 elections. Secondly, there was no clear winner of the elections as out of the total 577 seats, no party was able to secure 289 votes. The elections that were held to bring clarity into the country's parliament have further complicated matters because the results have reflected one thing – there is no one party that the French people majorly support. Also, although the RN has seen a surge in votes it is clear that the left has united to keep them out of power and this has been supported by the French people which led NFP to win maximum seats. This snap election saw the highest turnout in 20 years and the citizens made sure to unite to keep the far right out of power.

## III. Problems in the coalition

France is currently facing a hung parliament where no party enjoys a majority. The problem is further heightened by the fact that all three major blocs have different ideals and do not plan on coming together to form a coalition. No party is ready to compromise which is ultimately a loss for the French people. There are serious questions that need to be answered. The biggest one is who will be appointed as the next Prime Minister. Gabriel Attal, former Prime Minister of France, submitted his resignation due to the loss of a majority vote, however, Mr. Macron has asked him to continue his duties until the next Prime Minister is decided. However, deciding the next Prime Minister is quite a complex task because no party has a majority. The NFP coalition has the maximum votes however even NFP is quite fragmented. It consists of the French Unbowed, Socialist, Greens, and the communist. Even though under a coalition they differ in many of their ideals and the primary reason they united in the elections was to keep the RN out of power. Now that the RN is not in the majority, how united they would be is a different question. The leading party in the NFP, the French Unbowed, is considered to be

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<sup>3</sup> Aubert, R., Breteau, P., Ferrer, M., & Romain, M. (2024, July 7). *2024 French elections: Map and chart of results*. Le Monde.fr.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2024/07/07/2024-french-election-results-chart-and-map-of-second-round-winners\\_6676976\\_8.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2024/07/07/2024-french-election-results-chart-and-map-of-second-round-winners_6676976_8.html)

extreme in their political views and hence not supported by the people of their coalition. Similarly, this is the case with RN. In such a scenario electing a Prime Minister, which is the duty of Mr. Macron, is a very complex issue.

Another problem is the working of the National Assembly. It would be an immensely difficult task to pass bills in the Assembly with almost every party opposing each decision. In such a scenario it would be difficult to work on reforms and take action- a consequence of a hung parliament. Forming a coalition is not an easy task and more importantly, it is something that President Macron tried and failed at. After the loss of majority support in the 2022 election, Macron attempted to form an alliance with RN at which he was unsuccessful, and then with the left which led to the same result.

## **5. After effects of the election**

With no majority formed by any party, a weakened President and an uncertain future Prime Minister the French Parliament is at the brink of chaos and confusion. The only certain fact is that for the next three years, all three leading blocs will try to form a coalition where all three push for their different agendas and in the process oppose each other or France will be in a state of political paralysis. Although the parliament remains hung, the problems plaguing France do not. France is facing various Economic, Social, and Political issues which need to be immediately dealt with. Moreover, with the current parliament where each front differs in the stance regarding the EU, relations with the EU also remain uncertain.

### **I. The Rising Economic Crisis in France**

France has been at the center of economic turmoil for a very long period. Even after being the second largest economy in the EU, it finds itself under various challenges. One of the most important challenges is the debt crisis. The EU allows a deficit limit of up to 3%<sup>4</sup>. However, France is currently facing a budget gap of 5.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2023, up from 4.8% in 2022. Moreover, France's public debt was 110.6% of the GDP in 2023, the EU however limits it to only 60%. France is at a crossroads with EU limits. However, the bigger problem that remains is the fact that France has to present a budget in the Parliament, and with parties that have different economic policies negotiations would be tough. If France is not able to work out and compromise in the coalition, the deficit will only widen and the EU will take stringent actions.

Another problem is the slow growth in the manufacturing sector which is a result of the lack of labour. France has further heightened the problem by passing immigration laws that have strict control on migration. An estimated 400,000 to 600,000 undocumented migrants live in France (Millerand, 2023) and add to the economy, hence this could be quite drastic for a

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[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2024/06/19/european-commission-reprimands-france-and-six-countries-for-breaking-budget-rules\\_6675175\\_19.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2024/06/19/european-commission-reprimands-france-and-six-countries-for-breaking-budget-rules_6675175_19.html)

country that is dependent on migrant labor and could further hit the manufacturing sector thus hurting the economy.

Further due to France's poor performance over the last few years, investors might find it risky and at the same cost of borrowing would increase. This could be in the form of an increased risk premium on French bonds. This spike in bonds could make the market more volatile and lose investor confidence. In the long run, another problem this situation will attract is the lack of trust from the EU. A volatile French market will have repercussions in the EU also as investors reassess risk. From an economic standpoint, the EU should intervene to control the financial risk as it could hamper other regions but from a political standpoint financially conservative countries like Germany might resist. This resistance might be even more stringent if the crisis is perceived to be self-inflicted due to irresponsible fiscal policies.

## **II. Immigration Laws**

Possibly the topic on which all the three blocs differ the most is regarding immigration policies. Immigration has been a key issue that has been discussed in the French parliament and one that is highly debated. The far right has been anti-immigration in the past and their stance has not changed in the present. They have always advocated for 'National Preference' which gives priority to French citizens in matters of housing, employment, welfare benefits, etc. However, the most drastic change that the RN propagates is the abolishment of 'droit de sol' which automatically grants French nationality to people born on French soil to foreign parents at the age of 18. The RN has made availing this right much tougher. Automatic French citizenship would be provided only if the person has at least one French parent. If a person born on French land to foreign parents wants to avail citizenship they need to assimilate well with French people, have a mastery of the language, and respect French laws and customs. The privilege could be withdrawn if the person commits acts incompatible with French nationality. The crux of the matter remains that there remains no security and the eligibility to avail nationality remains highly ambiguous. Moreover, the RN plans to withdraw residency from migrants who haven't worked for over a year, ending family reunification visas, the systematic deportation of irregular migrants or migrants convicted of criminal acts, and the total off-shoring of asylum applications (How France's Far Right Changed the Debate on Immigration, 2024). The far-right remain staunch in their belief and plan to advocate for their anti-immigration policies. Macron's centrist party on the other hand has never focused much on immigration and hence did not bring the topic to the centre stage. However, over the years his actions have aligned with the far right as he has feared the security of the French public due to increasing migration.

The NFP on the other hand stands in complete disagreement with what the far-right advocates for. The NFP plans to facilitate visa applications for migrants. They even want to set up a rescue agency at sea and on land for undocumented migrants. At the same time, they want to



continue with the motto of 'droit de sol' which provides automatic nationality to people born in France to foreign migrants. They also want to provide access to state medical aid to undocumented migrants. They also want to create a status for climate refugees.

The problem in hand that the National Assembly needs to face is how the topic of immigration is to be dealt with. Because the coalition with the maximum votes remains 'pro-immigration' and although the RN came third, they are also staunch in their anti-immigration stance. This brings Macron's centrist party into the picture to take a stance on immigration policies and would end up having to take sides and hence form a coalition. Macron has in the past tried forming coalitions with both the far left and far right but has failed. In such a scenario the problem of passing immigration policies becomes difficult. Most importantly if immigration policies are to be passed one side would end up having to compromise as there seems to be no middle ground. This could potentially end up fragmenting the parliament in the long run.

### **III. Global standing and the upcoming Paris Olympics**

The French snap elections have been met with criticism by international media. This step by Macron has tainted his image as many have questioned it. The step Macron took not only put a halt to French governance but also, allowed the far-right to take control over the National Assembly. The RN taking power is something that the international media has feared as it could hamper international relations. At the same time, it could have also led to breaking alliances with the EU. The RN has always been Euro-skeptic and has advocated for focusing on France only. This is exactly why the news of the snap elections was not met with a warm welcome globally, as it was considered a dicey gamble by Macron. This one step could end up harming French relations with other countries, especially the EU. When France remains in a state of political paralysis it would be tough for other countries to trust them.

Another issue that France will face is the upcoming Olympics which are supposed to be held in Paris in the summer of 2024. The elections happened just before the Olympics and caused uncertainty. The electoral campaigns that took place due to the polls required the attention of public services and security forces who have the additional responsibility of organising the games. It remains an additional burden for the country. However, the main problem is the upcoming Paris Olympics will divert attention to the political paralysis currently plaguing the National Assembly. When all attention is placed on managing the Paris Olympics and making sure it is a success, issues such as electing the new Prime Minister, forming a coalition among the three blocs, and discussing the looming economic crisis will all be pushed back. These snap elections further worsened the problems that France was facing due to its ill timing and clashing with the Paris Olympics.

## 6. Recommendations

### *I. Forming a provisional government:*

- a. Prime Minister, Mr. Gabriel Attal, submitted his resignation after the centrist coalition was unable to form a majority. However, choosing a new Prime Minister remains difficult when there is no clear majority. In such a scenario, a provisional government could be set up which would be headed by Mr. Attal. There should be a period of maximum 2 months for which the provisional government should govern and carry out day to day administration but not take any major decisions when it comes to social, economic and political problems.
- b. During this period the NFP, Renaissance and RN should come together to form a coalition so that there remains a majority when the provisional government is dissolved. Considering Emmanuel Macron will continue to be the President till 2027, he can try to form coalitions with the parts of the left and right which are not extremes. For example, the Les Republicains who are liberal conservatives. It would be much more fruitful to form alliances with such parties as extremes like The French Unbowed and the RN are the leaders of the far-left and far-right and plan to spread their ideals to form a majority in the next elections. This advocacy of their ideals will not allow them to compromise.
- c. The Coalition when formed would not agree on everything especially in matters relating to the economy and human rights. In such a scenario in order to pass laws in parliament and bring about change it remains crucial that after the coalition is formed there is expert advice given by economists, financial advisors, policy makers, legal advisors and human right groups. A third unbiased voice, which has expertise and knowledge can help them to navigate between such negotiations and help in effective decision making. At the same time the main motive of the coalition government would be to serve the people so conducting surveys could be very beneficial in getting insights into what people want. All of these activities should be carried out in a period of two months so that the provisional government can be dissolved.
- d. After the coalition is formed and few major policies agreed upon it would be easy to elect the New Prime Minister based on public opinion through surveys and these candidates who are chosen by the public would have to get maximum vote by the coalition to be elected as the new Prime Minister.

### *II. The intervention of the EU:*

It is high time that the EU intervenes and takes stringent actions to make sure that the deficit levels are under the EU level. The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) provides financial assistance to EU countries facing financial issues. Given the high public debt and budget deficit, financial assistance could help them stabilise the economy in the short run. Also, if the EU intervenes there would be strict action taken and the economy would not be in a paralysis because of the fragmented parliament. Moreover, it is important to appoint

economists and financial advisors in France who are not lenient towards any party to work out the upcoming budget. The budget is a key issue and can only be dealt with if the political parties take advice from economists and financial advisors instead of trying to avoid their propagandas.

## 7. Conclusion

The snap elections which were supposed to bring clarity to France were further complicated with no coalition being able to win majority seats. The research paper talks about how the country is in a state of political paralysis as the parliament remains hung. The success of NFP however brought certainty to the fact that the RN has faced resistance and citizens have tried their best to keep them out of power however it is also important to note that the increase in votes for RN shows the rise of nationalistic sentiment. Even though France has a hung parliament it is important for the government to form an alliance which keeps their differences aside and focuses on some of the key issues plaguing the country. One of the biggest problems to tackle is the economic crisis. France's budget gap has reached 5.5% of the GDP in 2023 whereas the EU limit is only 3%. It is important for the National Assembly to deal with the ongoing financial crisis. France also needs to define a procedure to elect their new prime minister. This would help bring clarity into many decisions especially for topics like immigration. Now it is high time for the three blocs to come together to form an alliance that would work for the collective good of the French people.

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