

5 things to know about France's messy election

di Clea Caulcutt

PARIS — Voters in France have once again mobilized to stop Marine Le Pen's far right taking power. But it was a close-run thing for the anti-Le Pen movement, and this time it was a case of winning ugly.

The election delivered [a chaotic result, with no party taking enough seats for a majority](#) in parliament, plunging French politics into turmoil that could last months.

Macron called the snap election in June in an effort to stop Le Pen's surging far-right National Rally in its tracks. But her party enhanced its profile and won 50 more seats than in 2022, while the president's own liberal coalition fell back.

Macron's Prime Minister [Gabriel Attal has said he'll offer his resignation](#), but it's far from clear who could take over.

None of this apparently dampened the French president's mood. At a private gathering with his allies on Sunday night, Macron was upbeat, telling them: "Our ideas are still alive and [we] haven't lost voters," according to one person present who spoke to Paris Playbook.

With French politics in a mess, here's what you need to know about what it all means.

Governing France will be hellish now

The 577-seat National Assembly, the lower house of France's legislature, is not a pretty sight — split between the left, the center and the far-right. No group is even close to a majority, with all of them falling short of 200 MPs.

"It's not possible to govern France if you don't have 240 to 250 lawmakers," said Sylvain Maillard, MP for Macron's Renaissance party. "I was president of the Renaissance group with a coalition of 250 members of parliament and it was already very complicated."

Even though the leftist alliance and Macron's liberals agreed to collaborate and vote tactically to stop Le Pen's National Rally from winning, a deeper coalition between the two groups to govern France appears unlikely.

Veteran far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed, one of the parties within the left-wing alliance, has ruled out governing with the president's liberals. Likewise Macron's Prime Minister, Gabriel Attal, has said his side would never share power with Mélenchon.

On Sunday evening, Attal opened the door to leading a caretaker government to provide some stability during the Olympic Games later this month.

Whatever government emerges from the mess, it's unlikely to be stable for long. This autumn's budget talks will be the first potential flashpoint. France is under pressure to cut its deficit after missing targets earlier in the year. There are many ideas that the left, the liberals and the far-right will never agree on. Fiscal policy is near the top of the list.

Le Pen is down, but not out

After the first round of voting, Le Pen's National Rally was on course to win power for the first time in its history. That dream was left in fragments on Sunday night, after Macron's centrists and the left-wing alliance collaborated to keep the far right out, to the delight of mainstream pro-Europeans.

The gloomy mood at the National Rally election event spoke volumes, with activists booing Mélenchon, and the party's president Jordan Bardella condemning the "unnatural alliance" of the center and the left as an establishment stitch-up.

For all the bitterness, the party dramatically increased the number of its lawmakers in the National Assembly. How much longer can the establishment keep them out of power?

"It's a political upheaval, even if the National Rally doesn't end up running the country," said Benjamin Morel, political analyst at Panthéon-Assas University, Paris.

Le Pen's movement are "the big winners of the election," said Morel. "Millions of votes translates into a big financial windfall," he said with reference to the state funding that will follow the result.

That puts Le Pen in a powerful position — with a perfect grievance to exploit — ahead of her likely campaign for the French presidency when Macron steps aside in 2027. “They’ve got a great narrative ahead of the 2027: They can say that their victory was stolen, and they are the real alternative,” Morel said.

Macron’s gamble backfired, but it could have been worse

A week ago, it looked like Macron was heading toward disaster, with his snap election not only failing to stop Le Pen but putting her party one step from power.

By Sunday evening, his centrist coalition had averted the worst, surviving as a parliamentary force, albeit a smaller one, while Le Pen’s party fell short. But small consolations can’t hide the reality that the far right is now stronger and the liberals weaker, ahead of a wide-open presidential race in 2027.

Before the snap election, the president commanded the largest group in parliament. Now he will likely have to work with an opposition politician as prime minister. His authority at home and credibility abroad have been damaged.

But according to Alberto Alemanno, a professor at HEC Paris, Macron was right to call a snap election even though it ended in a muddle. “I see a lot of latent tensions in France, a lot of issues that haven’t been addressed,” he said. “He has opened the Pandora’s Box, the country is not happy with Macronism and it is screaming for a new sense of political belonging.”

Mélenchon won’t be in charge

If there was one winner, it was the veteran left-wing radical Mélenchon who won the race to get his message out, leaping on stage at his party’s rally to demand Macron appoint a leftist prime minister and bring his movement into power.

“We are ready for it,” Mélenchon declared. The three-times presidential candidate has indicated he wouldn’t mind becoming France’s prime minister himself. That’s not going to happen.

The firebrand is toxic to many frontline politicians, with his fascination for Latin American strongmen, his temper tantrums and his vicious attacks on opponents.

Most recently, critics accused him of flirting with antisemitism when he appeared to [downplay attacks against Jews in France](#).

Mélenchon can't even convince other parties within the loose left-wing alliance he is part of to put him in power.

The broader leftist coalition — under the banner of the New Popular Front — is falling out already. Its leaders on Sunday evening were sending conflicting messages about their goals.

While Mélenchon said the left would apply “our manifesto, nothing but our manifesto,” the MEP Raphaël Glucksmann, leader of a smaller party in the alliance, appeared more conciliatory, offering to “talk, debate and change political culture.”

What might emerge from the mess?

There's no easy answer to this one. As no party has won outright, it's possible the president could opt for a cooling off period that will give parties time to hold coalition talks.

Macron could then sound out a left-wing figure to form a government, given that the left has emerged as the largest group in parliament.

The Socialist Party for instance has entirely not ruled out building a wider coalition but it's unlikely that Mélenchon's France Unbowed would agree to watering down its manifesto.

Alternatively, Macron could appoint a caretaker government, keeping Attal as PM. He could even adopt the Italian model and nominate a [technocratic team of experts under a consensual figure](#). Such an administration would refrain from making ambitious plans and focus on keeping the wheels of the state in motion.

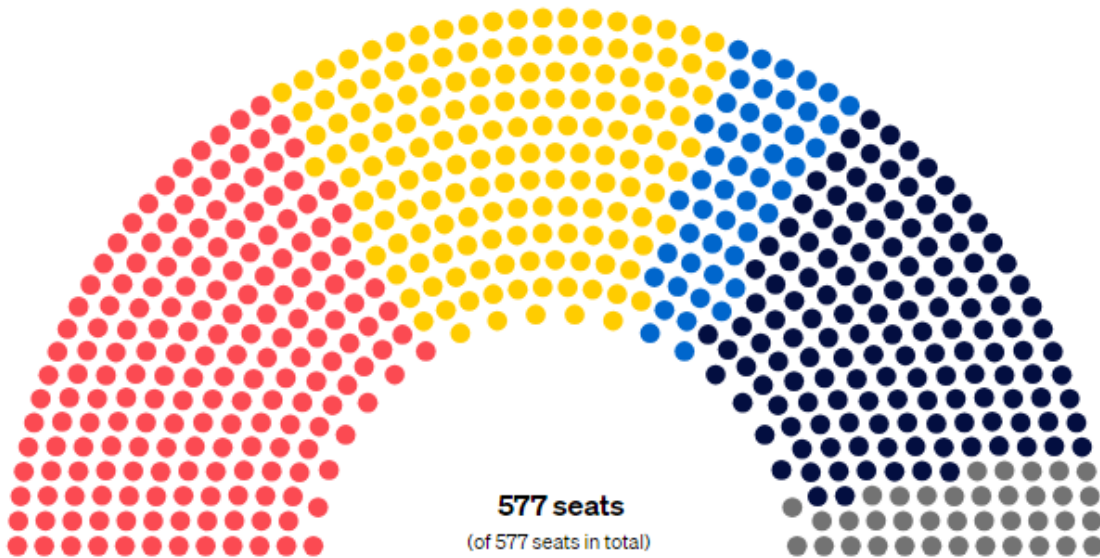
Such a limited administration would rest on a tacit agreement between diametrically opposed parties to refrain from toppling it, if only to reassure the markets and international partners.

But a caretaker or experts' government “risks being very frustrating democratically,” warned Morel, the political analyst. “The French voted massively, the centre was

defeated, and if it ends with Attal staying on as prime minister, it's not a good thing for France's democracy."

French election final results

2022 **2024**



Click on a party to form a majority

Group	Seats	Change	Votes
● New Popular Front (NFP)	188	+57 ▲	26.3 %
● Ensemble (ENS)	161	-76 ▼	24.7 %
● National Rally Alliance (RN)	142	+53 ▲	37.1 %
● Les Républicains (LR)	48	-13 ▼	6.2 %
● Other	38	-21 ▼	5.6 %