

# Mass abstention overshadows Macron victory in French legislative elections

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A historic level of abstention dominated the first round of the French legislative elections yesterday, which gave newly-elected President Emmanuel Macron's party The Republic On the March (LREM) a large majority. But fully 51.2 percent of voters abstained—the first time since the end of World War II that only a minority of registered voters participated in the legislative elections.

Workers and youth overwhelmingly stayed away from the polls. Although 70 percent of retirees voted in the elections, approximately 30 percent of voters aged under thirty went to vote. Opinion polls carried out in the days before the elections showed that 56 percent of the so-called “popular categories,” comprising manual workers and employees, planned to abstain.

This is a resoundingly negative judgment of the French population on the media campaign to promote Macron's counter-revolutionary program proposing to create a permanent state of emergency, slashing attacks on labor protections, and a return to the draft.

It appears that the legislative elections—whose purpose was to determine, as *Le Monde* wrote, whether Macron will have “unchecked powers” to impose his program—will produce an overwhelming LREM majority in the Assembly. However, even if the electoral mechanisms grant Macron an unchallenged hold over the legislature, this majority—elected by only a minority of the population—will have no legitimacy to impose his program.

LREM obtained 32 percent of the vote, against 21 percent for the right-wing The Republicans (LR), 13.9 percent for the neo-fascist National Front, 10.9 percent for the Unsubmissive France (UF) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, 13.3 percent for the Socialist Party (PS), and 3.3 percent for the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). The candidates of *Lutte ouvrière* (LO,

Workers Struggle) and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) together obtained only 0.08 percent of the vote.

Nonetheless, given the electoral set-up—one needs to obtain a number of votes greater than 12.5 percent of the registered voters to advance to the second round, which is carried simply by whoever gets the most votes—LREM can hope to obtain a lopsided majority in the Assembly.

Though it only obtained the votes of 16 percent of registered voters, LREM may have, according to initial projections based on yesterday's vote, a crushing majority of 400 to 450 seats in the 577-seat National Assembly. LR would have 70 to 110 seats, the PS 20 to 30, a UF-PCF coalition 8 to 18, and the FN 7 to 12.

Initial analyses of LREM's vote point to its very heterogeneous and therefore fragile character. In Paris, LREM's vague promises of reform and modernization allowed it to carry both the very bourgeois 16th district, as well as the working-class neighborhoods of the 19th district.

Numerous politicians and media commentators openly worried that the abstention meant that Macron's lack of democratic legitimacy will have serious political consequences when he sets out to enforce his agenda on the population.

“Our democracy cannot allow itself to be sick,” declared PS First Secretary Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, who added: “It is neither healthy nor desirable for a president who obtained only 24 percent of the vote on the first round and won the second round purely on the basis of popular rejection of the National Front, to have a monopoly of democratic representation.”

Last night, France Info commented: “It's a black mark, even a very black mark: the future National Assembly will give an image that is only a political

caricature of France. And this is not a sign of good health in a democracy.”

The Macron government was reduced to appealing to voters to participate in greater numbers in the second round of the legislative elections this coming Sunday. “You were less numerous to vote” than in the presidential elections, declared Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, who added that he felt obliged to “insist on the necessity that voters go vote next Sunday.”

These elections are marked by a crying contradiction. There is broad opposition to the program of austerity, military mobilization, and police-state rule that Macron has developed in collaboration with Berlin and the European Union (EU). However, LREM—founded last year by Macron, then the economy minister in the despised PS government of then-President François Hollande—has been able to establish itself over a few months as France’s main bourgeois party, winning over large factions of the PS and LR.

This is bound up above all with the treacherous role of Mélenchon and UF, as well as the NPA and LO, in providing tacit support to Macron, though it was perfectly clear that Macron would intensify the sharp shift to the right carried out under Hollande. When Macron and Le Pen made it to the second round, both Mélenchon and the NPA—without openly endorsing Macron—made clear that they tacitly supported a Macron victory.

The NPA stated that it “understood” anyone who voted for Macron against Le Pen, and Mélenchon then subsequently offered to serve as Macron’s prime minister and to advise Macron’s ministers on legislation they were trying to pass in the National Assembly.

They rejected the political line advanced by the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The PES rejected false claims that Macron was a defender of democracy against Le Pen and called for an active boycott of the second round of the presidential elections. It explained that it was seeking to arm the working class with a politically independent perspective to fight the onslaught that would inevitably be launched against the workers, whether it was Macron or Le Pen who won the presidency.

The total abdication of Mélenchon and the NPA of all responsibility to offer a perspective to oppose Macron

is in line with the historic collapse of the parties that made up what has passed for the French “left” for nearly a half-century—since the last major revolutionary experience of the working class in France, the May-June 1968 general strike.

The PS was the leading party since shortly after its foundation in 1971. It won a 331-seat majority in the Assembly after the 2012 elections, but after Hollande’s presidency, it is now set to be reduced to an impotent rump. It is paying the price for having carried out unpopular policies of imperialist war and social austerity every time it took power. Large sections of its personnel are seeking to recycle themselves politically by joining LREM.

Many other high-ranking PS and Green legislators have been eliminated, however: Cambadélis, PS presidential candidate Benoît Hamon, former PS Interior Minister Matthias Fekl, former PS Justice Minister Elizabeth Guigou, and former Green Party leader Cécile Duflot.

The PCF’s sclerotic bureaucracy, which collapsed after forming a long-term alliance with the PS in the 1970s and above all after the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the USSR in 1991, will have only 20 candidates present in the second round of the legislative elections. It is threatened with the loss of its status as a parliamentary group, which requires having at least 15 seats, and thus a loss of financial resources that could prove devastating, or even fatal.

To the extent that these forces blocked the politically independent mobilization of the working class against Macron, this has allowed him to establish a dominant position over other branches of government and prepare deep attacks against the workers. Macron will, nonetheless, face explosive opposition in the working class, under conditions where mass abstention has deprived the Assembly of any semblance of legitimacy to impose his reactionary program.



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