

No outright winner in New Caledonia election

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In a poll on June 28 marked by lower voter turnout, New Caledonia's long delayed provincial elections leave the French Pacific territory's Congress with a near deadlock between pro- and anti-independence parties, similar to the outgoing legislature elected in 2019.

French President Emmanuel Macron postponed the elections three times as he unsuccessfully manoeuvred to impose a political solution for New Caledonia's future. An election planned for 2024 was cancelled after Macron moved to change voter eligibility requirements, which would have diluted the indigenous Kanak vote. This ignited a seven-month uprising by alienated and impoverished Kanak youth, which France responded to with a military-police crackdown resulting in 14 dead and material damage of €2.2 billion.

Macron's unilateral move to "unfreeze" the electoral roll, which only allowed people born in the colony or residing there before 1998 to vote, would have given an additional 37,492 French nationals voting rights. While the bill was abandoned after the riots, a month before the elections Macron's government rushed through legislation to expand the rolls by 10,569 locally born voters who did not meet the previous definition of citizenship. The change was opposed by the pro-independence parties.

With the colony still "sensitive," according to the French High Commission, over social and economic issues, heavy security was in force on election day. Some 2,500 policemen were involved including 16 squadrons of gendarmes plus additional officers from the French anti-crime squad and judiciary police. A total alcohol ban was in force for a week. The security forces remain posted this month.

Voters choose 76 members for three provincial assemblies with different sizes: 40 seats for the Southern Province, 22 for the North and 14 in the

Loyalty Islands. Each assembly elects its own provincial president and executive, with a proportion of assembly members making up the 54-member Congress: 32 from the Southern assembly, 15 from the Northern and 7 from the Loyalty Islands.

Government business is then overseen by an 11-member cabinet made up from the parties at the Congress. A product of the "power sharing" 1998 Nouméa Accord, this ostensibly operates under a principle of "collegiality," implying that the multi-party executive, which includes both supporters and opponents of independence, works together. The executive selects the territory's president.

From a total of 192,584 registered voters there was a 63.71 percent turnout, down from 66.49 percent in 2019. The results for the 54 Congress seats saw the pro-independence side consolidate its position with 26, the same as 2019. The pro-France parties dropped one seat to 24, and Eveil Océanien, based in the Wallisian and Futunan islands community, increased from three seats to four.

The percentages of the vote obtained by the main parties making up the Congress were: the pro-France Les Loyalistes-Le Rassemblement 38.05 percent, Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) 10.66, Union Calédonienne (FLNKS aligned) 11.93, Union Nationale pour l'Indépendance-Palika (UNI-Palika) 10.56 percent. EO won 6.9 percent. Several minor pro-independence parties also won Congress seats; Kanaky Pour Tous alliance 6 seats, Nation Autochtone 3, Palika Isles 1.

There were significant shifts within the overall votes, indicating a deepening political polarization with sharply reduced support for parties that had sought a "middle way" between the two main contesting blocs.

In the Southern province, the most populous and affluent region centred on the capital Nouméa, the results confirmed a clear victory for the "Strong and

United” list of Les Loyalistes and Le Rassemblement. With more than 41,000 votes, they increased their tally by more than 12,000 from 2019.

Support for pro-independence lists in the Northern and Loyalty Islands provinces remained strong. Of the 26 pro-independence seats, the UC-FLNKS picked up one seat to secure 16. Kanaky Pour Tous secured six seats.

The UNI-Palika alliance, which had split from the FLNKS in 2025, failed to win a seat in the South and lost two seats, ending up with seven. Loyalty Island independence groupings won three seats, up from one in 2019.

The EO could well play the role of “kingmaker.” In the last Congress, EO leveraged its position to win places on the Congress executive as well as a seat in the territorial government. In August 2024, Congress President Roch Wamytan of the FLNKS was replaced by Veylma Falaeo from EO, who had won the backing of the Loyalists.

In January 2025, the cabinet installed anti-independence Loyalist Alcide Ponga as the executive’s president. Ponga leads Le Rassemblement, a party affiliated with the fascist Les Républicains (LR) in France. He replaced outgoing pro-independence President Louis Mapou of the Parti de Libération Kanak (Palika). Mapou had bitterly declared, “It’s a dirty political blow to the country.”

The election for Congress took place in the wake of Macron’s Élysée Oudinot Accord and its predecessor, the Bougival Accord, which proposed a new constitutional future for the Pacific colony. While offering the transfer of limited powers from France to the territorial administration, both the accords kept the 170 year-old colony embedded within the French constitution.

The Élysée Oudinot Accord was signed in Paris on January 19 by the French government and leaders of five parties from New Caledonia’s Congress. The FLNKS, in its absence, rejected the latest text “unequivocally.” FLNKS President Christian Téin said it had been imposed by force and was “incompatible” with the territory’s “decolonisation path.” The FLNKS calls for political solutions to be found “not in Paris, but here in New Caledonia.”

The Loyaliste-Rassemblement coalition, led by outgoing Southern provincial president Sonia Backès,

continues to insist that three successive referenda have flatly rejected full independence which must remain off the table. Following the riots in 2024, Backès provocatively suggested that New Caledonia be “partitioned” along provincial lines, separating the mostly indigenous North from the largely European South.

In the selections for provincial presidents, Backès has been returned unopposed in the Southern assembly after the strong showing by anti-independence parties. Mickaël Forrest of UC-FLNKS will lead the Loyalty Islands with his sister Omayra Naisseline (Indigenous Nation-FLNKS) as vice-president.

In the Northern province longstanding incumbent and UNI leader Paul Néaoutyine beat off a close challenge by UC-FLNKS candidate Pascal Sawa, due to decisive support by a pro-France grouping. An “indignant” Sawa condemned what he termed a de facto “alliance between UNI and the Loyalist pro-France.”

The Congress is scheduled to hold its inaugural sitting on 10 July, with France foreshadowing the immediate resumption of discussions. A new young leader of the FLNKS, Johanito Wamytan, said during the campaign that his party would participate. The pro-independence party represents a thin capitalist Kanak elite which seeks a deal with Paris that will give them a bigger slice of the profits extracted from New Caledonia’s workers and rural poor.

The lower election turnout and the subsequent deadlock reflect growing opposition to the entire political establishment, especially among many young indigenous Kanaks and workers who have not benefitted from the indigenous “empowerment” provisions of the Nouméa Accord.

None of the new assemblies nor the discussions with France will produce any substantive measures to seriously address the desperate social crisis facing the colony’s working class and youth, marked by inequality, poverty and alienation.



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