

Macron's snap election: A tactical move?

Following the failure of Emmanuel Macron's ticket in the European elections and the resounding success of the Rassemblement National (RN), the French president has decided to call new legislative elections. Whatever the political reasons, this decision will not ease the economic challenges facing the country



French President Emmanuel Macron's approval rating has dropped to the lowest level since 2018.

Flash decision

The results of Europe's parliamentary elections have assumed national significance in France, with President Macron announcing the dissolution of parliament and calling for new legislative elections on 30 June (1st round) and 7 July (2nd round).

The outcome of the European elections in France was unequivocal. With 31.37% of the vote, the Rassemblement National (France's far-right party) came out on top. President Macron's ticket garnered just 14.6% of the vote. It was a clear victory for the far right, as the polls had predicted.

What's the strategy behind this announcement?

In the face of such an outcome, it was almost impossible for the president to deny the national implications of this result (both through the success of the RN and the weakness of his own score).

Nevertheless, the decision may be more tactical than it first appears.

1. On the one hand, the short campaign ahead will force the other parties to clarify their positions. Remember that in the current parliament, no political group has a majority (neither the president's party, the traditional parties, nor the RN). Until now, it has almost always been impossible to form stable coalitions on important reforms, forcing the government to go by force (using article 49.3 of the constitution, allowing it to pass laws without a vote in parliament unless parliament passes a no-confidence motion). The threat of a major RN parliamentary victory could move positions.
2. The president probably also wants to show that the vote in the European elections was a protest vote, giving the image of a stronger RN than is actually the case. Let's not forget that, contrary to the European ones, the legislative elections are held in two rounds and abstention reached over 48.5% during yesterday's vote. No doubt President Macron is counting on voter mobilisation and alliances between the two rounds to overturn yesterday's results.
3. Assuming, however, that the RN manages to win an absolute majority (which would require it to win over 200 seats compared with its current representation), President Macron would be forced to co-habit with a government drawn from the RN. If anything, history has shown that this works against the governing party. As for the RN, unaccustomed to power, perhaps the president wants to demonstrate that the RN is not the solution, though this remains a gamble.

Economic numbers don't care about political strategies

The next few days will probably provide a clearer picture of the political strategies of each party. But that doesn't change the reality of the figures:

- Despite slightly higher growth figures and an undeniable economic upturn, it will be difficult for the French economy to achieve 1.0% growth this year.
- This weak growth continues to weigh on public finances, which are already in a very poor state. As a reminder, according to the latest figures from the European Commission, the deficit stood at -5.5% of GDP last year, and is set to narrow only slightly this year (-5.3%) and next (-5.0%). As a result, the debt ratio remains on an upward trajectory. On June 19, with 10 days to go before the first round of voting, the Commission is likely, barring any major surprises, to place France under the Excessive Deficit Procedure, which will put public finances and the performance of the French economy at the heart of the electoral campaign.

Whatever the next government, it will not be able to deny these realities, or alienate the European institutions and financial markets: economic realities are more stable than political strategies.

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