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# French Legislative Elections 2017: First Round Analysis

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Following on from our analysis of the [French presidential election](#), this short paper provides an analysis after the first round of voting in the legislative elections. The second round will take place one week after the first, on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June.

## **1. KEY POINTS**

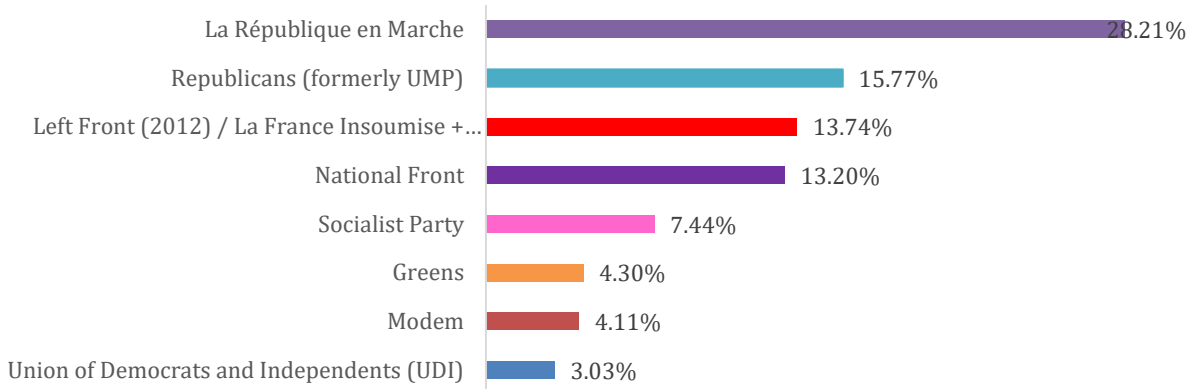
- Turnout for legislative elections reached a record low on Sunday at only 48%, much lower than the 58% turnout in 2012.
- Only four seats were won outright by candidates who garnered over 50% of the vote – a large drop from 2012 when 36 candidates won after the first round alone.
- Due to low turnout, there will only be one ‘triangulaire’ – a run-off between three candidates in the second round. This will take place in Aube, where Grégory Besson-Moreau (La République en Marche) came first with 29.86% of the vote. He will be against the incumbent Nicolas Dhuicq (Les Républicains, 25.68%) and the National Front’s Bruno Subtil (24.89%). In 2012, there were 46 ‘trinangulaires’, reduced to 34 after some candidates withdrew. In all other seats, it will be a two-person run-off.
- Emmanuel Macron’s party La République en Marche (LREM) put forth 461 candidates (and allied with centrist Modem’s 76 candidates). Between the two parties, they won two seats outright and the latest projections suggest that they will win between 415 to 455 seats on Sunday (Ipsos – Sopra Steria 11 June 2017).
- The Republicans, who are allied with the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) fielded 480 and 148 candidates respectively. Only one UDI candidate won outright. While the party’s aim at the outset was to win a majority, projections suggest they will win only 70 to 110 seats – a fair drop from the 225 they won in 2012. Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire is in a good position to win his seat, though former candidate in the presidential primaries Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet came second in her constituency.

- The Socialists, who won 295 seats to form a majority in 2012, only fielded 414 candidates this time, the lowest number amongst the main parties. They garnered only 7% of the vote, with numerous big names eliminated, including presidential candidate Benoît Hamon and party leader Jean-Christophe Cambadélis. Manuel Valls came a close first, but will have a tight battle in the second round against the LREM candidate. The Socialists are predicted to win between 20 to 30 seats.
- Jean-Luc Mélenchon's movement 'La France Insoumise' was present in 556 constituencies. Despite the remarkable presidential election result, the far left party (including the Communist Party) won only 13.74%. Mélenchon looks to be in a comfortable position to win in Marseille. The parties are expected to win around 8 to 18 seats between them.
- After winning its largest ever number of votes in the second round of the presidential election on 7 May, the National Front fielded 571 candidates, more than any other party. Its hopes were likely pinned on the [45 constituencies where Marine Le Pen won over 50%](#) in the second round of the presidential race. However, the National Front only won 13.2% of the vote – 538,071 less votes than it did in the 2012 legislative elections. While Marine Le Pen looks like she will likely in Pas-de-Calais, her deputy Florian Philippot is less assured and the party is only projected to win one to five seats overall.

**Table 1. Final results of the 2017 legislative election compared to 2012 results**

Party	Number of votes - 1st round 2012	% - 1st round 2012	Number of candidates elected - 1st round 2012	Number of votes - 1st round 2017	% - 1st round 2017	Number of candidates elected - 1st round 2017	Change in votes 2012-2017	Change in per cent - 2012-2017
Far left	253,386	0.98%		175,387	0.77%		-77,999	-0.21%
Left Front (2012) / La France Insoumise + Communists (2017)	1,793,192	6.91%		3,113,164	13.74%		1,319,972	6.83%
Socialist Party	7,618,326	29.35%	22	1,685,773	7.44%		-5,932,553	-21.91%
Radical Left	428,898	1.65%	1	106,287	0.47%		-322,611	-1.18%
Other left parties	881,555	3.40%	1	362,328	1.60%	1	-519,227	-1.80%
European Greens	1,418,264	5.46%	1				-1,418,264	-5.46%
Regionalists	145,809	0.56%		204,078	0.90%		58,269	0.34%
Greens	249,068	0.96%		973,739	4.30%		724,671	3.34%
Others	133,752	0.52%		500,458	2.21%		366,706	1.69%
La République en marche				6,390,797	28.21%	2	6,390,797	28.21%
Modem				932,229	4.11%		932,229	4.11%
Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI)				687,219	3.03%	1	687,219	3.03%
The Centre for France	458,098	1.77%					-458,098	-1.77%
Centrist Alliance	156,026	0.60%					-156,026	-0.60%
Radical Party	321,124	1.24%					-321,124	-1.24%
New Centre	569,897	2.20%	1				-569,897	-2.20%
Republicans (formerly UMP)	7,037,268	27.12%	9	3,573,366	15.77%		-3,463,902	-11.35%
Other right parties	910,034	3.51%	1	890,828	2.76%		-19,206	-0.75%
National Front	3,528,663	13.60%		2,990,592	13.20%		-538,071	-0.40%
Far right	49,499	0.19%		68,319	0.30%		18,820	0.11%

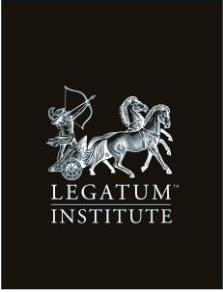
**Figure 1. First round legislative results**



## **2. FIRST ROUND POLLS ANALYSIS AND SEAT PROJECTIONS**

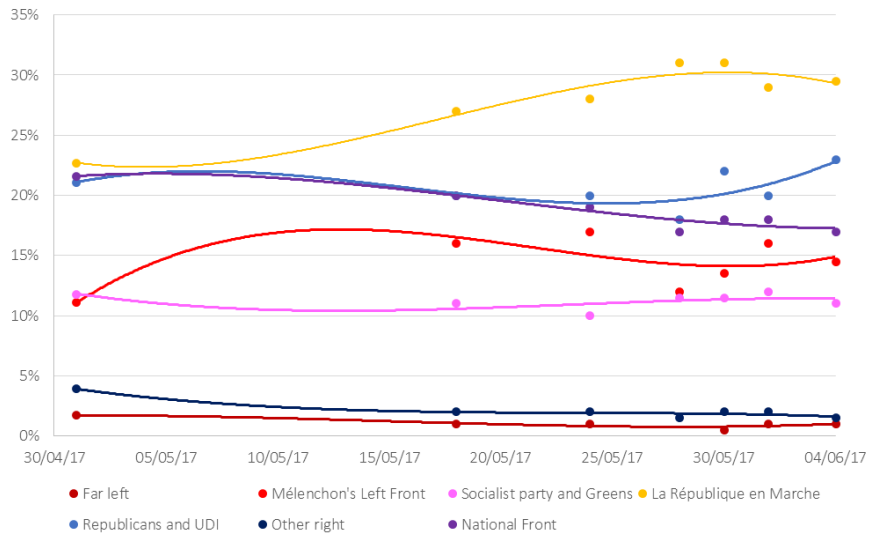
It has been unusual for French pollsters to conduct opinion polls in the lead-up to the legislative elections. Until this year, the first round of the presidential election offered a fairly accurate indicator of how many seats each party would win a few weeks later. However, the anomaly of En Marche (now La République en Marche) appearing as a new movement that galvanised enough support to bring its leader to the presidential post meant greater uncertainty about how presidential support for an individual would translate into parliamentary support for a new party.

Immediately following the presidential election, polls had LREM, the Republicans and the National Front neck and neck at around 21-23%. Over time, the gap between them widened significantly (see Figure 1). Days before 11<sup>th</sup> June, LREM had a large lead with around 30% support, followed by the Republicans at around 23% and the National Front trailing at 18%. Mélenchon's party was even further behind in fourth place below 15%, a five per cent drop in support since the first round of the presidential election. The final result was quite close to these polls; only the National Front did worse than expected.



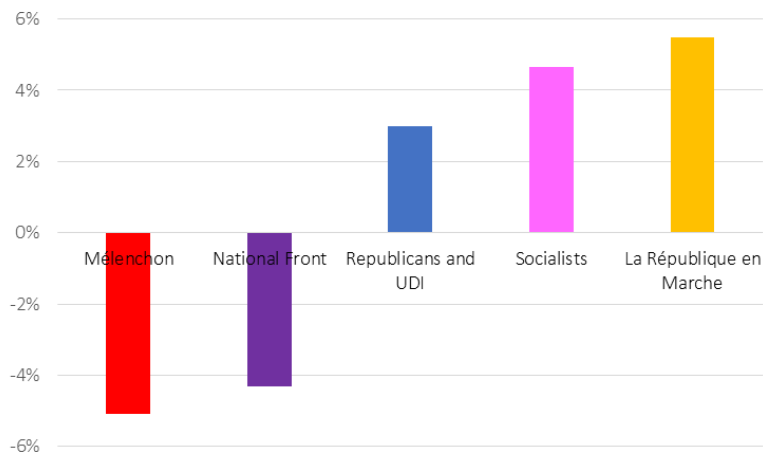
**Figure 2. The lead for La République en Marche grew substantially over time**

*(all OpinionWay, Kantar and Ipsos polls conducted between 24 May and 4 June 2017 that included both percentage estimates and seat projections)*



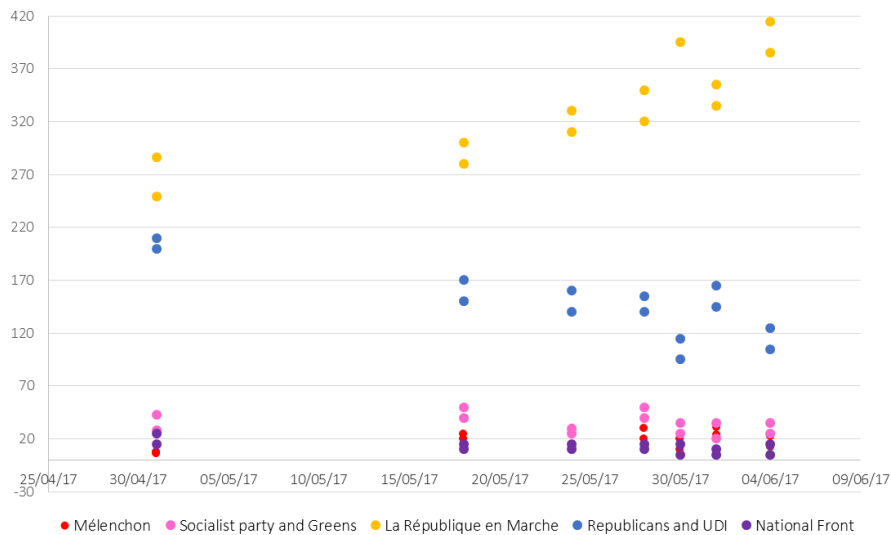
**Figure 3. Difference between first round legislative polls and first round presidential results**

*(Ipsos 4 June poll)*



**Figure 4. Seat projections before the first round of the legislative elections**

(all OpinionWay, Kantar and Ipsos polls conducted between 24 May and 4 June 2017 that included both percentage estimates and seat projections)



There are a few reasons why LREM likely defied initial scepticism to storm to a majority. One is that a law from Hollande’s time in office has now come into place, banning politicians from holding multiple posts at once, such as being mayor and MP at the same time. This meant that there were many new faces running to represent the Socialists and the Republicans as well, lessening LREM’s disadvantage. However, this alone does not explain everything, as heavyweights from both the main parties were wiped out or face strong challenges in the upcoming second round.

Second, in the few weeks since he took office, Emmanuel Macron has won the backing of a large proportion of French people who are willing to give him a chance. As an [Ipsos poll](#) on 6 June 2017 shows, the majority (60%) of French people are satisfied with Macron, including a large majority of Socialist (71%) and Republican/UDI/other right-wing voters (60%). Even a large proportion of Mélenchon supporters (43%) think Macron has done a good job so far. There seems to be a genuine belief that Macron might be able to bring about the change that he promises and that France needs.

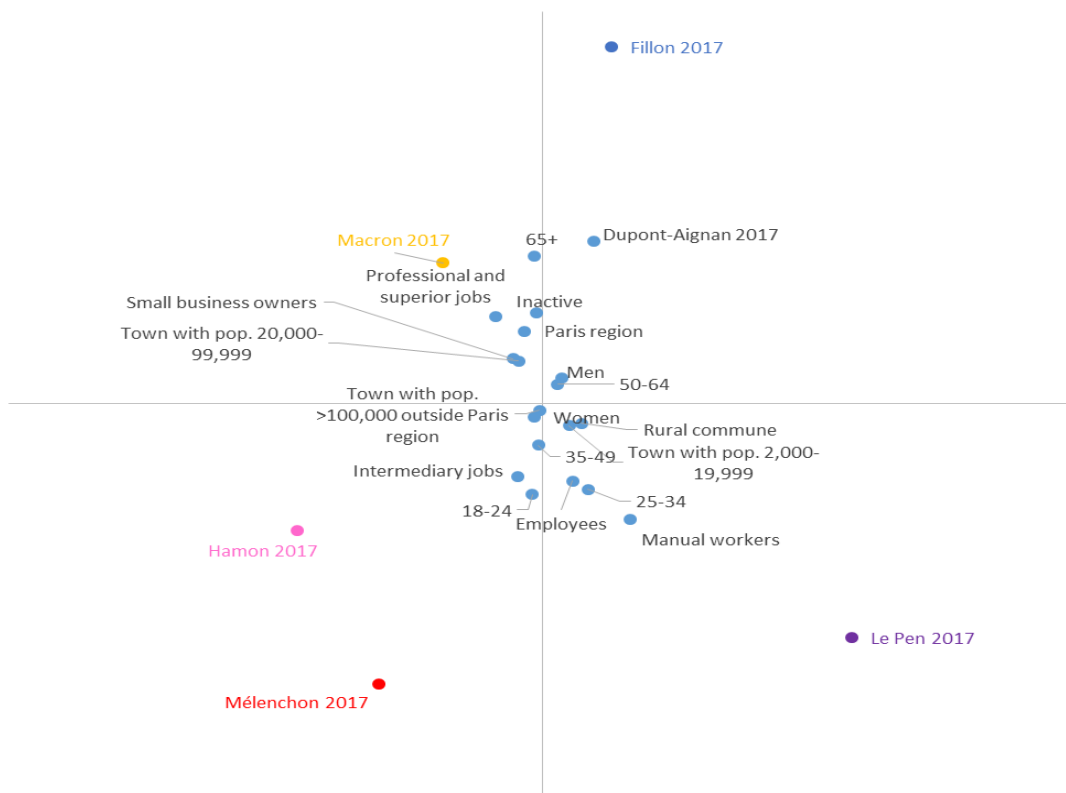
Testament to how far Macron has managed to broaden his support, [Ipsos’s exit poll](#) shows that LREM came ahead in every category of age, profession, salary, education, geography (city/rural), as well as among the unemployed. The best scores were among the demographics who voted for Macron disproportionately in the presidential race, but nonetheless, La République en Marche has widened support across socio-demographic lines considerably. Equally, LREM has [broadened support geographically](#) as well, coming first in more constituencies than Macron in the first round of the presidential election.

Even ahead of the first round of voting, the polls were picking up on this shift among all groups to Macron. We have conducted a correspondence analysis on Opinionway’s poll conducted 30 May – 1 June, about a week before the first round of voting, to visualise the similarities and differences between the different parties and their respective political positioning. It is a statistical technique that spatially represents the political landscape in which parties operate. Where parties are opposite each other, the greater the difference between them. When there is greater proximity, this represents greater similarity in the demographics between their supporters. The axes are approximate, but the horizontal one is left-right and the vertical one is globalist-nationalist.

In the two figures below, it is clear that Macron's support emanates from the centre. His strongest support comes from those in professional and superior jobs, who are over 65, small business owners, in the Paris regions and large towns. However, La République en Marche is still closer to all the other demographics than any of the other parties, indicating that Macron has siphoned off support from both the left and the right.

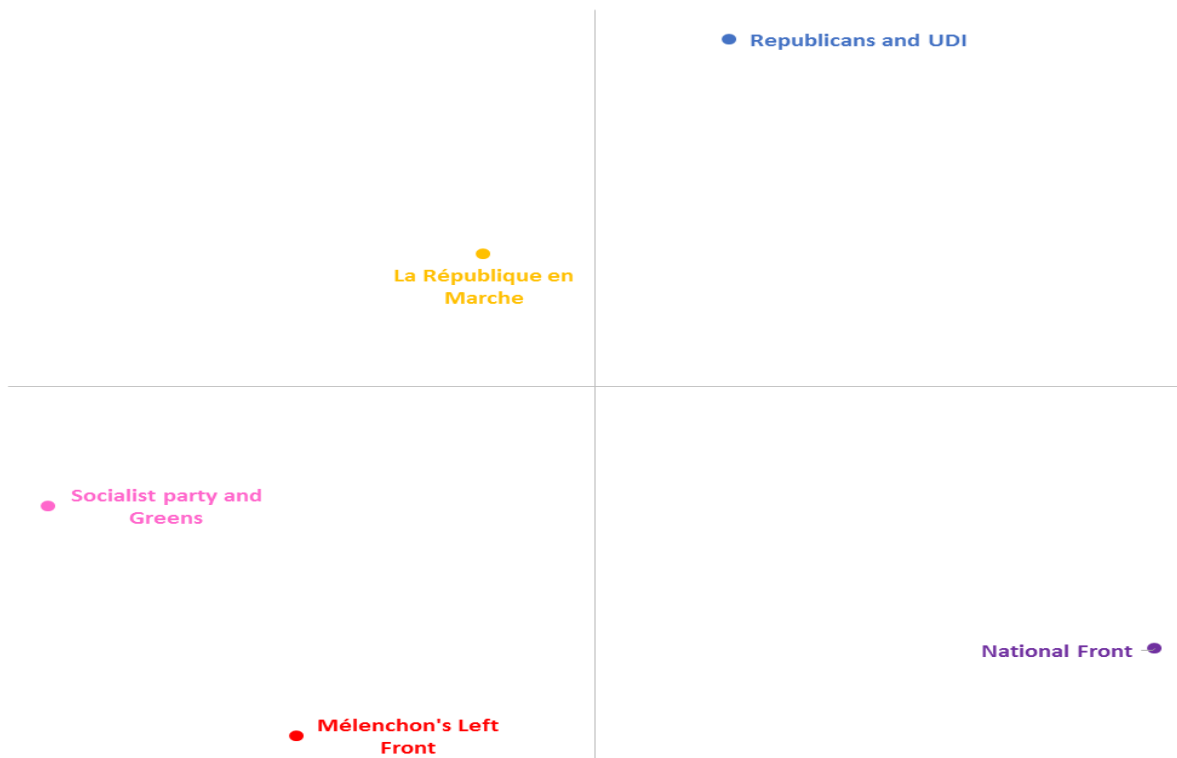
**Figure 5a. Correspondence analysis**

*(Opinionway poll 30 May – 1 June)*



## Figure 5b: Correspondence analysis

(Opinionway poll 30 May – 1 June)

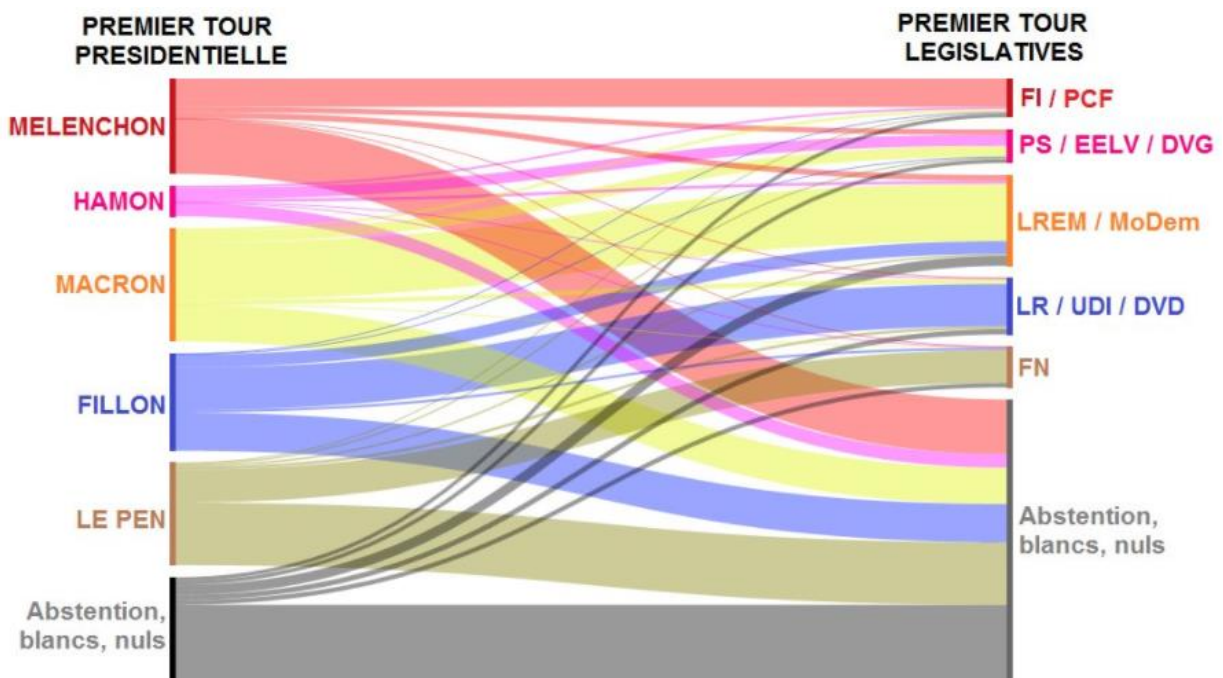


Third, LREM's route to a majority seems to be aided by the fact that abstention levels reached a record high – it is the first time that turnout has ever fallen before 50%. Ipsos analysis shows that the largest group of abstainers are those who did not vote in the first round of the presidential election, followed by those who had voted for Le Pen and Mélenchon. A smaller proportion of Fillon, Macron and Hamon voters also abstained this time. The most cited reason given by non-voters was a disappointment in politicians (30%), followed by a belief that regardless of the result, nothing would change (18%), being too busy (18%), and that none of the manifestos was convincing (16%). Only nine per cent of abstainers thought that their vote would not change anything because La République en Marche was sure to win, indicating that the choice to stay away from the polling station was not necessarily a latent endorsement of Macron or his party.



**Figure 6. Vote transfers between the first round of the presidential election and the first round of the legislative elections**

(Ipsos France)



Following the first round of voting, La République en Marche is predicted to win an even larger majority – ranging from 415 to 455 seats. Although the main casualty of this “[democratic revolution](#)” is the Socialist Party, the centre right has equally taken a large hit as French voters have decided to give their young new president a chance to renew the political sphere and implement his programme of reform. According to [Opinionway’s exit poll](#), three quarters (73%) of those who voted for a LREM candidate believe that the situation in France will get better in the next few months – their expectations are high.

### **3. IMPLICATIONS OF A LARGE LREM MAJORITY**

What will it mean for France, for Europe and for Brexit if La République en Marche wins big on Sunday as expected?

**a. For France: Economic and political reforms**

A massive majority should permit Macron to push through his economic and political reform agenda. The new president has staked his reputation on labour market reform in particular – a key component of his election platform and the first thing he has started doing since he took office. He spent his first day as president in back-to-back meetings with business leaders and trade union officials, demonstrating his determination and trying to win over their backing for both the substance of his proposals and the way in which he wants to go about them – a quickened procedure that shortens the amount of time for parliamentary debate.

Passing the labour market reforms first and fast is Macron's priority. If seat projections are correct, he no longer needs to be concerned about not having a parliamentary majority to back them up. The aim of his reforms is to give small and mid-size firms more flexibility to adapt wage and working conditions so as to make hiring more attractive, thus creating more jobs. The main way Macron proposes to achieve this is by decentralising collective bargaining to individual company level, bringing France closer to the Scandinavian and German models. The national minimum wage and the 35 hour working week are set to remain the legal benchmarks, but companies will have to pay extra time costs for those wanting to work more hours. Macron also wants to revise unemployment benefits and the welfare system management, though these will likely be done later in the year.

While he has started well by involving unions and businesses in the talks from the beginning, the reforms will likely infuriate some of the unions and provoke street protests. His proposals go much further than a reform passed by the Hollande government in 2016, which created quite some turmoil at the time and was watered down heavily by the time it passed. Although he is planning to do the bulk of negotiations over the summer, when public attention is focused on holidays and people are less mobilised, by ratifying the reforms without parliamentary debate, it could provoke a backlash in September. On the whole, however, these protests are not likely to undermine Macron entirely. The final product might be less ambitious than first hoped for, but it looks like the French president is determined. If they have the effect envisaged of stimulating the economy, this will be what counts most.

The labour market reforms are just the starting point, however. Macron's aims as president also include a €60 billion savings plan for public finances, corporate tax reduction, wealth tax reform, and council tax exemption for 80% of taxpayers. He also intends to reform pensions, harmonising the multitude of existing regimes to reduce the privileges of civil servants, for instance. With a strong majority in parliament, these all look more likely to happen as envisaged, likely with support from the Republicans, whose proposals were not radically different. The greatest points of tension might be around pension reforms, as past attempts have failed, and unemployment benefits, which could also provoke people to take to the streets.

Beyond economic reforms, Macron has also proposed numerous political reforms. These are partly to use the political capital available to make quick progress and send a strong signal that he is serious about “moralising political life.” These will be easier to pass than the economic reforms. As a response to the low level of trust in parliament and politicians more generally, particularly after François Fillon’s ‘Penelope-gate’ scandal, Macron wants to ban the hiring of relatives, place a limit on MPs holding no more than three terms, and creating a public bank for funding political campaigns. These will be relatively easy wins, as which politician will want to be seen as blocking such proposals?

During his presidential campaign, Macron had also proposed introducing more proportional representation into the system. This was always rather vague, however, and it is questionable whether after winning such a large majority in the current system there will be motivation to follow through on this idea. He might do as Justin Trudeau did in Canada – after making it a central campaign promise, the Canadian Prime Minister abandoned his electoral reform proposal due to ‘lack of consensus’ on Canadians’ desired preference.

Overall, the large parliamentary majority will give Macron the flexibility of changing his prime minister and ministers if he encounters resistance in his cross-party government, making it more likely he will actually carry out a good proportion of his agenda.

#### **b. For France: Political realignment**

The other key question about what Macron’s strong majority means for France is about the impact on political parties and allegiances in the longer term. It is perhaps too early to say. The left and the right appear cornered for now and Macron looks set to retain strong leadership for a long time. But the French people’s expectations are high and the government’s popularity cannot last at such high levels for the entirety of his presidential term. Such a large majority can only weaken with time as well. The appeal of ‘the centre’ might shrink as a result.

In the short term, however, the centre-left and centre-right have some existential questions with which to grapple. In particular, the Socialists have taken a greater hit than the Republicans. Their presidential candidate and their party leader were both eliminated in the first round of the legislative elections. Former prime minister and presidential hopeful Manuel Valls has held on for now, but has indicated he is willing to support Macron and LREM in parliament. Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo has in the meantime launched a new movement with former Justice Minister Christiane Taubira and Lille mayor Martine Aubry called “From Tomorrow.” But whether this will be the revival the party needs to survive is questionable. The lack of alternative leadership is the most pressing problem for the moment.

On the other hand, while they have been weakened for now, the Republicans seem to be standing firm and ready for Macron’s eventual weakening. While the president himself is likely to survive the street protests, the prime minister could be sacked as a result. The Republicans might win back some of those who have backed LREM. It will depend on how many seats they manage to hold on to on Sunday and how many big names they lose as well. Former presidential hopeful and one of the younger, moderate faces of the party Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet looks set to lose her seat, for instance. Those who are more on the centre-right have chosen to support Macron for now – will this push the Republicans further to the right to occupy the space that a weak National Front seems to be vacating? Time will tell.

### c. For Europe and Brexit

With Marine Le Pen as Emmanuel Macron's main opponent in the presidential race, the EU played a central role in both of their campaigns. An ardent EU supporter, Macron made it clear that he is pro-integration, but favours institutional reform rather than an acceptance of the status quo. His long-term objective is to convince Germany to change tack on the Eurozone and adopt a more growth-friendly stance, as well as some form of mutualisation of risks. It is an agenda that is already largely in line with what the European Commission has recently proposed: a Eurozone budget for countries respecting fiscal rules and reform commitments and a Eurozone finance minister under Eurozone MEP scrutiny.

Macron's EU reform ambitions are another reason why he is adamant on pushing through economic reforms to the labour market early on in his mandate. The hope is that by proving he is serious about reform domestically, he will be able to convince Merkel to make concessions on more ambitious EU institutional reforms. The timing is ripe for such a debate in Germany too given the upcoming election. Although Wolfgang Schäuble, the Finance Minister, is against treaty change, Merkel appears to be open to discussion.

In broader terms, Macron's wider vision is a "Europe that protects." Protection is defined in numerous ways:

- Defence: he is in favour of pooling efforts and of an avant-garde with Germany
- Stricter rules on free circulation of workers
- A fight against tax optimisation (corporate tax harmonisation)
- And, most importantly, defensive trade measures: a tougher EU stance against dumping; a 'Buy European Act' reserving public procurement contracts to companies locating half their production in the EU; EU control of foreign investments in strategic sectors, etc. Macron is not necessarily opposed to new free trade agreements, but he wants to ensure social and environmental standards feature highly.

On Brexit, Macron does not deviate much from the EU27 script: the exit must be negotiated before the new relationship; EU unity is paramount; there can be no Single Market access à la carte for the UK. He has been particularly clear on removing the financial services passport. One area specific to France which could throw up some tensions is related to UK border controls. This could be a thorny issue as renegotiation of the agreement has been floated.

However, it is worth remembering that Macron is a business-friendly anglophile with more a deal-breaker profile than Hollande. In Westminster in February 2017, he talked about a "special relationship" between the UK, France and the EU, stressing "mutual interests over the long term." Direct, frank discussions with Theresa May and Angela Merkel after the German elections in the autumn are thus quite likely. Ultimately, it is in France's interests to guarantee a smooth transition towards tariff-free trade and light customs procedures.