**Europeanizing the National Political Space:**

**EU Integration and Party Competition in France (1992-2022)**

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*Abstract*

This article contributes to the literature on the Europeanization of West European party systems through qualitative examination of the French case. Positing that Europeanization reflected the displacement of the traditional domestic left-right cleavage by a novel supranational integration-versus-demarcation cleavage articulated around European integration, the article posits that this new cleavage transformed the country’s political party system. After tracing the incipient Europeanization of the latter during the 1990s and 2000s, the article illustrates how this integration-versus-demarcation cleavage became operative in France in the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections. It is argued that the advances in European integration fueled Euroscepticism in the country which, initially harnessed by populist niche formations, splintered governing party electorates between the winners and losers from integration. Europeanization was consummated when a political entrepreneur—Emmanuel Macron—emerged who prioritized the defense of the winners from European integration in opposition to the populist parties that harnessed Europe’s losers.

*Keywords*

France—Elections; France--Presidents; Populism;

Euroscepticism; Emmanuel Macron

Upon winning the 2017 presidential election, Emmanuel Macron delivered his victory speech before the glass pyramid in the courtyard of the Louvre in Paris. The symbolism of this location was evocative, presenting a mix of modernity and history that highlighted the modernizing ambitions of Macron’s term whilst inscribing them in the continuity of France’s long and storied past. Another symbolic element was conspicuous in his victory speech: the allusion to Europe and the European Union (EU) that was conveyed in the form of the EU flag with its circle of gold stars sharing the stage alongside the French *tricolore* as well as the playing of the EU anthem, Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, to accompany the president-elect as he made his way to the stage. The overall impression cultivated by the occasion was of showcasing French modernity and history and situating them within the broader arc of civilizational progress carried by the EU.

Five years later, these elements underscoring French modernity and history enshrined by a broader European whole were repeated in Macron’s victory speech marking his re-election. Delivered this time on the backdrop of perhaps the most evocative historical symbol of French modernity, the Eiffel Tower, the Ode to Joy was once again played to announce the arrival of the president re-elect, while the crowd of his supporters enthusiastically waved both French and EU flags in approval.

 The centrality given to Europe on both occasions was no coincidence. Macron has made deepening and advancing European integration the central motif of both election campaigns, the overarching theme legitimizing and giving significance to the domestic proposals he set out in his policy platform. In marked contrast to his predecessors and the governing parties of the center left and center right they represented, he eagerly took up the Eurosceptic gauntlet thrown down by populist parties of the far right and left, which since the mid-2000s if not earlier had made the critique of European integration a core feature of their political discourses. As such, Macron’s presidential campaigns and the victory speeches in which they culminated testified to the broader Europeanization of the French political debate and logic of party competition.

 This article contributes to the literature on the political effects of Europeanization, notably its relationship to the growth of partisan fragmentation and polarization evident in many contemporary Western European democracies. Focusing on the case of France, it posits that these phenomena testify to the displacement of the traditional domestic left-right cleavage by a new supranational cleavage articulated around the values of ‘integration’ versus ‘demarcation,’ and specifically the divide over European integration, as the central fault line underlying national political competition.[[1]](#footnote-1) This new cleavage has occasioned a dislocation of the historically bipolar party systems that evolved in the postwar European democracies, fracturing their partisan landscapes.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Macron’s first *quinquennat*, as well as the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections that bookended it, constitute a key juncture in this process of cleavage ‘unfreezing’ and reconfiguration whereby domestic class and cultural divisions have been replaced by globalization-driven ones in the framing of the national democratic debate in France.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is argued that the latter presents one of the clearest national instances of cleavage “unfreezing” to overtake a Western European party system over the preceding election cycle.

*Theorizing Europeanization*

We take as our theoretical starting point that European integration —and the globalization process it reflects—is occasioning a seminal reconfiguration of the political cleavages that order the party systems of Western European democracies. As European integration deepened from the early 1990s on, it generated structural transformations within West European electorates that recast the terms of political contestation within EU member states. In this section, we theorize how globalization and European integration drove this structural transformation of European electorates and the dynamics of party competition that accompanied it.

Referring to the broadening and deepening of economic, cultural and political interactions at a transnational level, globalization presumes an unprecedented “unbundling” of national boundaries and competencies, yielding a progressive “denationalization” of economic and cultural exchanges and hence a weakening of political control over these processes by the nation state.[[4]](#footnote-4) In particular, globalization is generating new, increasingly acute economic and cultural competition both across and within countries, and hence ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ along both dimensions who have emerged as significant electoral constituencies across the democratic world.[[5]](#footnote-5)

European integration can be read as a supranational response to globalization that has both harnessed and intensified this dynamic of economic and cultural competition. Economically, the creation of the single market facilitated trade as well as capital flows across the EU, forcing a harmonization of economic and social policy at the expense of member states’ policy autonomy. This harmonization was underpinned by European Monetary Union (EMU), which was formally launched with the 1992 Treaty of European Union (TEU) and completed in 1999. Culturally, ‘denationalization’ was first facilitated by the lifting of internal border controls under the 1985 Schengen Agreement and then through the instauration of the free movement of labor across the EU under the 1986 Single European Act (SEA.)

As in the case of globalization, European integration thus generated economic and cultural winners and losers within the member states. Economically, the winners were those sectoral actors and interests who were able to successfully compete within the single European market, while the losers were those identified with traditionally protected sectors—including state-owned enterprises and public services—that were formerly insulated from market competition. Culturally, the winners included those groups who possessed the economic and social capital to take advantage of the opportunities for cross-national mobility and exchange afforded by the single market. The losers, who lacked such economic and cultural capital, remained rooted within their local communities and came to view Europe through an increasingly negative prism.[[6]](#footnote-6)

These winners and losers represent new constituencies that herald a structural transformation of West European electorates around a novel integration-versus-demarcation division between the advocates and opponents of globalization and Europeanization.[[7]](#footnote-7) However, this transformation is neither automatic nor inevitable. Certain contextual and strategic requisites need to be fulfilled which combine the conditions of political demand presented by the electorate and conditions of political supply advanced by partisan actors in order for it to occur. Specifically, the conditions of political demand heralding the politicization of European integration could only be harnessed by political entrepreneurs who put Europe at the forefront of their political discourses and programs, thereby rendering it an issue of political contestation.[[8]](#footnote-8) When such contestation was introduced into the national debate by a Eurosceptical political actor or through a domestic event, such as a referendum, which interceded in response to a “critical threshold” in the integration process,[[9]](#footnote-9) the other parties were pressured to position themselves on the EU. Particularly significant were the cross-pressures this development exerted on catch-all governing parties whose electorates were comprised of both winners and losers from European integration. These parties were forced to either make explicit their formerly implicit support—reflected in their advancing of the integration process while in government—for the latter, and hence alienate those parts of their electorates who had lost out from EU integration, or else roll back their commitment to integration at the risk of losing support from Europe’s winners.[[10]](#footnote-10) Because it cut across the domestic left-right divide on domestic socioeconomic and cultural issues, the debate over European integration threatened to split mainstream parties’ electorates and thereby reconstitute member states’ party systems.[[11]](#footnote-11)

 Applying this analysis to the party families constituting West European political systems, we can make the following observations. Mainstream parties can be broken down into three broad groups: Social Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives, while oppositional parties can be divided between two sets of formations: New Left or Green parties—the latter at least initially—and radical right-wing parties. Economically, New Left and Green parties contested the neoliberal trajectory of European integration while culturally sharing the EU’s cosmopolitan values.[[12]](#footnote-12) The principal targets of this contestation were the Social Democratic parties, which from the 1980s on had shifted towards a pro-market policy paradigm and accepted the liberalizing principles underlying the Single Market and EMU.[[13]](#footnote-13) Caught between their pursuit of a neoliberal Europe when they were in power in the 1980s and 1990s and their defense of national welfare states, social democratic parties risked their support among either the economic winners or losers from European integration.[[14]](#footnote-14) On the right, contestation of European integration was harnessed by radical rightwing parties on nativist nationalist grounds, putting pressure on conservative and liberal parties to either shift their programs to appeal to Europe’s cultural losers or else embrace the EU’s supranational cosmopolitanism so as to propitiate its cultural winners.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Of these two paths towards European politicization, the second, driven by the emergence of radical right parties around cultural and identity-based factors is widely held to predominate.[[16]](#footnote-16) Contestation of European integration on economic grounds, namely through the rejection of the EU’s neoliberal paradigm and the consequent mobilization of the socioeconomic ‘losers’ of Europeanization, is seen to be secondary to cultural identity in these accounts.

However, these latter fall short in several important respects. First of all, since the early 2000s and particularly the 2010 Eurozone crisis, it is the mainstream left that has registered the greater decline as European integration has progressed. This trend does not comport with identity-based accounts’ assertion that the erosion of European centrist parties is being driven by the radical right. Conversely, it must not be forgotten that the upsurge of the latter since the 1980s and ‘90s tracked a process of European integration that reached its most far-reaching institutional and policy expressions in the economic realm. During this period the EU had little to say about immigration, ceding policy discretion in this area to the member states. It seems therefore incongruous to attribute the cause of Europe’s politicization to an issue area holding only ancillary relevance to an integration process that was singularly focused on consolidating the single market during the 1990s.

Last but not least, it could be argued that nativist sentiments disproportionately affect voter attitudes during periods of socioeconomic crisis, a connection that raises the possibility that identity-based cultural factors are closely correlated to and mediated by structural economic ones.[[17]](#footnote-17) The spike in support for radical right-wing parties—and to a lesser extent radical left-wing ones—across culturally and institutionally diverse member states since the 2010 Eurozone crisis supports this interpretation. These considerations call for reassessing the explanatory force of purely identitarian factors in accounting for the post-crisis populist wave and reinjecting the analysis of economic factors into the European politicization debate.

Bringing economic factors back into the interpretive frame in turn makes it possible to account for the second half of the Europeanization dynamic, namely the emergence of a new integration versus demarcation cleavage at the root of West European political systems. If in a first phase it was the rise of radical right- and leftwing parties that drove Europe’s politicization within the national party systems through their defense of the ‘losers’ of modernization, in a second phase we see a parallel dynamic whereby existing parties—or new parties formed with the express goal of doing so—jettisoned the losers from European integration in order to exclusively appeal to its winners. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, Europe’s politicization within the national party systems was thus no longer solely driven by the populist critics of European integration but also by its partisan defenders.

 These trends have been particularly salient in France, which provides the case through which the foregoing model of European politicization will be tested. This is done in two stages. First, we analyze the evolution of the French party system during the two decades spanning the ratification of the TEU in 1992 up through the 2012 presidential election. During this period, it is argued that European issues grew in prominence in both national and European elections in France, pointing to an incipient Europeanization of the political debate although party positions on Europe remained subordinated to domestic concerns and traditional cleavages. In turn, we analyze how a new cleavage structure articulated around European integration has emerged and reoriented French politics since 2012. Beginning with the 2017 presidential election, we argue that the latter marked a critical disjunction in French political development that crystallized the new integration-versus-demarcation cleavage articulated around EU integration. This evolution was confirmed by the 2022 presidential election, which showed that Europe had gone from constituting an ancillary second-order issue to representing a determinative concern ordering party identification and aggregation at the national level.

*1992 to 2012: Incipient Europeanization*

In order to make sense of this process of cleavage transformation in France, we deploy a framework relating the factors of political supply and political demand to explain the outcomes of both national and European elections. On the demand side, we examine how European integration affected voter preferences in order to transform the latter into a salient domestic political issue. On the supply side, we focus on the party system’s adaptation to the growing intrusion of Europe into the domestic debate as integration advanced from the late 1980s on. Namely, we examine how political parties reacted to successive stages of European integration and mediated how the latter came to be apprehended by the electorate.[[18]](#footnote-18) Through this partisan feed-back loop, political demand and political supply are tied together to yield a dynamic account of electoral choice that correlates the objective conditions informing voters’ sociopolitical circumstances as related to Europe to their subjective views on the latter.

As we saw, linking these two components of political behavior was the emergence of Euroscepticism among both parties and voters. Mobilized first by fringe formations in reaction to the advances in European integration from the mid-1980s on and then spreading to the governing parties, Euroscepticism was the motive force that initially drove Europeanization of the French political space. In this context, Euroscepticism functioned as a means for marginal parties to carve out an electoral niche for themselves within the domestic party system.[[19]](#footnote-19) This was particularly the case in European elections that were viewed by voters as performative contests in which they could express their dissatisfaction with incumbent governments by voting for marginal formations before returning to the mainstream parties in subsequent national contests.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Thus, for most of the period under consideration, national and European election outcomes diverged from one another. Europe remained incidental to the domestic concerns reflected in national elections and had little impact on the domestic political system. Only in referenda on French participation in European integration did sitting governments seek to defend European integration in opposition to Eurosceptic forces. Yet, such referenda were sufficiently rare and far between, occurring only in 1992 and 2005, that their national political impact proved ephemeral.

It would take a series of endogenous and exogenous shocks to the domestic political system, rendering Euroscepticism a threat to the internal cohesion of the mainstream parties, that the debate over Europe emerged as a catalyst behind the recomposition of the domestic cleavage structure. The ensuing implosion of the mainstream parties opened the space for formerly Eurosceptic niche parties to advance to the fore of the partisan arena while calling forth the emergence of an unambiguously pro-European party in contradistinction to the latter. This new party took up the challenge posed by the Eurosceptic opposition, thereby Europeanizing the national debate and completing the ‘unfreezing’ of the traditional domestic left-right cleavage and its recomposition around an integration-versus-demarcation axis. Reflecting this elevation of Europe as a dominant axis of partisan debate, the gap between national and European election outcomes was attenuated, the latter emerging as first degree contests in their own right.

 The 1990s and 2000s in France correspond to the first phase of this process, when Euroscepticism drove a creeping Europeanization of the French political debate without displacing the domestically rooted left-right cleavage. Such Europeanization chiefly came from the right, which expressed the greatest disquiet over the 1992 TEU. Such rightwing Euroscepticism was driven by sovereignist concerns over what the TEU would mean for the Gaullist values of national *grandeur* and *indépendance*. Accordingly, it was not so much the qualitative intensification of European economic integration—notably the deflationary policy requirements and liberalizing impetus implied by the Single Market and EMU—but the symbolic aspects of the Treaty that struck at the primacy of French national sovereignty, which provoked disquiet in these quarters.[[21]](#footnote-21) Combined with the fears generated by the 1985 Schengen Agreement and EU enlargement to incorporate former Eastern Bloc countries, the TEU’s narrow ratification--51.04% versus 48.96%--heightened the salience of the themes of national sovereignty, identity and control, bringing them to the fore of the French political debate.

The most extreme expression of Euroscepticism was evinced by Jean-Marie Le Pen’s *Front National* (FN), which portrayed the TEU during the referendum campaign as signifying nothing less “than the end of France, the French people and its language and culture.”[[22]](#footnote-22) However, the debate over the TEU also gave rise to dissidences within the governing parties of the right, the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR) and *Union de la Démocratie Française* (UDF). Traditional gaullists such as Philippe Séguin and Charles Pasqua within the former, and the conservative sovereignist Philippe de Villiers within the latter, campaigned against their party leaderships in favor of the “No” on the grounds that the TEU threatened French national sovereignty and would curb the country’s foreign policy autonomy.[[23]](#footnote-23) However, these figures differed from Le Pen in that they continued to espouse the kind of intergovernmental confederalism that had been *de rigueur* in de Gaulle’s and his successors’ days in the 1960s and ‘70s, rather than repudiating European cooperation *tout court*.

Euroscepticism’s rightwing tenor during the 1990s was reflected within the broader French electorate. If we examine the results of the 1992 referendum by party affiliation, we find that the highest proportion of “No’s” obtained on the right. (See Table 1.) This was as true for the radical parties of the right and left, which overwhelmingly rejected the TEU, as the governing parties. Nearly three in five RPR voters voted “No” on the TEU, compared to one in five among Socialist ones. Interestingly, a greater proportion of voters for the historically Europhile UDF voted “No” than among the Socialist electorate, testifying to the adhesion of the latter to the Mitterrand Administration’s impulsion of the integration process beginning in the late 1980s.

Table 1. “No” vote in European Referenda by Party Affiliation (%)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Party Affiliation* | *TEU* *1992* | *EU Constitution**2005* | *TEU +20 Poll**2012\** |
| Trotskyists | 70 | 94 | -- |
| PCF/Front de Gauche | 81 | 98 | 81 (94) |
| PS | 22 | 56 | 49 (53) |
| Greens | 43 | 60 | 47 (51) |
| UDF/Modem | 39 | 24 | 31 (35) |
| RPR/UMP | 59 | 20 | 36 (40) |
| FN | 92 | 93 | 91 (93) |

\* In this poll respondents were given the third choice of “I don’t know.” For purposes of comparison, these undecided responses were broken down according to the proportion of “Yes” and “No” votes in the original TEU referendum. The adjusted figures are provided in parentheses. Gérard Grunberg, “Le référendum français de ratification du Traité constitutionnel européen du 29 mai 2005,” *French Politics, Culture and Society* 23 (2005), 137; Ifop, “Les Français et l’Europe 20 ans après Maastricht (September 2012), 28.

The strong anti-TEU vote expressed on the mainstream as well as radical right led these dissident figures to try to harness rightwing Euroscepticism in order to enhance their domestic electoral appeal. In the 1994 European election, the *Majorité pour une autre Europe* list formed by de Villiers came third behind the principal pro-Europe RPR-UDF and PS lists with 12.34% of the vote. In turn, in the 1999 European election, the independent *Rassemblement pour la France et l’Indépendance de l’Europe* list constituted by Pasqua and de Villiers came in second behind the victorious Socialist list with 13.01% of the vote.[[24]](#footnote-24) However, the respective parties formed by de Villiers and Pasqua in the wake of the election, the *Mouvement pour la France* (MPF) and *Rassemblement pour la France* (RPF), failed to replicate their European election scores in the 1995 or 2002 presidential contests, with neither de Villiers nor Pasqua presenting candidacies in the latter. This national failure testified to the second order nature of European elections, which saw RPR and UDF voters gravitate to de Villiers’ and Pasqua’s lists because they considered it politically costless, whereas in first-order contests involving national policy stakes these voters returned to the governing parties, leaving the FN as the only true standard-bearer of Euroscepticism on the right.

As Euroscepticism declined on the right, however, it began to gain currency on the left. Contrary to the identitarian mainsprings of rightwing Euroscepticism, this new strain reflected the left’s growing dismay over the neoliberal trajectory of European integration. In particular, it increasingly blamed the deflationary Maastricht criteria underlying convergence toward the single currency and Stability Pact governing EMU for the high unemployment that plagued the country through the 1990s and early 2000s.[[25]](#footnote-25) Mirroring its right-wing counterpart, this socioeconomically rooted Euroscepticism originated on the radical left, notably among the Trotskyist *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR) and *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO), before finding its way among the governing parties of the Left, the Socialist Party (PS), Greens and Communist Party (PCF) that underpinned Lionel Jospin’s *gauche plurielle* government from 1997 to 2002.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Jospin’s shock defeat to Le Pen in the first round of the 2002 presidential election radically transformed the European debate on the left and within the PS. Figures on the Socialist left, such as Henri Emmanuelli and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, blamed Jospin’s defeat on the excessively neoliberal tenor of his government’s policies in preparing the country for EMU. They called for renegotiating the TEU and argued that enlargement should not proceed without reforming EU economic governance.[[27]](#footnote-27) The PS’s unity became impossible to maintain in the wake of the May 2005 referendum on the draft European Constitutional Treaty (ECT), which saw a decisive victory for the “No” (54.67% vs. 45.33%.) On the Eurosceptic side, Mélenchon and Emmanuelli were joined by former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, who emerged as the public face of the “No” campaign within the PS and ensured that the debate over Europe became a source of division at all levels of the party. The definitive split came in November 2008 when a group of Eurosceptic Socialist deputies and party cadre led by Mélenchon officially broke with the PS leadership’s support for the Lisbon Treaty and united with the PCF and dissident Trotskyists to form the *Front de Gauche pour changer d’Europe* in preparation for the 2009 European elections.[[28]](#footnote-28) This list lay the basis for the *Front de Gauche* (FdG) that would contest the 2012 presidential elections on a Eurosceptic platform.[[29]](#footnote-29)

This reversal in the political valence of Euroscepticism is reflected in voters’ partisan provenance in the ECT and TEU referendum votes. (See Table 1.) Whereas nearly three in five Socialist voters voted “No” in the 2005 referendum, only one in five UMP voters did so—a reversal in the tally of “No” votes evinced by voters in the 1992 TEU referendum. There was a similar evolution on the liberal center right and among the Greens with just one in five *Mouvement Démocrate* (MoDem) voters opposing the ECT versus nearly two in five UDF voters opposing the TEU, while three in five for the pro-integration Greens in 2005 did so versus two in five in 1992. Meanwhile, on the far left, the Eurosceptic Trotskyist vote grew from seven in ten voters in the TEU referendum to over nine in ten over the ECT. Among Communist voters, this proportion rose from four fifths in 1992 to virtually all of them in 2005. The only party for whom the Eurosceptic vote held firm between 1992 and 2005 was the FN, confirming the consistency of its sovereignist Euroscepticism.

This reversal in the partisan salience of Euroscepticism failed to translate into national gains for the Eurosceptic left, however. Reflecting their post-2002 reticence to engage on such populist terrain, the Socialist left and far left parties attenuated their critiques of Europe in the 2007 presidential elections and stuck to debating domestic issues. Meanwhile, leftwing voters rallied around the ‘*vote* *utile*’ for the moderate Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal, who ran on a domestic program of increased social spending and institutional reforms.[[30]](#footnote-30) This domestic focus was mirrored on the right, where Nicolas Sarkozy campaigned on an economically liberal and culturally nativist platform. Among electorally significant parties, only the FN campaigned on an explicitly Eurosceptic program.[[31]](#footnote-31) Europe’s diminishing importance seemed to be confirmed by the 2009 European election in which Eurosceptic parties achieved lackluster results, with the first four places going to pro-European parties (UMP, PS, Greens and MoDem) and the FdG, FN and NPA only garnering 6.48%, 6.34% and 4.88% of the vote respectively.

The internal debate over Europe regained urgency with the outbreak of the European sovereign debt crisis. A succession of contentious EU summits resulting in bailouts for Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain from 2010 to 2012, as well as fraught negotiations on the Fiscal Compact, re-elevated the debate over European integration within French politics, starting on the extremes. On the far left, Mélenchon called for abrogating the Lisbon Treaty and allowing member states to assert political control over the European Central Bank.[[32]](#footnote-32) On the radical right, Marine Le Pen’s accession to the FN’s presidency in January 2011 heralded a strategic shift in the party’s message and program. Ditching economic liberalism in favor of a statist, protectionist and welfarist platform, in her 2012 presidential program Le Pen called for jettisoning the euro in order to restore France’s monetary independence and demand a referendum on EU membership.[[33]](#footnote-33)

In the face of renewed questioning of European integration from the populist extremes as well as the fallout from the Eurozone crisis, the governing party candidates were also forced to engage with the European question. Incumbent UMP candidate Nicolas Sarkozy emphasized Europe’s protective vocation, calling for strengthening the 1985 Schengen Agreement or else threatening to withdraw from it. Conversely, PS candidate François Hollande criticized the manner in which the Eurozone crisis had been managed, demanding that the Fiscal Compact be renegotiated.[[34]](#footnote-34)

This invocation of Europe by the presidential candidates was mirrored by the hardening of Eurosceptic and Europhile attitudes within the electorate. An Ifop survey that asked respondents how they would have voted on the twentieth anniversary of the TEU referendum found that a near totality of FdG voters would have voted “No” while the proportion of FN voters who did so was identical in 2012 to 2005. (See Table 1.) Similarly, the proportion of Socialist and Green voters who would have voted “No” in 2012 declined only slightly from 2005. Euroscepticism also made a comeback on the right and among the liberal parties. Strong pluralities of UMP and MoDem voters declared that they would have voted “No” had the TEU referendum been held in 2012 versus a fifth and a quarter in 2005. This spike reflected a reactivation of rightwing Euroscepticism by Sarkozy’s campaigning on sovereignist and nativist themes in the 2012 presidential race.[[35]](#footnote-35)

In short, by 2012, Europeanization had become an incipient feature of the French debate without yet providing an autonomous basis for political mobilization.Though Europe had emerged as a principle of partisan aggregation and differentiation on the extremes, it had not yet done so among the governing parties where the issue continued to be subordinated to domestic concerns, like immigration or neoliberalism, reflecting the traditional left-right cleavage.

*Europeanization in Earnest: Hollande’s Quinquennat and the 2017 Presidential Elections*

Europeanization of the French political space experienced an important fillip following the 2012 presidential elections. At the level of political demand, the economic failings of the Hollande Administration, notably its inability to arrest rising unemployment on the backdrop of the European debt crisis and its incapacity to reform the instances of European economic governance, doomed it to electoral failure. Under pressure from France’s European partners to bring the country’s public debt and budget deficits into line with the Fiscal Compact, the Ayrault government reintroduced the controversial *TVA sociale*—a value-added tax to help defray social security costs—which it had initially repealed as part of Hollande’s 2012 campaign pledges, in order to lighten the payroll taxes on employers. The succeeding Valls government introduced deep spending cuts—amounting to €50 billion over three years—in the 2014 budget while violating Hollande’s campaign promise to restore the retirement age to sixty by proposing to extend the social security contribution period required for workers to enjoy full retirement benefits.[[36]](#footnote-36) Finally, the Law Relative to Work, Modernization of Social Dialogue and Professional Advancement—the so-called *Loi Travail*—introduced an array of supply side measures designed to facilitate the hiring and firing of workers, restrict the scope of collective bargaining, and relax the provisions of the 35-hour week, in order to enhance firms’ ability to set their production schedules and adjust their workforces according to economic circumstances.[[37]](#footnote-37) These measures proved extremely unpopular among the Socialist rank-and-file as well as on the left. Tied by the administration to the austerity budgets and structural reforms dictated by the EU, they translated into burgeoning voter disapproval of European economic governance.

Proof of this disenchantment arrived with the May 2014 European election. For the first time, a Eurosceptical protest party won the vote, with the FN receiving 24.86% in front of the mainstream UMP (20.81%) and PS (13.98%). Contrary to previous European elections in which European themes took a back seat to domestic ones, the FN hitched its campaign to explicitly anti-European positions, “owning” the European issue and capturing the lion’s share of the Eurosceptic vote.[[38]](#footnote-38) The result indicated that while the mainstream parties remained divided over Europe, the FN under Marine Le Pen was assuming its status as the banner party of French Euroscepticism.

The 2015 migrant crisis further hardened anti-EU sentiment on the populist right by facilitating the EU’s identification with immigration. By the same token, it rekindled Eurosceptism on the mainstream right, which had lain dormant since the 2000s. The November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and July 2016 attack in Nice further aggravated this rightwing Euroscepticism. Viewing the Hollande administration as too lax in combating Islamic terrorism while tying the latter to the EU’s failed handling of the 2015 migrant crisis, rightwing voters blamed the passivity of both national and European authorities in the face of the influx of Muslim immigrants for France’s terrorism crisis. Last but not least, the country’s anemic economic performance and soaring unemployment during the final two years of Hollande’s term, combined with the resurgence of the Greek debt crisis in summer 2015 and unpopular austerity policies and structural reforms pursued by the Valls government in agreement with the EU, solidified the divisions over Europe between the radical and mainstream parties on the one hand and within the latter on the other.

The division over Europe came to a head within the mainstream parties during their primary campaigns in preparation for the presidential 2017 election. These primaries mobilized “hardcore partisan” voters within the PS and former UMP, rechristened *Les Républicains* (LR), favoring the selection of candidates who were more radical than their broader electorates.[[39]](#footnote-39) In the case of LR, the primary process yielded the nomination of François Fillon, a conservative gaullist who, as Sarkozy’s prime minister, had overseen the nativist and neoliberal inflection of the latter’s legislative agenda. In selecting such a candidate, the party alienated more culturally liberal voters aligned with former Prime Minister Alain Juppé, who had denounced the party’s nativist turn since Sarkozy’s presidency.[[40]](#footnote-40) Combined with the emoluments scandal that broke in January 2017 in which it emerged that he had fraudulently used public funds to pay his wife to serve as his parliamentary assistant, many center-right moderates looked elsewhere, depriving Fillon of the support he needed to get past the first round of the election.[[41]](#footnote-41) Rightwing voters were equally divided on Europe, with Fillon supporters expressing greater reservations towards EU integration on national sovereignty and anti-immigration grounds while more centrist LR voters were more enthusiastic.

In the PS, a similarly polarized primary led to the nomination of a candidate in Benoît Hamon who, issuing from the party’s social democratic left, was opposed by the its centrist social liberal wing led by former Prime Minister Manuel Valls.[[42]](#footnote-42) Repudiating the austerity and structural reforms that had been pursued during Hollande’s presidency, Hamon advocated increasing spending and repealing the Loi Travail while renegotiating the Fiscal Compact in order to accommodate his heterodox proposals at the European level.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Pro-EU activists and voters within both LR and the PS were thus dissatisfied by the presidential candidates selected by their respective parties and sought alternatives elsewhere. It was in this partisan context that Emmanuel Macron declared his candidacy and launched a new movement, *En Marche!*, that combined a neoliberal economic program with a culturally liberal agenda to appeal to centrist elements in both LR and the PS. At the center of his pitch was a fervent defense of European integration and a series of proposals to stabilize and deepen the EU in the wake of the 2010 Eurozone crisis, including a pledge to establish a joint Eurozone budget and EU-level Finance Minister as preliminary steps to introducing fiscal union. In exchange, Macron promised to comply with the Fiscal Compact and support its enforcement across the Eurozone.[[44]](#footnote-44)

In supplying a defense of European integration on liberal economic and cultural grounds, Macron established a partisan foil to the rhetorical and programmatic opposition to Europe advanced by Eurosceptic politicians and parties since the mid-2000s. By choosing to engage with the FN and *La France Insoumise* (LFI) regarding Europe—the rechristened FdG launched in February 2016—which respectively called for restoring French sovereignty within a “Europe of independent nations” or refounding the European project along “democratic, social and environmental” lines,[[45]](#footnote-45) he broke with the governing parties’ long-standing strategy of eluding confrontation on the issue as EU integration became increasingly contested. Instead, he elevated the debate over Europe into the overarching principle ordering party aggregation and competition within the French political system. Within this dispensation, the catch-all message of the traditional governing parties, conditioned by the domestically rooted left-right cleavage, was no longer operative. Their electoral support simultaneously eroded by the pro-European center and anti-European extremes, these parties’ oligopoly over the political system was irrevocably broken.

The outcome of the 2017 presidential election corroborated this reconfiguration of the French partisan space. Translating the electoral divisions that had emerged within the governing parties over Europe, LR and the PS saw more moderate voters decamp to Macron’s economically and culturally liberal party. Many leftwing socialist voters flocked to Mélenchon’s LFI in the hope of casting a ‘useful’ vote.[[46]](#footnote-46) For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, neither of the candidates from the governing parties acceded to the second round of a presidential election. The result was worse for the PS, which saw Hamon place only fifth in the first round with 6.36% of the vote (versus 28.63% for Hollande in 2012). Meanwhile, Fillon came third with 20.01% (versus 27.18% for Sarkozy in 2012), testifying to the greater resilience of LR’s voter base but well behind Macron who emerged as the first round’s big winner with 24.01%.

Conversely, the Eurosceptic parties achieved unprecedented scores, with Marine Le Pen reaching the second round with an unprecedented 21.3% of the vote and over 7.6 million ballots cast in her favor. Even though she was soundly defeated by Macron, Le Pen garnered an unprecedented 10.6 million ballots and over a third of the vote (33.9%) in the second round. On the radical left, Mélenchon built on his electoral score of 2012 (11.1% for nearly four millon votes) by winning an unprecedented 19.58% of the first-round vote and over seven million ballots. Combining their results, the FN and LFI candidates far outstripped in terms of vote percentage (40.9% vs. 26.4%) and ballots cast (14.7 million vs. 9.5 million) the scores of the candidates of the governing parties. This suggested that the dwindling capacity of the latter to deliver policy outcomes to their voters and the corresponding emergence of a new political configuration was rendering these parties ideologically and programmatically irrelevant.

A more refined analysis supports this conclusion. (See Table 2.) Whereas the

Table 2. Vote Transfers between the 2012 and 2017 Presidential Elections (1st rd)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Candidates 2017 | Vote Total 2017 (%)\* |  % of 2012Mélenchon | % of 2012Hollande | % of 2012Bayrou | % of 2012Sarkozy | % of 2012Le Pen |
| Mélenchon | 19.6 | 75 | 26 | 12 | 3 | 4 |
| Hamon | 6.3 | 6 | 16 | 5 | -- | -- |
| Macron | 24 | 9 | 47 | 51 | 17 | 3 |
| Fillon | 19.9 | 1 | 2 | 13 | 60 | 8 |
| Dupont-Aignan | 4.8 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 2 |
| Le Pen | 21.4 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 14 | 80 |

\* The vote for the minor candidates, including Nathalie Arthaud, Philippe Poutou, Jean Lassalle, François Asselineau and Jacques Cheminade, totaled 4% in the first round.

Ifop, “Le profil des électeurs et les clefs du premier tour de l’élection présidentielle,” 21.

first round vote for Le Pen and Mélenchon in 2017 was the most consistent compared to 2012, those for the mainstream right and especially mainstream left candidates were much less so. Three fifths of Sarkozy voters from the first round of the 2012 elections opted for Fillon in 2017 while less than one fifth of those who had voted Hollande in 2012 chose in favor of Hamon in 2017. Macron was the principal beneficiary of these defections, winning almost one fifth of Sarkozy voters and nearly half of Hollande voters from 2012—almost as many as those who went for the Macroniste François Bayrou in 2012. Meanwhile, highlighting the mainstream parties’ polarization, a quarter of 2012 Hollande voters chose in favor of Mélenchon in 2017 while slightly less of former Sarkozy voters opted for Le Pen.

These new partisan divisions cross-cutting the electorate were replicated in the sociological attributes of the vote. In 2012 the PS and to a lesser extent, the UMP, were sociologically catch-all parties whose electorates were broadly distributed across different class and socio-professional categories. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Sociology of the Vote 2012-2022 (%)

 2012 Presidential (1st rd) 2017 Presidential (1st rd.) 2022 Presidential (1st rd.)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Social Category | FN  | UMP | PS | FdG | FN | LR | PS | LFI | EM! | RN | LR | LFI | PS | LREM |
| **SPC+** | 14 | 32 | 25 | 8 | 12 | 22 | 9 | 17 | 32 | 17 | 6 | 21 | 1 | 31 |
| Shopkeeper/Artisan | 17 | 43 | 9 | 7 | 19 | 25 | 7 | 18 | 19 | 24 | 9 | 22 | 1 | 24 |
| Lib. Profs/ Upper Mgt. | 13 | 27 | 31 | 9 | 10 | 20 | 9 | 16 | 37 | 14 | 5 | 21 | 1 | 34 |
| Int. Profs/Mid Mgt. | 19 | 21 | 31 | 14 | 17 | 10 | 11 | 26 | 10 | 23 | 3 | 22 | 2 | 25 |
| **SPC-** | 30 | 17 | 25 | 14 | 34 | 10 | 5 | 24 | 10 | 34 | 2 | 26 | 2 | 18 |
| ServiceWorkers | 28 | 19 | 28 | 11 | 30 | 12 | 6 | 24 | 12 | 33 | 3 | 25 | 3 | 18 |
| IndustrialWorkers | 33 | 14 | 21 | 18 | 39 | 6 | 5 | 25 | 6 | 35 | 2 | 27 | 1 | 17 |
| No Bac or Tech Degree | 49 | 16 | 21 | 12 | 29 | 19 | 5 | 21 | 19 | 37 | 3 | 21 | 1 | 22 |
| Retirees | 10 | 37 | 32 | 9 | 17 | 34 | 3 | 12 | 27 | 18 | 9 | 15 | 1 | 38 |
| Unemployed | NA | NA | NA | NA | 20 | 10 | 9 | 32 | 14 | 32 | 1 | 30 | -- | 12 |
| Technical Degree | 26 | 24 | 24 | 14 | 32 | 18 | 4 | 19 | 18 | 36 | 3 | 18 | 2 | 23 |
| Bac +2 | 16 | 26 | 30 | 11 | 17 | 21 | 7 | 20 | 21 | 17 | 5 | 23 | 3 | 29 |
| > Bac +2 | 7 | 32 | 34 | 8 | 8 | 26 | 9 | 16 | 26 | 11 | 8 | 20 | 2 | 36 |
| Rural Communes | 23 | 24 | 24 | 10 | 26 | 18 | 6 | 19 | 22 | 26 | 5 | 19 | 2 | 28 |
| Urban Communes | 17 | 28 | 28 | 12 | 21 | 20 | 6 | 19 | 25 | 24 | 4 | 23 | 2 | 27 |
| Paris Region | 15 | 27 | 27 | 12 | 14 | 22 | 8 | 22 | 27 | 17 | 9 | 23 | 2 | 27 |

Ministére de l’Intérieur, “Elections: Les résultats,” <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats>; Ifop, “Premier tour de l’élection présidentielle,” 9-10; Ifop, “Profil des électeurs et clefs du 1er tour de l’élection présidentielle,” 20; Ifop, « Présidentielle 2022—Sondage jour du vote : Profile des électeurs et clés du scrutine (1er tour).

By 2017 this catch-all character had diminished and voter polarization intensified along sociological lines. Macron garnered the most support among the upper socio-professional and educational categories whilst appealing relatively little to the lower classes and least educated. Conversely, Le Pen and Mélenchon increased their hold among the lower classes and, in the case of the FN, least educated. Capturing this dichotomy, Macron won nearly two-fifths of upper management executives and the intellectual professions versus only a tenth for Le Pen, while these proportions were reversed for blue-collar workers. Meanwhile, Mélenchon garnered around a tenth of the vote among the working classes, upper socio-professional categories and intermediate professions, respectively.

Within this polarized sociological context, the mainstream parties saw their catch-all voter reservoirs dry up. This was particularly the case for the PS, whose hemorrhaging of votes saw Hamon win a tenth of upper and intermediary socio-professional categories but only a twentieth of the working classes. Fillon’s vote share held up better with respect to 2012 in regard to the upper socio-professional categories, but his proportion of the vote among the working classes and intermediary categories fell precipitously from 2012.

 Last but not least, there was both a spatial dimension to the 2017 election that overlaid its polarized sociological character. Macron’s was an urban vote that was particularly strong in large university towns.[[47]](#footnote-47) Conversely, the farther one moved away from these urban centers, the more the Macron vote dissipated and that for Le Pen strengthened. Reflecting a trend evident since the 2007 presidential election, autochthonous working-class populations respectively priced out of the cities and displaced from the *proches banlieues* by immigration, i.e. less educated, low-skill job-holding populations living in areas affected by socioeconomic crisis, emerged as the backbone of the FN vote.[[48]](#footnote-48) These categories represented the mirror image of the highly educated, urbanized and high-skill job-holding Macron electorate.

 In terms of Europe, Macron voters replicated their leader’s Europhilia. Most likely to have studied in other European countries, speak other European languages and travel within the EU for work and leisure, these voters are the most highly attached to European integration in its present guise. Conversely, structurally tied to their local communities and lacking the opportunity to travel let alone study or work within the EU, Le Pen and to a lesser extent Mélenchon voters were the least likely to see the benefits of remaining in the EU.[[49]](#footnote-49) Noting the symmetry between the pro-Macron and pro-Le Pen vote and Europhile and Eurosceptic sentiment,[[50]](#footnote-50) Strudel observes that the French electoral map for 2017 reflected less the domestic left-right cleavage characterizing previous presidential contests than the geography of the “No” and “Yes” votes in the 1992 and 2005 European referenda. This suggested “an erosion of the traditional markers” ordering voters’ preferences and their displacement by a new set of identifications determined by an integration-versus-demarcation cleavage articulated around Europe.[[51]](#footnote-51)

*Europeanization Confirmed: Macron’s quinquennat and the 2022 Presidential Campaign*

This new partisan cleavage underlying French politics was reinforced throughout Macron’s first term and then confirmed by the 2022 presidential election. From the start of his term of office, Macron couched his domestic policy agenda within a broader European governance and strategic framework, ineluctably raising the profile of the debate over Europe within the national political arena. After calling for “the EU’s refoundation” in the wake of his election, Macron set out in a speech delivered in September 2017 his grand ambitions for Europe, which in turn would define and legitimate his reformist domestic agenda.[[52]](#footnote-52) Conjuring the vision of an economically and strategically autonomous and “protective Europe,” Macron signaled his ambition to carve out a leading role for the EU—and through it, for France—within the emerging global order.

At the external foreign policy level, this call could be viewed as a resurrection of the old Gaullist vision, transposed from the national to the supranational level, of enhancing Europe’s diplomatic and security independence within an increasingly multipolar world system. Within Europe, Macron envisioned a federalizing project to advance fiscal and budgetary coordination across the EU so as to prevent the resurgence of unsustainable balance-of-payments disequilibria between the member states. Moving towards greater fiscal union would make it possible to avert the debt and financial crises that had threatened the euro’s survival in 2010-12, not to mention the brutal austerity regimes that had been forced upon peripheral Eurozone countries in exchange for receiving EU assistance, fueling the rise of powerful Eurosceptic parties within them. As a first step toward fiscal union, Macron called for substantially increasing the EU budget and creating a federal-level budget minister for the Eurozone to orchestrate fiscal ‘solidarity’ across its members during periods of economic distress. In order to win Germany and the other fiscally prudent states to this proposal, Macron pledged to enact substantial budget cuts and structural reforms so as to bring the French economy into line with the fiscal rules underpinning the Eurozone’s economic governance as well as improve the country’s trade competitiveness.

Predictably, Macron’s speech on Europe elicited strong reactions both at home and abroad. By positing European economic integration as a conditioning framework that would both guide and legitimize the government’s reform program, it squarely ensconced Europe at the center of the domestic political and policy debate, provoking the support of integrationists on the one hand and the ire of sovereignists on the other.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Seen in this light, the ambitious fiscal and structural reforms enacted by the Philippe government beginning in 2017 could in part be read as an effort to bolster the Macron Administration’s leverage within the EU so as to advance his federalizing European agenda. Foremost among these measures were the elimination of the wealth tax on financial assets, the reduction of housing subsidies for the poor, the augmentation of the carbon tax on gasoline, and a far-reaching reform of the Labor Code. Solidifying the impression that Macron was the president of the rich and business elite, these reforms became the object of widespread social protest in the form of the *gilets jaunes* uprising that swept the country through fall 2018 and winter 2018-19.[[54]](#footnote-54) Fueling a degree of popular mobilization not seen in France during the entire postwar era with the possible exception of May 1968, this movement channeled the economic and social anxieties of the France *d’en bas*, serving to polarize the political climate within the country in the run-up to the June 2019 European election.

The campaign preceding the election lent continued salience to European issues within the French domestic debate, with discussions over the nature of the EU elevated once again to the center of the latter.[[55]](#footnote-55) Replicating in reverse the result of the 2017 presidential election with the RN coming first with 23.3% of the vote and LREM winning 22.4%, the election’s outcome reinforced the partisan fault lines that had first materialized over Europe in the 2017 presidential election and confirmed the new integration-versus-demarcation cleavage which had been expressed by the latter. The RN comforted its position as the banner party of Euroscepticism while LREM affirmed its status as the principal defender of European integration. Conversely, the hardening of this new cleavage translated into a further decline for the governing parties, with LR and the PS now accounting for less than 15% of the vote, an unprecedented low not only in a European election but any national-level election since the advent of the Fifth Republic.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in France in March 2020 once again brought Europe to the forefront of the French political debate. It did so in two ways. First, though health policy under the EU treaties remains a prerogative of the member states, from the start the European Commission attempted to coordinate their policies in order to fight the pandemic and reduce its spread. The Commission’s initial attempts to collectively marshal protective personal equipment (PPE)—notably surgical masks to protect against the virus’s spread—and a requisite stocks of ventilators, respirators etc. to assist those stricken by the disease, as well as to maintain European borders open to preserve freedom of movement and of trade, were soon outstripped by domestic pressures emanating from within the member states to safeguard their own PPE and medical equipment stocks—some going so far as imposing export controls (German) or requisitioning (France) the latter for use by their own populations at the expense of the European collective.[[57]](#footnote-57) While Macron publicly lent his support to this coordinated effort,[[58]](#footnote-58) recriminations among the member states over access to PPE soon highlighted the European Commission’s inefficacy in steering the EU’s collective response to the pandemic.[[59]](#footnote-59)

These recriminations reached new heights in the face of the European Commission’s joint vaccine procurement program which, in an effort to ensure that all member states would have equal access to the new vaccines that were being developed during the second half of 2020 and rolled out in 2021, resulted in a slower distribution of these vaccines across the EU than in other advanced countries, notably the UK and the US. Most notably, by attempting to secure the vaccines at the lowest price to European taxpayers, the Commission’s negotiators had signed less-strict procurement agreements which led the pharmaceutical companies to prioritize delivery to countries—like the US, the UK, and Israel—who had paid (much) more for their vaccines in order to ensure the quickest delivery of the latter to protect their populations.[[60]](#footnote-60) In the midst of the deadliest pandemic since the global influenza epidemic of 1918-20, the ensuing delay was measured in lost lives.

However, since health policy was ultimately the responsibility of the member states, the EU was partially shielded from blame for the failure to contain the coronavirus. This was not the case in terms of coordinating the economic response to the outbreak. From the start, the EU sought to provide its members with sufficient macroeconomic space as well as the financial means to minimize the damage the pandemic would cause to their economies. Accordingly, it suspended the operation of the Stability Pact in March 2020 when the depth of the prospective downturn became apparent and encouraged member state governments to fiscally intervene in order to keep their economies from collapsing. Meanwhile, the Commission pledged €37 billion in emergency assistance to address members states’ immediate needs while the European Central Bank pledged to inject a trillion euros into the Eurozone’s economy to maintain liquidity as the crisis deepened. [[61]](#footnote-61) However, replicating the dissensus that had characterized previous EU attempts to coordinate member states’ acquisition of PPE and vaccines, initial attempts to mount a coordinated fiscal response also faltered. Recriminations soon emerged between the ‘frugal four’ surplus countries—the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark and Sweden—and the so-called “Club Med” deficitary countries—notably Spain and Italy—over the means and scope of financial assistance that the Union should bring to bear to staunch the economic crisis.[[62]](#footnote-62) At the March 30, 2020 Eurogroup meeting where these proposals were mooted, a new rift opened up between Europe’s North and South that was reminiscent of the Eurozone crisis, illustrating the extent to which the economic shock wrought by the pandemic threatened the unity of the EU.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Realizing the danger that the economic crisis posed to the European project, in May 2020 France and Germany made a joint proposal to create an EU-wide stimulus program that would offer a mix of grants and loans to help at-risk member states. The stimulus package would be funded by a common debt instrument, thereby resurrecting the prospect of a partial mutualization of member state debts contracted to combat the crisis. The resulting accord, which was approved at the July 2020 European Council and christened Next Generation EU, thus marked an important departure for the EU not just in terms of the policy instruments developed to combat the epidemic,[[64]](#footnote-64) but in setting a potential precedent for financing common collective responses to future economic shocks and crises.[[65]](#footnote-65)

As far as France was concerned, it would receive €40 billion euros in grants (while declining to contract any loans) under the program—making it the third largest recipient after Spain (€69.5 billion) and Italy (€68.9 billion)—, which the government planned to use in order to help finance its own domestic €100 billion stimulus program.[[66]](#footnote-66) This money, earmarked in 2020 and 2021 principally for investment in industrial recovery and the transition to green energies, was to be added to the €460 billion that had already been spent by the state since March 2020 on sectoral assistance and wage-support measures to keep employees on employer payrolls.[[67]](#footnote-67)

As in other member states, Europe’s response to the pandemic fueled anti-EU critiques on the part of Eurosceptic politicians and parties in France. A first set of critiques targeted the EU’s attempts to coordinate the health policy response of the member states. One charge, originating on the radical right, was that the EU had, in pursuit of its cosmopolitan ideology, deliberately weakened the capacity of the member states to protect themselves against the spread of the disease. Articulating this view on *France Inter* radio on February 26, 2020 as a Covid-19 cluster raged in Lombardy close to the French border, Marine Le Pen attacked the Commission’s call to keep European borders open despite the risks that this might facilitate the disease’s spread.[[68]](#footnote-68) Doubling down on this claim a month later in an interview given to *Le Figaro* newspaper, she inveighed: “The European Union has been totally inexistent [in its reaction to Covid] and even played a nefarious role [in its spread.] The first instruction it gave to the [member] states during this crisis was above all to not limit the circulation of persons… It bears a great responsibility in the massive diffusion of the epidemic. And this, out of pure ideology.” Thus, she concluded that politically “the first casualty from the coronavirus, is [the EU.]”[[69]](#footnote-69)

Conversely, the Rassemblement National (RN) (the new name given to the FN in 2018) emphasized the relative effectiveness of non-EU states being able to assert their sovereign autonomy in combatting the virus compared to EU members subject to cumbersome processes of European coordination, particularly with respect to vaccine procurement and distribution. Comparing the relative rapidity with which non-EU member states, and in particular post-Brexit Britain, were able to secure vaccines to inoculate their populations compared to the EU member states, RN vice-president Nicolas Bay drove the point home: “The countries that on their own initiative purchased vaccines absent {European} ideological blinders, notably by turning towards vaccines produced by Russia and China, are doing better {in vaccinating their populations than EU states.} And the British who quit the EU at the end of 2020 have today achieved a vaccination level four times that of France, Germany, Italy or Spain, » confirming for him that “the EU has been inadequate to the challenge of {either} anticipating or coordinating the response” to the outbreak.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Meanwhile, on the far left, it was the EU’s fecklessness and its incapacity for taking positive action when it mattered that was to be underlined. Pillorying this ineffectiveness in the wake of the spread of the outbreak and the first *confinement* (compulsory stay-at-home order) that was declared by the government on March 17, 2020 and which would last until May 20, LFI chief Jean-Luc Mélenchon thundered in the National Assembly: Since in the midst of the crisis, “Europe does not exist, the European Union plays no role,” he called upon France to bypass the EU and elaborate by herself “a plan detailing the means” (*planification des moyens)* by which to overcome the coronavirus.[[71]](#footnote-71) Worse, he suggested that the EU’s own pro-Western and neoliberal ideological biases had limited the efficacy of the response. Mélenchon asked why the EU’s vaccine procurement program had limited itself to securing vaccines only from European and American pharmaceutical firms when inoculations had already been developed by Russia and China. The implication was that in order to safeguard the European market for Western pharmaceutical companies, the European Commission was playing fast and loose with the lives of ordinary European citizens and that instead France would be better off pursuing an independent vaccine procurement strategy on her own.[[72]](#footnote-72)

In turn, Eurosceptics on the right and the left also pilloried the EU’s efforts to coordinate a collective fiscal response to the COVID crisis. Initially, as early efforts foundered and debates over what course the EU should follow descended into recrimination between Northern and Southern EU states in the spring of 2020, the principal criticisms emanated from the Eurosceptic left. In an interview given to a number of European newspapers, Mélenchon criticized the EU’s fecklessness and division, arguing that the bloc’s incapacity to find the requisite solidarity to reach a common agreement underscored the EU’s status “as a coalition of selfish interests” (*une coalition d’égoïsmes*.) He singled out the ‘frugal four’ northern EU states and Germany for particular criticism, charging that their refusal to countenance any debt mutualization to help EU member states address the crisis reflected an “extremely petty, narrow and stubborn vision” of Europe. Arguing that these countries were “trying to live without the other {member states}” and that “it was not serious for these countries to continue to defend neoliberal dogmas in the middle of the crisis,” he invited the southern European states, notably Italy and Spain with the support of France, “to show their teeth to Northern Europe.” As “the only sincere Europeans,” he invited these countries to disregard the admonitions of the frugal four and to work together to tailor a common fiscal response to the crisis, if need be outside the EU.[[73]](#footnote-73)

The EU’s July 2020 agreement to finance €750 billion in aid through the issuance of a common European debt instrument forced Mélenchon to recalibrate his Eurosceptic attacks. Now, the focus of his criticism wasn’t the lack of European solidarity in collectively underwriting a common European stimulus to address the COVID recession, but instead the fact that the French government had negotiated a ‘bad’ deal on the grounds that the amount of money that it would have to put into the EU budget in order to help underwrite the financing effort would outweigh the €40 billion grant that it received.[[74]](#footnote-74) In a tweet, he accused Macron of having “given in on everything: rebates on the contributions of the stingy {northern} countries, conditionalities on spending, the reduction in the size of the stimulus program etc. Bérézina {Napoleon’s greatest defeat in the 1812 Russian campaign}.” Concluding that “Macron does not know how to negotiate,” Mélenchon implied that he would have secured a better deal for France had he been president.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Eurosceptics on the radical right were similarly exercised by the program, but rather than arguing that the deal had been poorly negotiated their principal angle of attack was to claim that the agreement constituted a further infringement on France’s national sovereignty, this time in the fiscal domain. Asserting in a tweet that “Macron ha{d} just signed the worse deal for France in the history of the EU!”, Marine Le Pen charged that “in order to protect his ego, he sacrificed our future and our independence: European taxes, abandonment of our agriculture, colossal financial obligations on our country…” She concluded with a warning that “as a wave of bankruptcies and of layoffs threaten in the fall, France ha{d} decided to financially mutilate itself in support of an ideological and anti-national vision of Europe called the ‘European Union’.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

In short, the EU’s handling of the COVID crisis became a signal developing helping to drive the ‘integration’ versus ‘demarcation’ cleavage that was reconfiguring the French partisan debate. Pro- and anti-European politicians and parties regularly confronted themselves over Macron’s domestic covid policy, which was in turn brought back—often erroneously—to broader policy responses, particularly in the economic realm, that had been decided at the European level.[[77]](#footnote-77) Accordingly, disagreements over European COVID policy didn’t just spill over into the domestic policy debate; they became core structuring ingredients framing the political opposition between the president and his rivals in the run-up to the 2022 presidential election.[[78]](#footnote-78)

 The domestic and European impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic thus served as the constitutive backdrop for the French presidential election campaign that began in earnest in the fall of 2021. The principal parties either selected their candidates during this period (as in the case of LR, EELV, PS), party leaders launched their campaigns in earnest (RN; LFI), or new, ‘upstart’ candidacies materialized with the aim of overturning the electoral applecart (Zemmour). Meanwhile, sticking to precedent, the incumbent president delayed announcing his candidacy as long as possible so that he could bask in the presidential aura that distinguished him from his electoral rivals—the objective being to imbue his candidacy with an especial stature in the eyes of voters.

Though Europe did not initially directly figure in the campaign, which was cast as a domestic referendum on Macron’s term in office, it soon became apparent that it would indirectly inform the latter, first through the intraparty debates by which the parties selected their candidates and then within the general interparty competition that unfolded in the months leading up to the election. On the left, this was particularly the case in respect to the debate surrounding the incumbent president’s ambitious supply-side economic reforms, which he had justified in part in terms of the necessity of having to comply with European economic governance rules—notably the Stability Pact—that constrained France’s public finances and commercial policy (see above). As the negative social impacts of these reforms were magnified first by the recessionary downturn precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic then by the inflationary spike attendant upon the global supply shock that followed the simultaneous emergence of advanced economies from lock-down,[[79]](#footnote-79) the various measures advanced by the parties of Left in order to lift living standards and reduce inequalities, not to mention to finance the ‘ecological transition’, were bound to conflict with European budgetary constraints once these were reinstated.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Meanwhile, on the right, cultural and regalian themes prevailed, with Macron having been adjudged to have done neither enough to defend the country’s cultural-historical (and even ethnic) identity, particularly with respect to fighting illegal immigration and combatting the ‘Islamization’ of French society, nor in lowering crime and maintaining public order. Thus, though Europe did not expressly figure in this intra- and inter-partisan debate, many of the proposals raised in these debates, such as definitively suspending the Schengen Accord, enshrining the principle of national preference in the French constitution, giving French law primacy over European law etc., expressly conflicted with the European treaties, thereby inserting the European question into the political debate on the right was well.

As in 2017, the divisive potential of these policy debates—and their European implications—was most evident within the erstwhile or aspiring parties of government. On the left, the leading such formation was EELV, which following the PS’s electoral in the 2017 Presidential and legislative elections, combined with its performance in the 2019 European and 2020 municipal elections, gave it a legitimate claim to constituting the leading formation on the left entering the 2022 campaign. Though the party had selected a moderate candidate who advocated a ‘responsible’ and ‘uniting’ brand of environmentalism in the person of Yannick Jadot, the close-run primary in which EELV members voted to select their candidate had revealed that there was also a strong appetite within the party for a more radical, ‘rupturist’ strain of environmentalism. Evoking the urgent necessity of resolving the crisis, the radical candidate, Sandrine Rousseau, advocated policies that would invariably fall afoul of EU budgetary rules, let alone the neoliberal principles underlying the Single Market, should they be implemented.[[81]](#footnote-81) Jadot narrowly defeated Rousseau by a vote of 51.03% versus 48.97% among EELV party members, suggesting that half of the French Greens were more favorable to these radical solutions than the “responsible” *écologie de gouvernement* preconized by the party’s designated candidate. This suggested that, though he himself was a committed European, the formation that Jadot represented also contained activists and appealed to voters whose European convictions were outweighed by the policy radicalism they were ready to countenance in the fight against climate change, for economic sustainability and in support of social justice.[[82]](#footnote-82)

A similar dynamic was evident within the PS, where the official candidate, the sitting Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, launched her campaign on the backdrop of a longstanding internecine war between the former ‘barons’ of the party, who had held the reins of power during François Hollande’s term of office, and the post-Hollande tenants of the party who, under the stewardship of first secretary Olivier Faure, sought to resurrect the PS following its 2017 electoral debacle—if necessary by seeking alliances on the left with former partisan rivals.[[83]](#footnote-83) Attempting to balance the imperatives of a ‘pragmatic’ form of social democracy supposedly enshrined by the former on the one hand and a more economically interventionist and environmentally assertive line defended by the latter on the other, Hidalgo never would be able to find a clear programmatic voice during the campaign.[[84]](#footnote-84) As a result, her strongly pro-European stance was lost in the muddle of her domestic program.[[85]](#footnote-85) This left what remained of the Socialist electorate with an unappetizing choice: stand fast and support for what increasingly looked like a losing cause, thereby fragmenting the leftwing vote and rendering a repeat of the 2017 runoff between Macron and Le Pen more likely, or else tactically vote for the leftwing candidate with the greatest chance of reaching the second round—even if they held certain convictions with which it disagreed, especially on Europe.

Similar normative and programmatic fractures emerged on the governmental right, notably during the primary by which LR designated its candidate for the 2022 presidential election. At the beginning of December 2021, the primary process, which also polled party members to designate who might best represent them in the presidential race, designated Valérie Pécresse, sitting President of the regional council of the Ile-de-France and former Minister of the Budget and of Higher Education and Research during the administration of Nicolas Sarkozy. A centrist liberal, Pécresse won 61% of the party member vote in the second round versus 39% for the hard-right LR deputy from the Alpes-Maritimes, Éric Ciotti. Ciotti had run in the primary on hard right regalian and identitarian themes, which often came very close to approximating the discourse and propositions of the radical right.[[86]](#footnote-86) The result signified that two-fifths of LR activists—and presumably a substantial proportion of LR voters—were sympathetic to such nativist identitarian proposals as enshrining national preference in the constitution and in favor of placing draconian restrictions on immigration and the right to asylum which, if realized, would place France in contravention of extant EU Law. Thus, as in the case of EELV, if LR officially remained a pro-European party—although some of its primary candidates, such as the former EU Trade Commission Michel Barnier, argued for inscribing the primacy of French over EU law into the constitution[[87]](#footnote-87)—it harbored alongside its more centrist and liberal electorate an increasingly hard-right fringe of sympathizers and voters whose nativist convictions would lead them to recognize themselves in a nativist Eurosceptic candidate than in the more moderate choice officialized through the party primary.[[88]](#footnote-88)

 If the parties of government found themselves internally divided in terms of their programmatic approach to economic or cultural issues, and hence by implication in respect to their official positioning in favor of Europe, the anti-system parties faced a different problem with regard to the latter. After their hardline Eurosceptic positions had served to discredit their candidates in the eyes of many voters in 2017, the radical parties of the left and the right either opted to soften their formerly hardline anti-EU positions or else chose to elide European questions by focusing exclusively on domestic issues.

 On the far left, LFI candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon abandoned his “Plan A or Plan B” proposal from 2017, by which he had stipulated that if the EU did not modify the Stability Pact to accommodate his spending proposals were he elected, he would unilaterally pull France out of the EU. In its place, he opted for a strategy of “disobeying the EU” by not complying with its budgetary rules but nevertheless remaining within the bloc. This was to lead to a concertation with the other member states and debouch on formal negotiations to abandon the European Treaties in their current form, particularly with respect to economic and budgetary governance.[[89]](#footnote-89) A similar proposal was mooted by the PCF candidate Fabien Roussel who called for replacing the Stability Pact and Single Market with a €900 billion environmental and social spending program.[[90]](#footnote-90) Needless to say, notwithstanding their dubious legal grounds, neither of these proposals was likely to be accepted in a union of 27 members, underscoring the fundamental incompatibility between LFI’s and the PCF’s electoral programs and present EU rules. Thus, in order to not arouse voter fears, Mélenchon and Roussel sought to de-emphasize the radical anti-European tenor of their economic and social spending programs by limiting discussion of their application solely to the domestic arena.

For her part, Marine Le Pen discarded her call from 2017 for organizing a ‘Frexit’ referendum were she elected as well as abandoned her hardline proposal to unilaterally pull out of the euro. Instead, Le Pen called for instituting a “Europe of nations” in replacement of the EU within which “France would be able to reconcile her European commitments with the preservation of her sovereignty and the defense of her interests.” In concrete terms, this implied holding a referendum with the goal of granting the French constitution primacy over the EU treaties, a proposal that would effectively abrogate the supranational character of the European Union, as well as a series of measures in contradiction with EU constitutional law and the Single Market.[[91]](#footnote-91) As in the case of LFI, the Eurosceptic core of the RN’s program remained intact, only it was now presented in a much less aggressively confrontational manner. Thus, Le Pen’s softened European vision constituted a new element in her de-demonization (*dèdiabolisation*) strategy that sought to normalize the RN in the eyes of voters by making its proposals appear more reasonable than they in fact were.[[92]](#footnote-92)

The only ‘anti-system’ candidate who explicitly embraced an anti-European stance was Eric Zemmour, who declared his candidacy in November 2022 in defense of the colors of the ‘unabashed’ nationalist right. Legitimizing his entry into the race on the basis that Marine Le Pen could never win the presidency and that her normalization strategy had brought her to abandon the radical rightwing convictions that had characterized the FN under her father, Zemmour’s attacks on the EU were part and parcel of a broader strategy to win votes by endorsing a radically nationalist program and deploying an extremist political discourse to convey it.[[93]](#footnote-93) Promising an “arm-wrestle with the European Union,” Zemmour emerged as the most overtly Eurosceptic candidate in the campaign. As a practical matter, however, his difference with Le Pen was more one of tone than of substance, motivated by a desire to present himself as the novelty candidate of anti-systemic *rupture* on the radical right.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Ironically, the one other candidate to explicitly reference Europe during the campaign, but in an overwhelmingly favorable light, was the incumbent president. Macron had waited until the last possible moment—March 3, 2022—to declare his candidacy but the fact that he planned to run again was universally assumed. As in 2017, he placed Europe’s renewal through deeper economic and political integration at the center of his program. Once again, the domestic reforms he planned for his next term assumed their significance in light of Macron’s European ambition.[[95]](#footnote-95) Only if France accomplished these necessary economic reforms, he argued, would other member states—Germany in particular—agree to his ambitious proposals to advance towards greater EU fiscal integration by perennializing the common European debt instrument that had been introduced to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, lay the basis for an autonomous EU tax regime to finance common initiatives without having to rely on member state contributions, and fulfill his grand vision of European strategic autonomy. These lofty ambitions were set out by Macron as he prepared to assume the presidency of the European Council from January through June 2021. In emphasizing the connection between liberal domestic reform and the project of European integration, he sought to leverage his unabashedly pro-European stance as a means of distinguishing himself from his political rivals in the campaign.[[96]](#footnote-96)

On the backdrop of the economic hardship inflicted by the Covid-19 crisis and the inflationary supply shock following the global lifting of lockdowns, Macron’s ambitious liberal economic reforms quickly elicited a chorus of opposition not only from the left but also on the populist right, where Le Pen in particular sought to make the fight against the rising cost of living the central plank of her campaign.[[97]](#footnote-97) Since these reforms were explicitly tied by Macron to France’s European vocation, they were naturally conflated with the ongoing debate over the nature of France’s future relationship to the EU as well. This conflation between domestic economic reform and deepening European integration served to resurrect the demarcation-versus-integration cleavage around Europe that had emerged as a defining axis of political mobilization and competition in 2017, thus entrenching it as the principal cleavage subsuming the 2022 French presidential campaign as well.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Partisan differentiation around Europe was radically catalyzed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Marking the first time a European country had invaded another since World War II, the invasion was a political game-changer that elevated the fundamental strategic and normative questions relating to Europe to the forefront of the national political debate.[[99]](#footnote-99) In substantive terms, the candidates were forced to clarify their positions relative to the war and notably Vladimir Putin’s regime. At one level, this forced them to pronounce themselves on the immediate policy concerns raised by the war, such as what economic sanctions to take against Russia, the authorization of arms shipments to Ukraine, and on welcoming Ukrainian refugees. At a second level, the candidates were also made to confront fundamental geopolitical and normative questions pertaining to the EU’s strategic posture with respect to Russia specifically, and the role the bloc should play in defending not only Ukraine’s democratic sovereignty but in the global struggle opposing democracy and autocracy more generally. In this sense, the war catalyzed even further the demarcation-versus- integration cleavage in the French political debate, with the candidates’ positions on the war defining their positioning along this cleavage.[[100]](#footnote-100)

As a practical matter, the war had a two-fold impact on the issue debate defining the campaign. Firstly, it gave new salience to the question of European strategic autonomy that had been set out by Macron as a priority for the French presidency of the European Council. Specifically, the war raised the issue of how the EU should position itself relative to the United States as well as Russia and China within the emerging multipolar order and whether it should rely on NATO to provide for its military defense.[[101]](#footnote-101)

Secondly, the war provided new lines of debate and attack between the candidates themselves. In particular, the candidates of the radical right, Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour, as well as LFI candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, were targeted by their rivals for their previous foreign policy positions with respect to the Russian regime on the one hand and the Western alliance on the other. On the far right, Le Pen and Zemmour were taken to task for their previous expressions of admiration for Vladimir Putin and for relaying Russian talking-points during the diplomatic standoff opposing Russia to Ukraine in the lead-up to the invasion.[[102]](#footnote-102) Similarly, the invasion also became an issue of differentiation among the two candidates of the radical right themselves, notably over the question of what to do with the Ukrainian refugees generated by the war.[[103]](#footnote-103) For his part, Mélenchon was taken to task by his rivals on the pro-European left for his “past complacency towards Vladimir Putin” and his neutralist, anti-NATO pronouncements.[[104]](#footnote-104)

In short, by bringing to the fore the core issues of war and peace in Europe, of how the EU should deal with Russia, of Europe’s energy dependence on the latter, and of the place of the EU within the geopolitical order, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine gave the new demarcation-versus-integration cleavage articulated around Europe unprecedented prominence within the 2022 presidential campaign. With the possible exception of the cost of living—an issue itself connected to the war due to the surge in energy and food prices that was attendant upon the latter—the singular focus on the war was crowding out important domestic issues that deserved to be discussed in the campaign, including the climate emergency, the growth of socioeconomic inequality, or the place of Islam in French society. In this sense, it could be said that the 2022 campaign demonstrated that the demarcation-versus-integration cleavage had come to subsume the entirety of the French political debate, consummating its displacement of the domestic Left-Right cleavage begun in 2017.[[105]](#footnote-105)

*Interpreting the 2022 Presidential Election Results*

The results of the 2022 presidential election confirmed this dynamic of cleavage ‘unfreezing’ and reconfiguration at the level of the French electorate. The first round of the vote translated an effective tri-partization of the French partisan space, which left the traditional parties of government under the Fifth Republic, the PS and LR, as effectively rump political formations within the political system. The former saw its electoral implantation further degraded with its candidate, Anne Hidalgo, winning a disastrous 1.75%, and placing a humiliating tenth (!) out of the 12 candidates in the first round, ahead of only the two Trostkyist candidates. The result represented the worst electoral score ever recorded by a Socialist candidate to the presidency in the history of the Fifth Republic since the introduction of the election of the president by the popular suffrage in 1965. Suffering a nearly 5% decline from Benoît Hamon’s 2017 result (6.56%), the score marked the culmination of the PS’s slide into electoral irrelevance at the national level.

Whereas the bulk of the PS’s electoral collapse had occurred in 2017 (see above), it was the traditional governing party of the right, LR, that the most pronounced electoral decline among the governing parties in 2022. In a nightmare result for the party, Valérie Pécresse won only 4.78% of the vote, marking a fall of more than 15% compared to the result recorded by Fillon (20.01%) in the preceding presidential election. The primary beneficiary of the declines suffered by the PS and LR was Emmanuel Macron, who with 27.85% of the vote improved on his first-round score from 2017 (24.01%). Yet the high scores achieved by Marine Le Pen who, with 23.15% of the vote, also improved on her 2017 tally (21.3%) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon—21.95% versus 19.58% in 2017—suggested that they had also benefited from voter defections from the former governing parties as well as in the case of the latter, the defection of more radical Green voters, whose candidate, Yannick Jadot, also failed to break the 5% barrier (4.63%).[[106]](#footnote-106)

This final collapse of the PS and LR—which together now only represented under 7% of the electorate (versus about 27% in 2017), combined with the surge of Macron on the one hand and of the anti-system party candidates on the other, suggested that the new demarcation-integration cleavage opposing the winners of globalization and Europeanization to their losers had definitively replaced the traditional left versus right cleavage embodied by the alternation between the governing catch-all parties.

Three political blocs emerged from the vote that reflected this new cleavage. On the one hand were the pro-market and cosmopolitan forces that favored globalization and European integration. Spearheaded by Macron and LREM, if one added the scores of the governing parties plus that of the Greens, parties whose respective candidates defended the market economy, a more-or-less ‘open’ or civic conception of nationhood, and remained committed to European integration, this bloc comprised roughly four in ten voters (38.98%).[[107]](#footnote-107) The second bloc was that comprised of the far-left vote—the vote won by Mélenchon plus that going to the Communist (2.28%) and the two Trotskyist candidates (1.33%)—, which added up to just over a quarter of the electorate (25.56%) in the first round. Combining an anti-market program with a commitment to progressive or cosmopolitan cultural values, this bloc was the political vehicle for an economically-based form of Eurosceptic demarcation. Finally, the third bloc reflected the radical rightwing vote, which in addition to that garnered by Marine Le Pen included the ballots that had gone to Eric Zemmour (7.07%) and the sovereignist candidate Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (2.06%).[[108]](#footnote-108) Representing nearly a third of the vote (32%), this bloc combined the ideal of demarcation on cultural and national identity with a more-or-less economically liberal agenda.[[109]](#footnote-109)

In short, the anti-system camp enshrining the values of either economic or cultural demarcation and hence Euroscepticism represented nearly six in ten French voters from the first round in 2022, underscoring the growth of the anti-system camp since 2017 where in the aggregate the advocates of demarcation did not reach half of the electorate (48%). If we add the high number of voters who abstained (28.01%) or cast blank or spoiled ballots (6.23%),[[110]](#footnote-110) we find that over three quarters (75.94%) of eligible voters either voted for anti-system candidates or refused to participate in the election. Thus, even though Macron comfortably defeated Marine Le Pen in the second-round run-off by a 17% margin (58.55% vs. 41.55%),[[111]](#footnote-111) the first-round results underscored not only the French electorate’s broad disaffection with the pro-globalization and pro-European course pursued by his government but also the depth of the general democratic malaise within the country.

A more granular analysis of the vote confirms the entrenchment of this new demarcation-versus-integration cleavage articulated around Europe. (See Table 4.) Comparing voters’ preferences in 2022 to 2017, we find that whereas Macron, Le Pen

Table 4: Vote Transfers between the 2017 Presidential

and 2022 Presidential Elections (1st rd.)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2022 Pres. Candidates | % 2017Mélenchon | % 2017 Hamon | % 2017 Macron | % 2017Fillon | % 2017 Le Pen | % 2017Abstained |
| Trotskyists(NPA/LO) | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | 4 |
| Mélenchon(LFI) | 70 | 34 | 9 | -- | -- | 28 |
| Roussel(PCF) | 7 | 6 | 6 | -- | -- | 3 |
| Hidalgo(PS) | 1 | 15 | 15 | -- | 1 | 3 |
| Jadot(EELV) | 4 | 18 | 18 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Macron(LREM) | 4 | 13 | 73 | 37 | 6 | 14 |
| Pécresse(LR) | -- | -- | 2 | 21 | 1 | 2 |
| Dupont-A.(DLF) | 1 | 3 | -- | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Le Pen(RN) | 8 | 6 | 5 | 17 | 72 | 25 |
| Zemmour(Reconquète) | 1 | 1 | 2 | 16 | 13 | 5 |
| Lassalle | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 7 |

 Ifop, “Présidentielle 2022—Sondage Jour de Vote (1er tour),” 28.

and LREM enjoyed the greatest degree of voter stability, the candidates of the former parties of government, as well as that for EELV, experienced the greatest voter defection. Thus, on the mainstream left, only 15% of voters who chose in favor of the PS’s candidate in 2017 voted for Anne Hidalgo and 18% for Yannick Jadot of EELV. This total (33%) was exceeded by the proportion of Hamon voters who chose in favor the anti-system leftwing candidate, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, in 2017 (34%). This would confirm that the greatest proportion of more moderate socialist voters had already decamped to Macron in 2017, who only garnered 13% of ex-Hamon voters in 2022.

Meanwhile, it was on the governmental right, notably within LR, that, in marked contrast to 2017, the pro-Macron dynamic was at its strongest. Accordingly, the proportion of Fillon voters from 2017 who chose in favor of Macron in 2022 (37%) far outweighed that who supported the party’s official candidate, Valérie Pécresse (21%). Meanwhile, testifying to the appeal of the culturally authoritarian and nativist right for a growing segment of the conservative vote in this election, one third of former Fillon voters from 2017 chose in favor of either Marine Le Pen (17%) or Eric Zemmour (16%). What the foregoing suggests is that whereas a large proportion of PS voters who felt most strongly about defending European integration on economic grounds had decamped to Macron in 2017, with a strong plurality (41%) of Hamon voters supporting candidates from radical left Eurosceptic parties in 2022, in this presidential election its was the LR candidates’ turn to be caught between a culturally integrationist, pro-European candidate of the liberal center on the one hand, and culturally demarcationist, Eurosceptic candidacies on the radical right on the other. Hence, the collapse of the formerly catch-all vote that had sustained the governmental—Gaullist and Liberal—right from the 1960s through to 2017. This dynamic thus consummated the polarization of the French electorate between the pro-European center and the anti-European radical right and radical left that had begun in the 2017 presidential election.

A final notable trend in these vote transfers concerns the electoral preferences evinced by former abstentionists from 2017 to 2022. Nearly two thirds (65%) of voters who abstained in the first round of the 2017 election chose in favor of anti-system candidates of the radical left (35%) or the radical right (30%) in the first round in 2022. This suggests that the growing proportion of abstentionists within the French electorate presents a substantial potential reservoir of votes for anti-system parties, thereby adding a further potential factor of polarization within the French system.

In turn, as in 2017 political polarization in the 2022 presidential election was also sociologically and spatially reflected. (See Table 3 above.) Macron placed first in the first round among the upper socio- professional categories (31%), especially upper

management executives and liberal professionals, as well as the most educated categories. By the same token, he won nearly four in ten retirees—representing in the aggregate the wealthiest group of savers—and over two-fifths (43%) of the highest income group (i.e. those earning over €2500 per month.)[[112]](#footnote-112) Conversely, Macron performed comparatively poorly among voters emanating from the lower socio-professional categories, especially industrial workers and the unemployed, as well as the least educated.

The vote for Le Pen and to a lesser extent, Mélenchon, was the exact inverse of that for Macron. For her part, Le Pen achieved her highest scores among the lower social professional categories, of whom over one third—35% of industrial workers—cast their ballots in the first round in her favor while achieving her highest degree of penetration among the least educated—i.e. 37% of those without a high school or technical diploma—as well as the unemployed. Finally, over a quarter of the voters from the lowest (26% among those making less than €900 per month) and second lowest (28% among those earning between €900 and €1300 per month) categories chose in her favor.[[113]](#footnote-113) Conversely, she most underperformed her aggregate vote total in the first round among the upper socio-professional categories, the most affluent and the most educated segments of the electorate.

Mélenchon’s vote in the first round overlapped in part with Le Pen’s; however, it also reflected inroads among the better educated as well as higher socio-professional categories and income groups. He routinely came second to Le Pen, averaging between a quarter and three in ten voters among the lowest socio-professional categories as well as the unemployed. The one popular category where he came first in terms of penetration was among the poorest income group, over whom just above a third (34%) voted for Mélenchon in the first round.[[114]](#footnote-114) However, where he did outperform Le Pen was among the upper socio-professional and highest income groups—winning respectively 4% and 2% more than more Le Pen among these groups to place second behind Macron—and especially among the most educated categories. In the case of the latter, he nearly doubled (20% vs. 11%) the score achieved by Le Pen among advanced degree holders and outstripped her by 6% among college graduates. This would suggest that his message appealed to the most progressive segment of the more educated and upwardly mobile electorate who in the past might have voted Socialist or Green, but who in this election voted strategically in the first round in order to avoid repeating as second-round run-off in which the left was not represented.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Finally, between one in five and a quarter of the members of the intermediary professions voted in roughly equal proportion for Macron, Le Pen, and Mélenchon, with the remainder scattered among the other candidates. This dynamic neatly captured the effective tripartition of the French party system following the election among the anti-system right and left on the one hand and the liberal center on the other, with the former parties of government (plus the Greens) left fighting for the scraps. Thus, perpetuating the dynamic seen in 2017, the broad-based class coalitions that formerly sustained the erstwhile governing parties continued to erode. UMP/LR and the PS thus saw their support among the upper and lower socio-professional categories fall from a total of 57% and 42% respectively in 2012 to 7% and 4% in 2022. A similar pattern is observable at the level of education, with the traditional governing parties’ share of the vote among the least and most educated voters declining from 37% and 64% respectively in 2012 to only 4% and 7% ten years later. (See Table 3 above.)

Finally, this tripartition of the partisan system at the expense of the former catch-all parties of government could also be seen in the spatial and geographical segmentation of the vote (Table 3). In spatial terms, in the first round Macron came first in rural communes, larger urban communes outside the Paris region (winning 29% in cities of 100,000 to 2 million inhabitants and 31% in those of 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants) as well as in the Paris region. Meanwhile, Le Pen came first with three in ten votes in the smallest urban communes counting 2000 to 20,000 inhabitants outside the Paris region (versus 24% of the vote in all communes outside of the Paris region), and won over a quarter of the vote (26%) in rural communes as a whole. Conversely, she was weakest in the Paris region (17%).[[116]](#footnote-116) Finally, Mélenchon achieved his highest tally (26%) in the largest metropolitan areas (100,000 to 2 million inhabitants) outside the Paris region as well as in the latter, where he won just under a quarter of the vote (23%)[[117]](#footnote-117) Conversely, his support proved weakest in rural communes (19%). In the meanwhile, as in the case of the other sociological indicators examined above, the former governing parties saw their shares of both the urban and rural vote collapse. From 2012 to 2022, the combined urban vote for UMP/LR and the PS fell from well over half (56/54% outside/within the Paris region) to under one in ten voters (6/11%.) Conversely, the total rural vote for both parties collapsed from 48% in 2012 to 7% a decade later. (Table 3.)

Geographically, apart from Paris and the more prosperous western departments of the Ile-de-France (Hauts-de-Seine and Yvelines) as well as the border departments running from Bas-Rhin down to the Hautes-Alpes on the country’s eastern flank and the Pyrenées and Hautes-Pyrénées on the Spanish border, LREM’s vote was highest in the western regions of the country, the Southern massif central, and in the Dauphiné. Meanwhile, the RN performed best in its Northern and Northeastern heartlands, the Mediterranean coast running from the Spanish to the Italian border and Corsica, and along the *diagonale du vide* running from the Ardennes to the Lot-et-Garonne and then hooking southeast to the sea, as well as the Western bank of Rhone valley running up to the Haute-Loire.[[118]](#footnote-118) Finally, apart from winning five of the eight departments in the Ile-de-France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon came first in the first round in the Ariège and four of the five overseas French departments, i.e. areas historically identified as *terres de gauche* such as the old red belt around Paris. As in 2017, these results mapped roughly with the vote distribution of the ‘No’ and ‘Yes’ votes in the 1992 and 2005 European referenda. Pro-Macron areas combined more affluent and educated urban voters with formerly Socialist and Centrist electoral bastions. Meanwhile, those who supported Le Pen and Mélenchon reflected areas which were broadly populated by less-educated working class populations, featured large immigrant populations, or—in Mélenchon’s case—younger urban categories.[[119]](#footnote-119)

This line of fracture between a more peripheral, poorer, less-educated and more socio-professionally precarious France versus an urbanized, richer, more highly educated and socio-professionally ascendant France was further reinforced by the second-round runoff between Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron. As in 2017, Macron achieved his highest scores among the highest socio-professional categories--66% overall and 74% among upper management executives—, members of the highest income bracket—76% among those making more than €2500 per month—voters with a university education--70% overall and 78% among those holding advanced degrees—and inhabitants of the Paris region (73%) as well as of the largest provincial cities (65%). Meanwhile, Le Pen garnered her greatest support among the lowest socio-professional categories (58%), notably industrial workers (65%), those making incomes of less than €900 per month (56%), voters without a high school diploma (56% and 58% for those with only a trade or technical diploma), and voters living in the smallest urban communes outside the Paris region (51%) and in rural villages (52%).[[120]](#footnote-120)

The overall picture that emerges from these indicators is of a peripheral, poorer and more locally-rooted *France d’en bas* which has been largely bypassed by the benefits of globalization and European integration versus an urbanized, wealthier and more cosmopolitan *France d’en haut* composed of the winners of globalization and Europeanization. As in 2017, Emmanuel Macron emerged in the 2022 presidential elections as the party of the economic and cultural winners from globalization and European integration while the Le Pen and Mélenchon votes proved the principal refuges for its losers. These winners and losers continued to decamp from the former governing cartel parties—LR and the PS—that had unsuccessfully attempted to reconcile the contradictory interests of both, confirming the emergence of a new demarcation-versus-integration axis articulated around approval or rejection of globalization as symbolized by the EU as the newly defining political cleavage underpinning the French party system.

*Conclusion*

The emergence of this new cleavage symbolized by Europe in the French 2017 presidential election and its confirmation in the 2022 presidential election represent the culmination of a process of Europeanization of domestic politics that had begun thirty years earlier. Starting with the SEA in 1986 and TEU in 1992, followed by EMU in 1999 and the Fiscal Compact in 2012, it was only natural that, as European integration advanced and the EU’s supranational competencies expanded, this process should become an object of intensifying political debate within the member states. The French case shows that in the 1990s European integration was first seized upon by its Eurosceptic opponents, while the governing parties, even as they evinced internal dissensions on the subject, officially supported the European project. Likewise, the French example demonstrates that Euroscepticism, at least in its initial incarnation, came principally from the (radical) right and was harnessed by niche parties as a means of electoral differentiation from the governing parties. Such Euroscepticism was essentially driven by cultural or identitarian concerns, which dovetailed with the exclusionary ethnocultural nationalism of the radical right.

However, the French case also demonstrates that the economic focus of European integration from the early 2000s on opened the door to a distinct form of Euroscepticism, which emerged on the radical left. Contending that the neoliberal impetus of European economic integration threatened the viability of the comprehensive welfare states and stakeholder economies that had been established under postwar social democracy, leftwing parties and their electorates grew increasingly conflicted about the EU. By the middle of the 2000s two forms of Eurosceptism, one cultural and identity-based, the other socioeconomically rooted, had emerged in France, which fringe parties sought to import into national political contests for their own electoral advantage.

 Yet, this debate continued to be subordinated to domestic political concerns and was subsumed by the traditional left-right cleavage that had conditioned political competition in the Western democracies throughout the postwar era. Governing parties had little interest in trying to harness Europe as a lever of political mobilization because it divided their electorates. They therefore continued to adhere to the permissive consensus and tried to work towards greater integration at the supranational level while remaining silent about Europe at home.[[121]](#footnote-121)

The fact that mainstream parties refused to engage Eurosceptic challengers on the fringes of the party system meant that for most of the period under consideration European integration failed to emerge as an object of domestic political debate. It was only following the emergence of political entrepreneurs who made the defense of European integration central to their message and program that this debate emerged as a source of political cleavage within the member states. This was the true political significance of Emmanuel Macron’s victory in 2017. His rise from obscurity to assert himself as the univocal Europhile antagonist of right- and leftwing Euroscepticism displaced the fulcrum of political debate and caught out the catch-all governing parties, the PS and LR, who had remained primarily focused on domestic left-right concerns while trying to reconcile *tant bien que mal* their policy responses to the emergent constellation of supranational European rules and regulations. The resulting integration-versus-demarcation cleavage fragmented the governing parties’ electorates, depriving them of the broad voter bases that had ensured their primacy through the postwar era.

The emergence of this new cleavage at the center of national democratic debate and the ensuing collapse of governing cartel parties has occurred not only in France but also in Greece and Italy as well as, in a different context, Poland and Hungary. Likewise, the hold of the mainstream parties has grown increasingly tenuous in other countries. In Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Scandinavia and even Germany, governing cartel parties have seen their vote shares dramatically erode, with pro- and anti-European parties eating up growing chunks of their former support. Both within the member states and at the European level the lines of political contestation are fundamentally shifting, with the basic line of conflict increasingly over the future direction and character of European integration.

Macron has been happy to take up this gauntlet thrown down by the forces of Euroscepticism and to cast the RN and LFI as the principal parties of opposition in France. He reckons that the fear or reprobation that they elicit among voters will deliver permanent majorities to his party for the foreseeable future. However, such a strategy is not without its dangers. Casting these parties as the principal forces of opposition is likely to accelerate their normalization as voters become progressively inured to their Eurosceptic claims on either cultural-nativist or social-economic grounds.[[122]](#footnote-122) Similarly, as the durability of the *gilets jaunes* as well as the nationwide strike movement that flared up in December 2019 and January 2020 against the government’s pension reform attest, the liberalizing measures pursued by Macron have proved quite unpopular, contributing to Le Pen’s and Mélenchon’s political strengthening over the 2017 to 2022 election cycle.

The tripartition of the French party system around the demarcation-versus-integration cleavage was given institutional form in preparation for the June 2022 legislative elections. In particular, in order to increase the chance of a leftwing candidate acceding to the second round run-off in these elections and thereby installing the left as the principal force of opposition to Macron within the country, under the impulsion of Mélenchon LFI successfully negotiated an electoral accord with EELV, the PS and the PCF in order to decide common candidacies for each of the National Assembly’s 577 legislative constituencies.[[123]](#footnote-123) The new leftwing bloc, named the New Popular Ecological and Social Union—or NUPES in its French acronym—was forged despite strong disagreements opposing LFI on the one hand to the PS and EELV on the other with respect to Europe. The latter two parties were essentially forced to swallow LFI’s proposal to ‘disobey’ European Single Market and Stability Pact rules if these infringed with the coalition’s economic program. Envisioning large-scale government spending to fund the ecological transition and boost social benefits and the minimum wage, as well as envisioning the nationalization of certain strategic sectors—water, gas, electricity as well as the freight sector—and the conversion of French agriculture to organic production, its prescriptions would most certainly conflict with the EU’s presently ordoliberal economic orientation.[[124]](#footnote-124) Yet reflecting the overriding desire of a critical mass of their voters to advance a robustly environmentalist, redistributive and interventionist agenda, the leading instances of EELV and the PS put these differences over Europe aside and validated the agreement, including its EU ‘disobedience’ clause.[[125]](#footnote-125) For the first time in its history, the postwar French left united around an effectively Eurosceptic or at least Euro-critical program, thus validating the new demarcation-versus-integration cleavage now subtending the French party system.

Completed by the sovereignist-nativist RN which up to this point has never proved able to parlay its substantial scores attained in presidential elections into parliamentary seats, the Eurosceptic side of the demarcation-integration cleavage is confronted on the Europhile side by LREM/Renaissance, supported by François Bayrou’s MoDem and Édouard Philippe’s new Horizons party. Caught in the middle is LR (including its small centrist UDI ally), which though currently representing the principal opposition party in the National Assembly, envisages the upcoming legislative elections with trepidation following Pécresse’s electoral débacle. Increasingly torn between its sovereignist-nativist wing on the one hand and culturally liberal wing on the other, the party appears to be faced with a similar threat of disintegration in 2022 to that which has confronted the PS since 2017.

Despite this fluid political context, the synchronization of the calendar in 2002 between presidential and legislative elections and the correlative scheduling of the latter after the former mean that the chances that the 2022 legislative elections will yield a cohabitation government formed in opposition to Macron remain quite slim. However, through its presentation of a unitary leftwing candidate in each electoral constituency, NUPES is likely to emerge as the biggest opposition to the Renaissance-MoDem coalition. Likewise, the RN is also virtually certain to make gains compared to 2017.[[126]](#footnote-126) The effective capacity of the opposition to block the government’s plans would remain largely symbolic, but the leftwing opposition—and to a lesser degree the RN—would enjoy an unprecedented perch from which to launch their attacks against the incoming government’s liberalizing program, which continues to be legitimized by Macron through reference to France’s European vocation and obligations. However, reflecting the core ideological division riving the Eurosceptic anti-globalization camp between the nativist-liberal radical right and the progressive anti-market radical left, in the short to median term the political hegemony of the liberal Europhile bloc seems assured.

However, should Macron’s liberalizing program fail to deliver the broadly-shared economic growth that he has promised and the gap between the winners and the losers from globalization continues to widen, the logic of partisan competition could well turn to the advantage of the anti-European, anti-globalization camp. At the very least, the anti-integrationist parties could form a blocking majority against a future integrationist government’s plans liberal agenda. At the most, the 2027 presidential election might yield a demarcationist winner—an outcome that cannot be ruled out given Marine Le Pen’s significant electoral progression from 2017 to 2022, not to mention the fact that Macron himself cannot re-present himself as candidate to his reelection under present constitutional rules.

In short, increasingly shorn of domestically-rooted cross-cutting identities and interests that might attenuate its salience, the demarcation-integration cleavage currently ordering French politics is only likely to grow in strength. Unless something is done to mitigate its force, it appears only a matter of time before, following the iron law of political alternation, the present integrationist, pro-European beneficiaries of this cleavage find themselves cast in the minority, taking France and the EU into uncharted political waters.

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3. Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967.) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kriesi et al, 921, and John Ruggie, “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,” *International Organization* 47 (1993), 139-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kriesi et al, 922. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kriesi, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Catherine de Vries, “Sleeping Giant: Fact or Fairytale? How European Integration Affects National Elections,” *European Union Politics* 8 (2007), 363-385. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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10. Kriesi, 86-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Kriesi, 102; Hooghe and Marks, “Postfunctionalist Theory,” 15, and Kriesi et al., 924-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kriesi, “Role,” 86-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hooghe and Marks, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Kriesi, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kriesi et al.; Kriesi; Hooghe and Marks, “Postfunctionalist Theory”; and Hutter and Grande. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. C.f. Jonathan Hopkin, *Anti-System Politics: The Crisis of Market Liberalism in Rich Democracies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 10-12, 61-67,and Gabriel Goodliffe, *The Resurgence of the Radical Right in France: From Boulangisme to the Front National* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Paul Taggart, “A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems,” *European Journal of Political Research* 33 (1998), 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 384. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. C.f. Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, “Nine Second-Order Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results,” *European Journal of Policy Research* 8 (1980), 3-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
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22. Cited in Paul Hainsworth et al., “Defending the Nation: The Politics of Euroscepticism on the French Right,” *European Studies* 20 (2004), 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Hainsworth et al., 56, 42-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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28. Bernier, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Bertrand Vayssière, “L’Union Européenne dans les dernières élections présidentielles françaises: un veritable enjeu?” *Les Cahiers d’Histoire Immédiate* 50 (2017), 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
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33. Bernier, 58, and Dehousse and Tacea, 156, 165n. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 157-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 157, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Patrick Roger, “L’exécutif choisit de s’écarter des exigences de Bruxelles.” *Le Monde*, April 10, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Alexandre Pouchard and Pierre Breteau, “Ce que contient la loi travail,” *Le Monde*, 20 July, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Gabriel Goodliffe, “Europe’s Salience and Owning Euroscepticism: Explaining the Front National’s Victory in the 2014 European Elections in France,” *French Politics* 13 (2015), 324-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Sylvie Strudel, “Emmanuel Macron: Un Oxymore Politique?” in *Le vote disruptif. Les élections présidentielle et législatives de 2017.* ed. P. Perrineau(Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 2017), 206-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Martial Foucault and Flora Chanvril-Ligneel, “Le vote François Fillon, autopsie d’un naufrage,” in *Le vote disruptif*, 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Strudel, 207, and Pierre Bréchon, “Un vote socialiste résiduel, siphonné par sa droite et sa gauche,” in *Le vote disruptif*, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Bréchon, 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Deutsche Welle, “How France’s Emmanuel Macron Wants to Reform the EU,” *dw.com*,March 16, 2018: <https://www.dw.com/en/how-frances-emmanuel-macron-wants-to-reform-the-eu/a-43002078> [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Vaissière, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Bréchon, 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Strudel, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Christophe Guilluy, *Fractures françaises* (Paris: François Bourin, 2010.) [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Macron won 39% of voters who believed that they gained from globalization but only 12% of those who felt they lost from it (compared to 26% versus 12% for Fillon and only 6% versus 5% for Hamon.) Conversely, Le Pen won 34% of voters who felt that they lost from globalization versus only 10% who felt that they gained from it (compared to 25% versus 14% for Mélenchon.) See CEVIPOF, “Vague 15: juin 2017” *L’Enquête électorale française: comprendre 2017* (June 1, 2017), 45, and Ifop, 2017, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Apart from large cities, Macron’s vote was strongest in the former Christian Democratic heartlands of the broader west and Brittany, erstwhile Socialist strongholds in the southern Massif Central and Southwest, and former bastions of the *deuxième gauche* in the Ile-de-France and Grenoble area. The contours of Le Pen’s electorate were the exact opposite, encompassing the area north of a horizontal line running from the Eure to the Meurthe-et-Moselle and the area east of a diagonal line extending from the Vosges to the Ariège. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Strudel, 215-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. AFP, “L’appel d’Emmanuel Macron pour ‘refonder l’Europe’,” *Le Point* {online} (8 Sept. 2017) : [L'appel d'Emmanuel Macron pour "refonder l'Europe" - Le Point](https://www.lepoint.fr/europe/l-appel-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-refonder-l-europe-08-09-2017-2155373_2626.php), and Emmanuel Macron, “Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur les défis et priorités de la construction européenne, à Paris le 26 septembre 2017,” *République française : Vie publique* (26 Sept. 2017) : [Prononcé le 26 septembre 2017 - Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur les d | vie-publique.fr](https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/203688-declaration-de-m-emmanuel-macron-president-de-la-republique-sur-les-d). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Thus, though they cautioned on the perhaps excessively French conception of Europe being advanced by the new President, the pro-European PS and LR generally welcomed Macron’s address. As LR deputy Philippe Gosselin put it, “Everything that goes in the direction of European renewal, of a European project on perhaps new bases, considering the Brexit and wariness {of the EU} expressed by the {European} Parliament and {European} peoples, makes sense to me. Europe is still a *raison d’être* today.” Conversely, sovereignists on both the radical left and radical right were unequivocally critical. For his part, LFI chief Jean-Luc Mélenchon criticized Macron’s vision of Europe on the grounds that it would “undo France in order to create a Europe out of disparate and incompatible elements stuck together any which way. An aggressive Europe of defense alongside a patchwork Europe, dedicated to advancing the single market in which France would have to abandon its industry, its school system, its political independence.” Meanwhile, FN president Marine Le Pen also attacked the speech, charging that Macron “wants a federal Europe, he wants more European integration, he wants us to forego even more of our {national} sovereignty.” RFI, “Discours de Macron sur l’UE : Bruxelles applaudit, réactions partagées en France,” *Radio France Internationale* (26 Sept. 2017) : [Discours de Macron sur l'UE: Bruxelles applaudit, réactions partagées en France (rfi.fr)](https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20170926-discours-macron-ue-bruxelles-applaudit-reactions-partagees-france) [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Pascal Perrineau, *Le Grand Écart. Chronique d’une Démocratie Fragmentée* (Paris: Plon, 2019), Ch. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., Ch. 4, and Gabriel Goodliffe, “Macron versus the RN? The Battle Lines of French Politics Following the 2019 European Elections,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 58 (S1): 57-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Specifically, LR won only 8.48% of the vote--compared to Fillon’s score of 20.01% in the first round of the 2017 presidential election--while the PS secured 6.19%, essentially replicating Hamon’s score from 2017. The result also testified to fragmentation on the left, where LFI dramatically underperformed compared to its 2017 result, doing little better than the PS with only 6.31%. The biggest surprise was the third-place finish secured by the Greens with 13.48%, putting them first among leftwing parties. Correlatively, the fact that the election saw the highest participation rate—50.1%--for a European election since 1994 meant that the poor results recorded by the former governing parties, as well as the high scores achieved by new or ‘outsider’ formations, could not simply be attributed to the “second-order” character historically ascribed to European elections. On the contrary, the high participation level suggested that French voters had been engaged by the preceding campaign and were keen to pronounce themselves on the kind of Europe they wanted established. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. C.f. Thomas Wieder el al., “Covid-19: la discrète bataille des masques entre la France, l’Allemagne, et l’Italie,” *Le Monde* (14 March 2020) : [Covid-19 : la discrète bataille des masques entre la France, l’Allemagne et l’Italie (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/03/14/covid-19-la-discrete-bataille-des-masques-entre-la-france-l-allemagne-et-l-italie_6033075_3234.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. France 24, “Emmanuel Macron annonce une coopération européenne pour lutter contre le coronavirus,” *France 24* (10 March 2020) : [Emmanuel Macron annonce une coopération européenne pour lutter contre le coronavirus (france24.com)](https://www.france24.com/fr/20200310-en-direct-emmanuel-macron-s-exprime-sur-l-%C3%A9pid%C3%A9mie-de-coronavirus) [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Rebecca Foreman and Elias Mossalios, “The EU Response to COVID-19: From Reactive Politics to Strategic Decision-Making,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 59 (Annual Review): 60-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. An investigationinto the EU’s vaccine procurement program revealed that the EU had negotiated a price of less than $2 per vaccine for the Oxford-Astrazeneca vaccine versus $4 for the US. Likewise, it negotiated a $15 price per vaccine with Pfizer-BioNTech compared to $20 for the US. This led one seasoned EU observer, Gertram Wolff of the Breugel think tank, to charge that the EU’s “stingy approach {had} cost lives.” Jillian Deutsch and Sarah Wheaton, “How Europe Fell Behind on Vaccines,” *Politico* (27 Jan. 2021): [How Europe fell behind on vaccines – POLITICO](https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-coronavirus-vaccine-struggle-pfizer-biontech-astrazeneca/). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Virginie Malingre, “Coronavirus: la Commission européenne pousse les États à intervenir sans limite,” *Le Monde* (14 March 2020): [Coronavirus : la Commission européenne pousse les Etats à intervenir sans limite (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/03/14/coronavirus-la-commission-europeenne-pousseles-etats-a-intervenir-sans-limite_6033065_3234.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. The former, with the initial support of Germany, called for using the European Stability Mechanism established in 2012 during the European debt crisis, and which predicated the attribution of aid on recipients’ implementation of austerity and structural reform programs to restore their budget and trade balances as called for under the Stability Pact, to help the latter negotiate crisis. Meanwhile Sàom and Italy, with the support of France and seven other EU countries, flatly refused conditional assistance, calling instead for the creation of an EU-wide ‘coronabond’ that effectively mutualized the debt contracted to fight the economic downturn. Isabel Mandraud et al., “Coronavirus: les divisions de l’Union européenne la placent face à “un danger mortel.” *Le Monde* (1 April 2020): [Coronavirus : les divisions de l’Union européenne la placent face à un « danger mortel » (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/04/01/coronavirus-les-divisions-de-l-union-europeenne-la-placent-face-a-un-danger-mortel_6035118_3210.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Underlining the gravity of the threat, 94 year-old former European Commission President Jacques Delors, widely regarded as the father of modern Europe, warned that, unless EU members were able to conjure up sufficient solidarity in the face of the crisis, the Union was in “mortal danger” of fracturing apart. “The microbe [of national selfishness] is back,” he observed. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Under the agreement, which involved considerable haggling between the northern ‘frugal four’ and southern member states, €390 billion was to be delivered in the form of grants and €360 made available in loans from 2021 through 2023. In order to satisfy the ‘frugal four,’ as a requirement for receiving aid recipient countries would have to submit structural reform and fiscal consolidation programs for approval by the European Council before they could access the funds. The €750 billion fund would be raised by European Commission on behalf of the EU-27, effectively mutualizing the debt contracted to assist the member states. European Council, “Special European Council, 17-21 July 2020,” *Council of the European Union* (21 July 2020): [Special European Council - Consilium (europa.eu)](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2020/07/17-21/). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Some, including German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, went so far as to depict the agreement as Europe’s ‘Hamiltonian Moment’ in allusion to the point in 1790 when the U.S. federal government, under the auspices of the first Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, assumed the debts of the thirteen colonies, thereby endowing the new country with a unitary economy underpinned by a common fiscal and currency union. Peter Dausend and Mark Schierttz, “Olaf Scholz: Jemand muss vorangehen,” *Die Zeit* (19 May 2020): [Olaf Scholz: "Jemand muss vorangehen" | ZEIT ONLINE](https://www.zeit.de/2020/22/olaf-scholz-europaeische-union-reform-vereinigte-staaten). See also Thomas Mayer et al., “Symposium of Views: Did Europe just Experience its Hamiltonian Moment?” *The International Economy: The Magazine of International Economic Policy* (Summer 2020): [TIE\_Su20\_EUHamiltonSymp.pdf (international-economy.com)](http://www.international-economy.com/TIE_Su20_EUHamiltonSymp.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Caroline Quevrain, “Un plan de relance ‘catastrophique pour la France’, comme l’affirme Marine Le Pen ?” *TFI* *Info* (19 Jan. 2022): [Un plan de relance européen "catastrophique pour la France", comme l'affirme Marine Le Pen ? | TF1 INFO](https://www.tf1info.fr/economie/un-plan-de-relance-europeen-catastrophique-pour-la-france-comme-l-affirme-marine-le-pen-2207610.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Agence France-Presse, “France: Macron avance le chiffre de 100 milliards d’euros pour le plan de relance,” *Mediapart* (14 July 2020) : [France: Macron avance le chiffre de 100 milliards d’euros pour le p... | Mediapart](https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/fil-dactualites/140720/france-macron-avance-le-chiffre-de-100-milliards-d-euros-pour-le-plan-de-relance). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Her exact words were: “I was surprised to see that that the European Union, which has not said a word on the issue so that we don’t really know what its utility is, the only message it sent was to condemn those who envisioned closing the borders {in response to the outbreak}, including in a temporary manner.” Quoted in William Audureau, « Les propos erronès de Marine Le Pen sur le coronavirus, l’UE et la fermeture des frontières, » *Le Monde* (26 Feb. 2020) : [Les propos erronés de Marine Le Pen sur le coronavirus, l’UE et la fermeture des frontières (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2020/02/26/les-propos-errones-de-marine-le-pen-sur-le-coronavirus-l-ue-et-la-fermeture-des-frontieres_6030951_4355770.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Charles Sapin, « Les Français mesurent l’effondrement de l’Etat, » *Le Figaro* (28 March 2020), p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Marie Bremeau, « L’Union européenne à l’épreuve du Coronavirus, » *Public Sénat* (2 April 2021) : [L’Union européenne à l’épreuve du Coronavirus | Public Senat](https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/politique/l-union-europeenne-a-l-epreuve-du-coronavirus-188418). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Radio France, “Coronavirus: ‘On voit bien que l’Union européenne est une coalition d’égoïsme,’ affirme Jean-Luc Mélenchon,” *France Info* (1 April 2020): [Coronavirus : "On voit bien que l'Union européenne est une coalition d'égoïsme", affirme Jean-Luc Mélenchon (francetvinfo.fr)](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/coronavirus-on-voit-bien-que-l-union-europeenne-est-une-coalition-d-egoisme-affirme-jean-luc-melenchon_3894297.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Speaking to *France-Inter* radio on March 21, 2020, Mélenchon expressed his desire “that the Russian vaccine be made available in France” on the grounds that “vaccines from all over the world should be used to help as many people as possible, all the people who wish to be vaccinated.” He then added: “We ourselves could have directly ordered vaccines from the Russians, as the Hungarians who are also members of the European Union have done.” Had this approach been taken, he continued, “we would have had the quantity of vaccines we wanted [but] we wouldn’t do this, not because of the vaccines, but because of the fact that Mr. Macron being the friend of Mr. Biden and Mr. Trump, he refuses to talk to the Russians.” Radio France, “Covid-19: Jean-Luc Mélenchon “souhaite qu’il y ait le vaccin russe en France,” *Franceinfo* (21 March 2020): [VIDEO. Covid-19 : Jean-Luc Mélenchon "souhaite qu'il y ait le vaccin russe en France" (francetvinfo.fr)](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/vaccin/video-covid-19-jean-luc-melenchon-souhaite-qu-il-y-ait-le-vaccin-russe-en-france_4341765.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Radio France, “‘On voit bien que l’Union européenne est une coalition d’égoïsme’,” and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, “Coronavirus : ‘une période d’éveil des consciences politiques’—Entretien avec la presse européenne,” *Mélenchon le blog* (8 May 2020) : [Coronavirus : «une période d'éveil des consciences politiques» - Entretien avec la presse européenne - Melenchon.fr](https://melenchon.fr/2020/05/08/coronavirus-une-periode-deveil-des-consciences-politiques-entretien-avec-la-presse-europeenne/). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Specifically, Mélenchon argued that since France contributed 17% to the EU budget, she would have to pay a net sum of €66 billion once the €40 billion grant was deducted from her contribution to help underwrite the plan. See Ibid. and France Inter, “Jean-Luc Mélenchon: ‘Danièle Obono fait l’objet d’un harcèlement raciste et sexiste depuis des mois,” *France Inter : Questions Politiques* (30 Aug. 2020) : [Jean-Luc Mélenchon : "Danièle Obono fait l'objet d'un harcèlement raciste et sexiste depuis des mois" (franceinter.fr)](https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/questions-politiques/questions-politiques-30-aout-2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ouest-France and AFP, “Plan européen. ‘Le pire accord’ pour Marine Le Pen, François Hollande salue ‘un progrès majeur’.” *Ouest-France* (21 July 2020) : **???** [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. One such erroneous insertion of Europe into the domestic political debate over the government’s Covid policy occurred in June 2020, when Marine Le Pen falsely declared that France “was the country in which Covid had caused the most deaths.” Similarly, in January 2021, the spokeswoman for LFI, Sophia Chirikou, made the erroneous claim that the European Commission had introduced as early as March 2019, i.e. a full year before the Covid-19 outbreak, the guidelines governing the “vaccine pass” (*le passe vaccinal*)—an official document testifying to an individual’s vaccination status as a precondition for gaining access to public services and businesses—that would be introduced in France in January 2022 and become a hot-button civil liberties issue within the national debate. Mélenchon himself continued to circulate this claim when the National Assembly debated the pass in the winter of 2021-22. Such assertions dovetailed at times with conspiracy theories that sought to implicate the EU in the epidemic’s outbreak and propagation, underscoring the extent to which some elements on the radical left and right were willing to go to mobilize Eurosceptic sentiment in order to discredit their domestic political opponents. Fabien Leboucq, « Marine Le Pen a-t-elle raison de dire que la France est le pays où le Covid a fait le plus de morts ? » *Libèration* (10 June 2020) : [Marine Le Pen a-t-elle raison de dire que la France est le pays européen où le Covid a fait le plus de morts ? – Libération (liberation.fr)](https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2020/06/10/marine-le-pen-a-t-elle-raison-de-dire-que-la-france-est-le-pays-europeen-ou-le-covid-a-fait-le-plus-_1790830/); Emma Donada, « L’Europe avait-elle prévu le ‘pass vaccinal’ dès 2019, comme le dit Jean-Luc Mélenchon, » *Libération* (29 Dec. 2021) : [L’Europe avait-elle prévu un «pass vaccinal» dès 2019, comme le dit Jean-Luc Mélenchon ? – Libération (liberation.fr)](https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/leurope-avait-elle-prevu-un-pass-vaccinal-des-2019-comme-le-dit-jean-luc-melenchon-20211229_K3GI2ZRZHVDRLCRIHWGKWWM6LE/), and Tristan Berteloot, « Covid : le complotisme fait les affaires du RN, » *Libération* (28 Nov. 2020) : [Covid : le complotisme fait les affaires du RN – Libération (liberation.fr)](https://www.liberation.fr/les-idees/2020/11/28/covid-le-complotisme-fait-les-affaires-du-rn_1806656/). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Reflecting the growing centrality that the pandemic—and by extension its effect on domestic perceptions of the EU--had come to assume within the French political debate, an ELABE survey from April 2021 (i.e. approximately one year after the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in France and roughly a year out from the 2022 presidential election) showed that 69% of the French regarded the EU as having been “inadequate to the task” (*pas à la hauteur*) in its response to the pandemic, with 32% asserting that it had been “totally” inadequate to the task. ELABE, “Les Français, l’Union européenne et l'épidémie de covid-19,” *Etudes & Sondages, Non-Classés* (April 8 2021) : [Les Français, l'Union européenne et l'épidémie de covid-19 (elabe.fr)](https://elabe.fr/ue-epidemie-covid19/). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. This was notably the finding of an Ipsos Sopra-Storia survey taken in January 2022, which found that for 42% of respondents, the socioeconomic crisis, conceived in terms of the stagnation of their purchasing power, the rise of income inequality, and the perceived lack of social mobility, was their principal preoccupation going into the campaign. This was followed by, for 33% of respondents, the country’s looming environmental crisis, and for 25%, the country’s identitarian crisis. See Victor Vasseur and Yaël Goosz, “Présidentielle : la crise sociale et le pouvoir au cœur des préoccupations, selon notre sondage, » *France Inter* (23 Jan. 2022) : [Présidentielle : la crise sociale et le pouvoir d'achat au cœur des préoccupations, selon notre sondage (franceinter.fr)](https://www.franceinter.fr/politique/presidentielle-la-crise-sociale-et-le-pouvoir-d-achat-au-coeur-des-preoccupations-selon-notre-sondage). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. As of this writing, enforcement of these rules under the Eurozone’s Stability Pact is set to resume at the end of 2022.Virginie Malingre, « L’Europe prête à prolonger la suspension du pacte de stabilité jusqu’à fin 2022, » *Le Monde* (3 March 2021) : [L’Europe prête à prolonger la suspension du pacte de stabilité jusqu’à fin 2022 (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2021/03/03/l-europe-prete-a-prolonger-la-suspension-du-pacte-de-stabilite-jusqu-a-fin-2022_6071812_3234.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. These policies included making massive investments in green technologies, nationalizing and providing essential services like water, transport and electricity for free, providing a universal basic income at €850/month for all people above the age of 18 while raising the minimum wage by 10%, limiting the work week to four days, and broadly breaking with a ‘productivist’ model of society driven by conspicuous consumption in favor of an environmentally sustainable low-growth economic model oriented toward the provision of human services versus the production of consumer goods. Le Monde, “Primaire écologiste: prix de l’essence, ISF climatique, revenu d’existence… Ce qu’il faut retenir du dernier débat Rousseau-Jadot,” *Le Monde* (24 Sept. 2021): [Primaire écologiste : prix de l’essence, ISF climatique, revenu d’existence… Ce qu’il faut retenir du dernier débat Rousseau-Jadot (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2021/09/24/primaire-ecologiste-rousseau-souhaite-augmenter-le-prix-de-l-essence-entre-6-a-10-centimes-le-litre-par-an-irrealiste-selon-jadot_6095850_6059010.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. In this sense, the Green presidential primary of the fall 2022 was reminiscent, within the French political context, of the fundamental division between the ‘Fundi’ and ‘Realo’ factions that rove the German Green party during the 1980s and 1990s. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. For an excellent account of the internal programmatic and strategic divisions that emerged within the PS during Hollande’s term of office and their persistance beyond the party’s 2017 electoral wipeout, see the series of articles by Gérard Davet and Fabrice Lhomme under the rubric “PS, sept ans de trahisons: une série en articles,” *Le Monde* (Aug.-Sept. 2019.) [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Françoise Fressoz, “Anne Hidalgo ne sait plus à quel héritage se vouer,” *Le Monde* (14 Dec. 2021): [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Clara Bauer-Babef, “French candidate Hidalgo ‘profoundly’ pro-European,” *EURACTIV France* (21 Jan. 2022): [French candidate Hidalgo ‘profoundly’ pro-European – EURACTIV.com](https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/french-candidate-hidalgo-profoundly-pro-european/). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Specifically, echoing themes that would be raised by Marine Le Pen and especially Éric Zemmour during the campaign, Ciotti warned of an impending “war of civilization” as a result of the supposed Islamization of French society, drawing on the radical right’s theory of the “great replacement” (*grand remplacement*) according to which progressive political and economic elites since the 1980s had worked to gradually replace the autochthonous white and Christian population with non-white Muslim immigrants for electoral and financial gain. Echoing the far right, Ciotti embraced the concept of ‘national preference’ as a criterion for accessing jobs and housing, called for instating pure *jus sanguinis* as a basis for citizenship transmission, and advocated officially enshrining the “Judeo-Christian origins” of the French nation in the constitution. In debating Pécresse prior to the second-round runoff in the primary, Ciotti argued that victory for LR in the elections would not come from adopting a strategy of centrist triangulation which aped that pursued by Emmanuel Macron and LREM since 2017, but instead by leaning hard into cultural and identitarian issues as Nicolas Sarkozy had done in the 2007 campaign, a strategy that had enabled him to win the presidency by siphoning off FN voters. To underscore the point, Ciotti affirmed that in the case of a second-round runoff opposing Zemmour and Macron in the presidential election, he would unhesitatingly cast his ballot in favor of the former: “The diagnosis that Eric Zemmour has made {of the current situation in France} in many respects I share. We could even say that I arrive at the same diagnosis… What differentiates us are our proposals” to resolve the problem. See Solenn de Royer, “Congrès des Républicains : Eric Ciotti perd l’investiture mais gagne la bataille des idées,” *Le Monde* (4 Dec. 2021) : [Congrès des Républicains : Eric Ciotti perd l’investiture mais gagne la bataille des idées (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2021/12/04/election-presidentielle-2022-eric-ciotti-perd-l-investiture-lr-mais-gagne-la-bataille-des-idees_6104725_6059010.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Solenn de Royer, “Présidentielle 2022: chez LR, la course à l’échalote souverainiste, » *Le Monde* (29 Oct. 2021) : [Présidentielle 2022 : chez LR, la course à l’échalote souverainiste (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/10/29/presidentielle-2022-chez-lr-la-course-a-l-echalote-souverainiste_6100327_823448.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Eric Zemmour in particular fit this bill. His nativist liberal discourse, marrying fiscal conservativism with strongly identitarian and dracononian law-and-order proposals, was tailor-made to appealed to more culturally conservative or traditionalist bourgeois voters who were increasingly dissatisfied with the perceived *mollesse* (laxity) with which the UMP and then LR had approached the twin issues of immigration and crime since the early 2000s. See Sarah Belouazzane and Solenn de Royer, « Débat Les Républicains : l’ombre d’Eric Zemmour n’en finit pas de planer sur la droite, » *Le Monde* (22 Nov. 2021) : [Articles du journal Le Monde pour “Débat Les Républicains : l’ombre d’Eric Zemmour n’en finit pas de planer sur la droite”](https://www.lemonde.fr/recherche/?search_keywords=D%C3%A9bat+Les+R%C3%A9publicains+%3A+l%E2%80%99ombre+d%E2%80%99Eric+Zemmour+n%E2%80%99en+finit+pas+de+planer+sur+la+droite&start_at=19%2F12%2F1944&end_at=12%2F05%2F2022&search_sort=relevance_desc). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Le Figaro, “Présidentielle 2022: le programme de Jean-Luc Mélenchon, » *Le Figaro* (11 April 2022) : [Présidentielle 2022 : le programme de Jean-Luc Mélenchon (lefigaro.fr)](https://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/presidentielle-2022-jean-luc-melenchon-candidat-20211012). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Le Figaro, “Présidentielle 2022: le programme de Fabien Roussel, » *Le Figaro* (11 April 2022) : [Présidentielle 2022 : le programme de Fabien Roussel (lefigaro.fr)](https://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/presidentielle-2022-fabien-roussel-candidat-20211014). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. These included abolishing the free movement of persons by abrogating the Schengen Accord; reinstituting border controls on the circulation of goods; drastically cutting France’s contribution to the European budget; instituting the principle of national preference in the attribution of jobs, housing and welfare benefits; ending the EU’s posted worker directive; and establishing the principle of national preference in public procurement. See Romain Imbach and Manon Romain, « Derrière le programme européen de Marine Le Pen, de lourdes sanctions financières ou un ‘Frexit’ deguisé, » *Le Monde* (18 April 2022) : [Marine Le Pen : derrière son programme européen, de lourdes sanctions financières ou un « Frexit » déguisé (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/04/18/derriere-le-programme-europeen-de-marine-le-pen-de-lourdes-sanctions-financieres-ou-un-frexit-deguise_6122681_4355770.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ivanne Trippenbach and Franck Johannès, “Marine Le Pen: un programme fondamentalement d’extrême droite derrière une image adoucie, » *Le Monde* (31 March 2022) : [Marine Le Pen : un programme fondamentalement d’extrême droite derrière une image adoucie (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/03/31/presidentielle-2022-derriere-la-normalisation-de-marine-le-pen-un-projet-qui-reste-d-extreme-droite_6119942_6059010.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Specifically, Zemmour called for France to veto any free trade treaty that was proposed by the EU, to block any new transfer of national competence to the European level, to enshrine the primacy of national over supranational law, and to definitively end the accession process of the Turkey to the EU. Similarly, his overtly xenophobic anti-Muslim prescriptions, including banning the headscarf in public, prohibiting the construction of new mosques and minarets, and expelling from the country any foreigner who presented a potential threat, flew in the face of the constitutional guarantees of individual equality and freedom from discrimination that were enshrined in EU Law. Le Figaro, “Présidentielle 2022: le programme d’Eric Zemmour, » *Le Figaro* (11 April 2022) : [Présidentielle 2022 : le programme d'Éric Zemmour (lefigaro.fr)](https://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/presidentielle-2022-eric-zemmour-candidat-20211130) [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Franck Johannès, “Election présidentielle 2022: l’extrême droite à l’assaut de l’Europe, » *Le Monde* (29 Oct. 2021) : [Election présidentielle 2022 : l’extrême droite à l’assaut de l’Europe (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/10/29/election-presidentielle-2022-l-extreme-droite-a-l-assaut-de-l-europe_6100332_823448.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. These reforms include consummating the stalled pension reform of 2019 by simplifying the country’s various retirement schemes to guarantee a minimum pension of €1100/month whilst extending the retirement age from 62 to 65, introducing a workfare requirement for the long-term unemployed to access the *Revenu* *de* *Solidarité* *Active* welfare benefit, centralizing all social benefits under a single system, and further cutting taxes on businesses and households. See Angelique Chrisafis, “Emmanuel Macron Vows to Step Up Welfare Reforms if Elected,” *The Guardian* (17 March 2022): [Emmanuel Macron vows to step up welfare reforms if re-elected | France | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/17/emmanuel-macron-vows-to-step-up-welfare-reforms-if-re-elected?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Olivier Faye, « Election présidentielle 2022 : Macron l’Européen mise sur sa différence face au souverainisme ambiant, » *Le Monde* (29 Oct. 2021) : [Election présidentielle 2022 : Macron l’Européen mise sur sa différence face au souverainisme ambiant (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/10/29/election-presidentielle-2022-macron-l-europeen-mise-sur-sa-difference-face-au-souverainisme-ambiant_6100293_823448.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Le Monde and AFP, « Election présidentielle 2022 : sur le terrain, Marine Le Pen fait du pouvoir d’achat son sujet principal de campagne, » *Le Monde* (19 March 2022) : [Election présidentielle 2022 : sur le terrain, Marine Le Pen fait du pouvoir d’achat son sujet principal de campagne (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/03/19/election-presidentielle-2022-sur-le-terrain-marine-le-pen-fait-du-pouvoir-d-achat-son-sujet-principal-de-campagne_6118290_823448.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Claire Gatinois et Virginie Malingre, « L’Europe au cœur de la future campagne d’Emmanuel Macron, » *Le Monde* (9 Dec. 2021) : [L’Europe au cœur de la future campagne d’Emmanuel Macron (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/12/09/emmanuel-macron-veut-mettre-l-europe-au-c-ur-de-sa-future-campagne_6105273_823448.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Brice Teinturier, « Guerre en Ukraine : une inquiétude massive qui domine dans l’élection présidentielle, » *Le Monde* (5 March 2022) : [Guerre en Ukraine : une inquiétude massive qui domine dans l’élection présidentielle (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/03/05/guerre-en-ukraine-une-inquietude-massive-qui-domine-tout-dans-l-election-presidentielle_6116251_823448.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Jean-Pierre Darnis, « la relance de la défense européenne et le conflit en Ukraine. Dynamiques et paradoxes, » *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique. Note 15/22* (28 March 2022) : [Microsoft Word - Format note\_UKR et Défense européenne(1).docx (frstrategie.org)](https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/notes/2022/202215.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ivanne Trippenbach, “Marine Le Pen et Eric Zemmour rappellent leur inclination pro-Poutine dans la crise ukrainienne, » *Le Monde* (8 Feb. 2022) : [Marine Le Pen et Eric Zemmour rappellent leur inclination pro-Poutine dans la crise ukrainienne (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/02/08/dans-la-crise-ukrainienne-eric-zemmour-et-marine-le-pen-rappellent-leur-inclination-pro-poutine_6112784_6059010.html). In Le Pen’s case, such criticisms extended to highlighting and questioning her longstanding ties to the Russian state. These included multiple visits to Russia, including three official appearances before the Russian Douma from 2013 to 2015 and an official reception by Putin at the Kremlin in March 2017, as well as having contracted a €9.4 million loan in 2014 from a Russian-Czech bank in order to finance the FN’s regional and departmental election campaigns, as well as benefiting from a €2 million loan from a Russian-owned offshore company registered in Cyprus to help finance the party’s 2017 presidential campaign. See Romain Geoffroy and Maxime Vaudano, « What are Marine Le Pen’s Ties to Vladimir Putin?” *Le Monde* (21 April, 2022) : [What are Marine Le Pen's ties to Vladimir Putin's Russia? (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2022/04/21/what-are-marine-le-pen-s-ties-to-vladimir-putin-s-russia_5981192_8.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Though both condemned the invasion, Marine Le Pen immediately called on France to welcome Ukrainian war refugees while Zemmour, no doubt to buttress his reputation as the staunchest opponent of immigration among the candidates, initially refused to accept them, arguing instead that the countries bordering Ukraine should take them in. This position proved electorally ruinous, inaugurating an inexorable slide in the polls for Zemmour which he would never be able to reverse. Ivanne Trippenbach, « Avec la guerre en Ukraine, la campagne d’Eric Zemmour minée par le doute, » *Le Monde* (5 March 2022) : [Avec la guerre en Ukraine, la campagne d’Eric Zemmour minée par le doute (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/03/05/election-presidentielle-2022-avec-la-guerre-en-ukraine-la-campagne-zemmour-minee-par-le-doute_6116318_6059010.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. For example, characterizing Mélenchon’s condemnation of NATO expansion as a way of objectively supporting the Russian invasion, Green candidate Yannick Jadot observed: “Jean-Luc Mélenchon never fails in showing his complacency towards Putin. He invariably repeats the Russian propaganda according to which, at base, Putin was pushed by NATO into militarily attacking Ukraine.” For her part, PS candidate Anne Hidalgo was even less restrained in her criticism, accusing Mélenchon in an interview with *L’Express* magazine of being an “agent” who served “the interests of Putin.”

 Admitting that he had been “mistaken” in his predictions that Russia would not invade Ukraine and condemning the invasion as “an initiative of pure violence betraying a will to power that knew no bounds,” Mélenchon nevertheless refused to renounce his anti-NATO stance. Charging his rivals on the pro-EU and pro-NATO left with “playing the violin to the Pax Americana,” he doubled down on his *tiers-mondiste* conviction that “NATO represented the camp of the defeated” and that therefore “another alliance was necessary{, a}nother France was needed to advance on the international stage.” Thus, Mélenchon simultaneously blamed Russia for launching the war while continuing to argue that NATO expansion up to Russia’s borders had laid the structural conditions for the Russian attack. See Sarah Belouezzane et al., « Election présidentielle 2022 : le clivage russe, terrain d’affrontements des candidats, » *Le Monde* (2 March 2022) : [Election présidentielle 2022 : le clivage russe, terrain d’affrontement des candidats (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/03/02/election-presidentielle-2022-le-clivage-russe-terrain-d-affrontement-des-candidats_6115790_823448.html), Julie Carriat and Jérôme Talpin, « Guerre en Ukraine : Jean-Luc Mélenchon contraint de changer de position face à la Russie, » *Le Monde* (24 Feb. 2022) : [Guerre en Ukraine : Jean-Luc Mélenchon contraint de changer de position face à la Russie (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/02/24/guerre-en-ukraine-jean-luc-melenchon-contraint-de-changer-de-position-face-a-la-russie_6115146_6059010.html) and Jérôme Talpin,  « Guerre en Ukraine : Jean-Luc Mélenchon reconnaît ‘une erreur’ mais se moque des ‘exploits’ d’Emmanuel Macron, » *Le Monde* (27 Feb. 2022) : [Guerre en Ukraine : Jean-Luc Mélenchon reconnaît « une erreur » mais se moque des « exploits » d’Emmanuel Macron (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/02/27/guerre-en-ukraine-jean-luc-melenchon-reconnait-une-erreur-mais-se-moque-des-exploits-d-emmanuel-macron_6115453_6059010.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Some commentators also worried that, by reinforcing Macron’s presidential stature relative to the other candidates in dealing with the gravest military crisis to overtake Europe since the Second World War, the war was rendering the campaign a “non-event” and inexorably paving the way for his reelection absent a proper debate concerning his policy and governing record. Benoît Floc’h et al., « Election présidentielle 2022 : dominée par la guerre en Ukraine, la campagne se cherche, » *Le Monde* (7 March 2005) : [Election présidentielle 2022 : dominée par la guerre en Ukraine, la campagne se cherche (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/03/07/presidentielle-2022-dominee-par-la-guerre-en-ukraine-la-campagne-se-cherche_6116405_823448.html) ; Abel Mestre, « Election présidentielle 2022 : les effets majeurs de la guerre en Ukraine sur le jeu électoral, » *Le Monde* (5 March 2022) : [Election présidentielle 2022 : les effets majeurs de la guerre en Ukraine sur le jeu électoral (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/03/05/election-presidentielle-2022-a-un-peu-plus-d-un-mois-du-premier-tour-la-guerre-en-ukraine-rebat-les-cartes_6116248_6059010.html), and Teinturier, “Guerre en Ukraine : Une inquiétude massive qui domine dans l’élection présidentielle. » [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. For the Greens the 2022 presidential race thus marked a considerable regression from their performance in the 2019 European elections, in which they had placed third with 13.5% of the vote, as well as in the 2020 municipal elections, in which the party had won a number of key provincial cities such as Lyon, Bordeaux, Strasbourg and Grenoble, as well as participated in victorious electoral coalitions in Paris and Marseille. In this sense the 2022 presidential election confirmed the impression that voters did not view EELV as ready to assume a national leadership role, let alone to install it as the dominant electoral force on the French left. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. The coalescing of these parties around Macron and LREM was to be seen in the fact that their candidates all unanimously called for their voters to support the outgoing president versus Marine Le Pen in the second-round runoff. This was in marked contrast to the admonition given by Jean-Luc Mélenchon who, though repeating that not a single one of his voters should support Le Pen in the runoff, did not explicitly recommend that they choose in favor of Macron. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. To this total could arguably be added the vote tally of the deputy Jean Lassalle (3.13%) on account of his proposals to expand France’s sovereign autonomy vis-à-vis the EU. However, I have elected to not categorize Lassalle within this bloc because he conceives of himself as a ‘radical centrist’ and repudiates the nativism characteristic of the radical right. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. In this last respect, there was considerable variance between the economic program advanced by Eric Zemmour, who advocated for substantial tax reductions, spending cuts and generally favored pro-market economic policies, at least at home, and the much more interventionist, even statist, and redistributive agenda defended by Marine Le Pen, to be implemented according to the exclusionary criteria of welfare chauvinism. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. The 2022 presidential election marked the second-highest level of abstention recorded in the first round in the history of the Fifth Republic after the high of 28.4% attained in 2002, which saw the FN candidate accede to the second-round run-off for the first time. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Though substantial, this margin was just over half the 32% margin of victory recorded by Macron over Le Pen in the second round in 2017. Similarly, in 2022, 43% of voters who supported Macron in the second round did so not because they favored the president’s program but because they wanted to prevent Marine Le Pen from acceding to the presidency as opposed to 57% in 2017. This would suggest that, though substantial, the breadth of the ‘republican front’ erected to block the accession of the far right to power in the second round had diminished by 14% between the two sets of elections. See Ifop, “Présidentielle 2022—Sondage du jour du vote: profil des électeurs et clés du scrutin (2nd tour), » *Ifop pour TFI-LCI-Paris Match-Sud Radio* (24 April 2022) : 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Underscoring Macron’s domination among these voters, Mélenchon came second among this category of voters with 14%. Ifop, “Présidentielle 2022—Sondage Jour de Vote (1er tour): 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. The appeal of both Mélenchon and Le Pen among the most socioeconomically vulnerable categories was confirmed by the fact that they received their greatest majorities in France’s relatively deprived and poor overseas departments, with Mélenchon taking four out of five of these in the first round and Le Pen repeating this performance—many by substantial margins—in the second round. See Patrick Roger, “Election présidentielle 2022: pourquoi les outre-mer ont largement voté en faveur Marine Le Pen,” *Le Monde* (26 April 2022): [Election présidentielle 2022 : pourquoi les outre-mer ont largement voté en faveur de Marine Le Pen (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/26/election-presidentielle-2022-dans-les-outre-mer-le-choc-du-vote-le-pen_6123741_6059010.html#xtor=AL-32280270-[mail]-[ios]), and Patrick Roger, “Election présidentielle 2022: La France insoumise largement en tête en outre-mer,” *Le Monde* (12 April 2022): [Election présidentielle 2022 : La France insoumise largement en tête en outre-mer (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/04/12/election-presidentielle-2022-la-france-insoumise-largement-en-tete-en-outre-mer_6121801_823448.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Joseph Confavreux and Fabrice Escalona, “Les électeurs de gauche face aux dilemmes du ‘vote utile’,” *Mediapart* (10 March 2022): [Les électeurs de gauche face aux dilemmes du « vote utile » | Mediapart](https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/100322/les-electeurs-de-gauche-face-aux-dilemmes-du-vote-utile?utm_source=global&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=SharingApp&xtor=CS3-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. See Table 3 above and Ifop, “Présidentielle 2022”, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. In particular, Mélenchon made major inroads in the heavily immigrant-populated urban *banlieues*, among whose populations his message of cultural tolerance combined with socioeconomic redistribution particularly resonated. Thus, whereas in 2017 he had only won the department of Seine-Saint Denis in the first round, in 2022 to this he added four more of the eight departments of the Ile-de-France with substantial immigrant populations: the Val-de-Marne, the Seine-et-Marne, the Essonne, and the Val-d’Oise. The scores he garnered in certain towns with large immigrant populations were even more striking. Thus, in the emblematic department of the Seine-Saint-Denis, he won close to 64% in La Courneuve, 61% in Saint-Denis, 55% in Montreuil, 54% in Pantin, and 54% in Villepinte. Julie Carriat, “Urbain, jeune, Populaire, les contours du nouvel électorat de Jean-Luc Mélenchon,” *Le Monde* (12 April 2022): [Urbain, jeune et populaire, les contours du nouvel électorat de Jean-Luc Mélenchon (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/12/urbain-jeune-et-populaire-les-contours-du-nouvel-electorat-de-jean-luc-melenchon_6121785_6059010.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Perrineau, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Carriat, “Les contours du nouvel électorat de Jean-Luc Mélenchon.” [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Ifop pour TFI-LCI-Paris Match-Sud Radio, « Présidentielle 2022—Sondage jour du vote : Profil des électeurs et clés du scrutin (2nd tour), » *Ifop* (24 April 2022) : 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Hooghe and Marks, “Postfunctionalist Theory,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. The latest Eurobarometer poll for Winter 2021-2022 highlights the rise of Eurosceptic sentiment in France over the previous year. In answer to the question, “Do you tend to trust or not to trust the EU?”, only 32% of respondents in France answered that they tended towards trust (compared to 47% in the Union as a whole), marking a 4% decline from the latest iteration of the poll taken in summer 2021, while 56% responded that they tended toward distrust (compared to 44% for the EU-27), a 6% increase from summer 2021. Similarly, in response to the question, “Does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative, or very negative image?”, 36% of French respondents answered that it conjured up a positive image (compared to 44% for the EU-27), marking a 6% decline since summer 2021. Meanwhile, 37% of respondents in France had a neutral image of the EU (versus 38% in the EU-27), a proportion unchanged from summer 2017. Lastly, those for whom the EU evoked a negative image had risen to 26% (versus 17% in the EU-27), a 5% increase over summer 2021. European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 96.3: Winter Eurobarometer 2021-2022: France Datasheet,” (April 2022): [Standard\_Eurobarometer\_96\_Winter\_2021-2022 Datasheet for France.pdf](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CGabriel%5CDropbox%5CDocuments%5CFrance%202022%20Elections%5CStandard_Eurobarometer_96_Winter_2021-2022%20Datasheet%20for%20France.pdf): 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Reflecting the electoral balance of power issuing from the presidential election, under the agreement LFI would designate the candidates representing the left in 325 constituencies, EELV in 100 constituencies, the PS in 70 constituencies, and the PCF in 50 constituencies, with those for the remaining 32 constituencies to be decided later. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Guy Dagorn, “Qu’impliquerait la ‘désobéissance’ aux règles européennes promue par la Nupes ? » *Le Monde* (10 May 2022): [Qu’impliquerait la « désobéissance » aux règles européennes promue par la Nupes ? (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/05/10/qu-impliquerait-la-desobeissance-aux-regles-europeennes-promue-par-la-nupes_6125509_4355770.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Critics of the accord within both formations, including the official candidates whom they had designated to run for the presidency, Jadot and Hidalgo, as well as a number of former Socialist barons close to former president François Hollande, were left out of the agreement, leaving their immediate political futures uncertain. One obvious move would be for them to follow former centrist dissidents from within their parties into the broad fold of the pro-market, pro-Europe camp led by Macron and his former LREM party, now rechristened Renaissance, in view of the 2022 legislative elections. Laurent Telo, “Au Parti socialiste, le cimetière des ‘éléphants’,” *Le Monde* (10 May 2022): [Au Parti socialiste, le cimetière des « éléphants » (lemonde.fr)](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/05/10/le-parti-socialiste-au-cimetiere-des-elephants_6125407_823448.html), [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. According to an OpinionWay-Kéa Partners survey conducted from 5 to 9 May 2022 confirmed this scenario: LREM and its allies would win a majority of between 310 and 350 seats, followed by a tranche of between 135 and 165 seats for the NUPES coalition, 50 to 70 for LR, 20 to 40 for the RN, and between five and 10 for other formations, confirming this scenario. Alexandre Rousset, “Sondage Exclusif—Législatives: Emmanuel Macron bien parti pour conserver une large majorité à l’Assemblée,” *Les Echos* (10 May 2022): [SONDAGE EXCLUSIF - Législatives : Emmanuel Macron bien parti pour conserver une large majorité à l'Assemblée | Les Echos](https://www.lesechos.fr/elections/sondages/sondage-exclusif-legislatives-emmanuel-macron-conserverait-une-large-majorite-a-lassemblee-1406064). [↑](#footnote-ref-126)