

Georgina Wright

*Senior Fellow and Deputy Director for International Studies,
Institut Montaigne
@GeorginaEWright*

“I will fight every day to improve the European Union and to defend it”. That was French President Emmanuel Macron’s promise ahead of the last European Parliament (EP) elections in 2019. Five years later, his promise has turned into a **stark warning**: the European Union (EU) must make bold choices to “adapt” to new geopolitical realities or risk “dying”. European citizens face a choice between electing politicians who want a stronger EU or opting for those who want to break it.

For many French citizens, the June EU elections are not really about Europe. Rather, they are about voicing their support for or discontent with the president and the government. Worse still, **a recent poll by Odoxa** shows that about 20% of French voters do not know the election is happening and that around 50% of eligible voters are thinking of abstaining. These numbers are a blow to a French president who has made the EU a cornerstone of his domestic and foreign policy. The result is largely a foregone conclusion. **Late April 2024 polling by IPSOS**, another French company, suggests that Marine Le Pen’s far-right party *Rassemblement National* (RN) is expected to gain more than 30% of seats, with Macron’s list *Besoin d’Europe* trailing behind at 17% (significantly below the 22.24% they secured in 2019). Eric Zemmour’s far-right party *Reconquête* is also expected to secure 5% of the vote.

The consequences of a far-right victory in June would be significant for French national politics. Jordan Bardella, who heads the RN’s list, has already said that his party would call for a vote of no confidence in the French government and a fresh round of legislative elections. This would be bad news for Emmanuel Macron whose coalition already failed to secure a comfortable majority at the June 2022 French parliamentary elections. A slimmer majority, or the loss of it, would make it almost impossible for the French government to pass new legislation with the consent of the parliament. A strong result for the RN would also bolster Le Pen’s credentials ahead of the 2027 presidential election – but it would not necessarily guarantee her the keys to the Elysée Palace.

Such an outcome would have mixed results for France’s role inside the EU. With fewer MEPs, Macron’s support inside the EP would certainly diminish. However, France would remain a key player inside the

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European Council. There are three reasons for this. For starters, France's presidential-parliamentary system grants significant decision-making powers to the president, especially over EU affairs. Second, France is the EU's second largest member state, so its voice and opinions count. And despite his sometimes controversial statements, the French president still has more allies than enemies across EU capitals. Finally, Emmanuel Macron will do everything he can to leave in 2027 with a strong track record in Brussels as part of his legacy. To deliver on that ambition, he will need to muster the support of the rest of the EU.

A divided political landscape and little knowledge of the EU

France's political landscape is incredibly fragmented and this polarisation is visible in the polling on the EP elections. As it stands, French voters will have a choice between several lists, which include either one party (for example, the centre-right *Les Républicains*) or a group of parties (for example, the *Ensemble* list, which includes four centrist parties: Macron's *Renaissance*, former French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's *Horizon*, former Justice Minister François Bayrou's *MoDem* and Jean-Christophe Lagarde's *UDI* - Union of Democrats and Independents). Only those lists securing at least 5% of the vote will be able to send their MEPs to the European Parliament.

The RN is currently leading the polls with over 30% of voter intention. It is followed by Macron's centrist *Ensemble* list at 17% and Glucksmann's centre-left coalition of the *Parti Socialiste* and *Place Publique* at 14.3%. Far-left party *La France Insoumise*, the centre-right *Les Républicains* and the Greens are all expected to secure between 6% and 8% of the vote. Finally, *Reconquête*, another far-right party, is expected to secure 5.5% of the vote. For President Macron, anything short of 20% of the vote share would be a huge blow. This probably explains the recent flurry of Macron interviews on Europe for the *Economist*, French national newspapers and his short videos on social media where he answers questions from the public. But the reality is that it has become much harder for President Macron to single out his EU stance from that of other parties. Unlike in 2019, no French party is advocating leaving the EU – which is unsurprising given that 62% of French voters want France to remain inside the EU. This jumps to 80% for voters aged between 18 and 24 and 86% for those working in the agricultural sector.

However, polling also shows that around 57% of French citizens think the EU will be weaker in five years' time. French voters across the political spectrum are calling for changes to the way the EU operates. Only Macron's list is supportive of the EU in its current form – but even it has questioned some of the EU's recent decisions, including its stance on free trade; it has also called for fewer and smarter EU regulations.

In terms of voter concerns, immigration is a top concern in France at 41.7%, followed by climate change at 36.3% and the future of European agriculture at 35.3%. However, when asked what issues will determine their final choice in the June elections, French voters list reduced purchasing power (22%), growing immigration concerns

(15%) and a stretched healthcare system (9%) as the principal drivers. Unsurprisingly then, a lot of the election campaign has focused on whether the EU makes France more or less competitive (including on energy policy and what support it provides to French industry and agriculture); more or less safe (all parties now condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, though the far-left and far-right remain sceptical about EU defence); and more or less able to tackle major areas of concerns (such as immigration and climate change).

For a [majority of French citizens](#), this election will be the opportunity to vote on national issues, rather than European ones. Some 37% have also said they would use this vote to voice their discontent with Emmanuel Macron and/or the French government. What the campaign so far has made clear is that most French citizens do not feel like they know the EU or understand what it does. Only [24% believe](#) they are “well informed” about EU decisions. Fewer still feel France exercises any influence in Brussels.

A zoom in on the radical-right and a centre-left revival

The radical right has always tended to do well in EP elections. This year, it is expected to obtain its highest score yet. There are several reasons for this. For starters, their anti-EU rhetoric, which deterred many from casting their vote for them in 2014 and 2019, has been toned down to the point where it has almost disappeared. Neither Marine Le Pen's RN nor Eric Zemmour's *Reconquête* are calling for a “Frexit”. Instead, like most of the other parties, they have preferred to emphasise the need for “EU reform”. In reality, many of their proposals – such as leaving the EU energy market or giving French law supremacy over EU law – would go much further than simply reforming the EU. Were they to come to pass, they would alter, divide and lead the EU to a standstill – something their opponents have been keen to point out.

Second, these parties, especially the RN, are seen as the main opposition in France. Their gradual normalisation, and adept use of social media, makes them one of, if not the most, talked about parties in French politics. Jordan Bardella is now the second most popular politician in France at 38%, only 4 points behind former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe. Marine Le Pen comes third at 35%. The RN also has a lot of reach on social media platforms like TikTok. The EU Parliament Identity and Democracy (ID) group, of which RN is a member, reaches on average over [1 million users on TikTok](#). What's more, both Jordan Bardella (RN) and Marion Maréchal (*Reconquête*) are well-known in France, certainly more than Valérie Hayer, who heads Macron's list.

Third, the radical right has benefitted from the centre-right *Les Républicains'* internal divisions and loss of popular support, with many of their voters choosing to cast their vote in favour of centrist parties or the RN. Even the radical right's proximity to Russia seems not to have abated its support base. Both the RN and *Reconquête* have publicly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine – and few seem to mind the fact that [RN voted against](#) EU Parliament resolutions on providing financial and military support to Ukraine.

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On the other side of the political spectrum, Raphaël Glucksmann's centre-left list is also expected to do well – with some suggesting it will get between 14% and 16% of the vote. His call for greater action to mitigate climate change is particularly popular with younger voters, including with centre-left voters who had previously voted for Emmanuel Macron in 2017 and 2022. He is also one of the most visible politicians in the EU election campaign.

Macron: weak(er) in France but still strong inside the EU

It is far too early to say who would win France's presidential election in 2027. But certainly, Emmanuel Macron will be thinking about what legacy he wants to leave. With the rise of the radical right, Macron will probably try to cement his credentials as a key leader and visionary for the EU. France's European influence grew significantly in the first years of Macron's leadership. A lot of this was down to Macron's personal style and ideas, which he first formulated in his 2017 Sorbonne speech and continued to champion, most notably during [France's six-month EU Council presidency in 2022](#). His latest Sorbonne speech, which he gave in 2024, gave further indication of what he was hoping to accomplish over the next five years.

A weaker Macron domestically could have some implications for France's role inside the EU. For starters, it may make it harder for the French government to pass necessary reform initiatives, for example to reduce public spending and debt, which many frugal member states worry about. A more volatile and fragmented political scene could also occupy a lot of his attention, as it did for the first year of his second term. At the same time, the French president will still have a large say over EU policy and is unlikely to shy away from playing that role. Macron knows that to get anything done inside the EU, he needs the support of a majority of member states, but also to work closely with the EU Commission and the EU Parliament.

In his first year in office, Macron had visited all EU capitals. In 2019, his MEPs represented the largest delegation in the centrist parliamentary grouping Renew, which ensured his views were heard in parliament too. Finally, he also made sure he had a say over the allocation of the EU's top jobs (Von der Leyen was long seen as one of Macron's picks). While his influence inside the European Parliament is likely to take a hit, we can still expect Macron and the French government to be active and vocal inside the Council – and be heavily involved in the formation of the new EU Commission.

Whether France continues to be influential after 2027 is an open question and will depend on who becomes the next French president. For now, all bets are off.