

THE SECOND ROUND OF MACRON'S INSANE ELECTION

**Take a deep breath,
because here we go
again.**

The French legislative election is on Sunday. As the clock turns over to early Saturday morning, we entered Silence électoral, or the blackout period, when media coverage and campaigning stops ahead of Election Day. (I, being an American resident in France posting to a website in America, can do whatever.) The French themselves are trying to not pay too much attention, as there some kind of very important soccer game they won as I was writing this, and they qualified for another, even more important soccer game. Outside the window of my hotel in Lille is screaming and fireworks. There's a lot of shouting and horns blaring well after bedtime.

Anything is preferable to thinking about Macron's Great Foirage. (Though the Euros aren't just anything! They are important! Please don't burn down my house!)

As we approach the second turn of the snap legislative election in France on Sunday, it's hard to say how it's going. There is, at this moment, no obvious outcome. It's nerve wracking. Not even hopeless, which makes it even more nerve wracking. The parties, Left, Right, and Center, are playing their hands close to their chest.



NFP activists doing voter education in Lille shortly before the second turn of the French election.

The rate of procuration, the French term for a proxy vote, is at an all time high as people going on vacation make sure someone left behind can cast their vote. (Do not get in the way of French Vacation, that way lies the guillotine.) The voter participation in the first round was the highest seen in France in decades, and this Sunday might well beat it.

French people all over, including the overseas territories and residing in foreign countries, are getting in on the action, but the action is tense. There's no sense, like some have in America, that all the parties are the same, or that they'll all end up doing the same things, so why bother? No, the contesting parties in this election don't have a lot in common.

These legislative elections which will decide the composition of the French Parliament until the next election, or Macron temper tantrum, whichever comes first. (He can just throw another tantrum in a year, and there's word on the street that he might. God that man is an exhausting mess.)

How to Hack an

Election

One of the more inspiring things to come out of this season of insane election drama has been how a massive portion of France have come together to hack the vote, after this unexpected (and unforced) political crisis. In a two round run-off system there's soft assumption that the first round is there to clear out the field, and narrow it to two candidates. But if a trailing candidate gets 12.5% of the registered voters in their voting area, *they qualify in the next round*. If the third candidate stays in, they can split the vote, and let the fascist candidate in, even if most people in that constituency don't want the local Rassemblement National asshole representing them in Parliament.

The two round instant run-off isn't isn't terrible normally. (Though it's no ranked-choice voting!) It's a system that clears out candidates, *if* you assume lowish voter turnout. If voter turn out is high, the second round is just as, maybe more, chaotic as the first. Over the last week, all the parties opposing the Rassemblement National have started making tactical decisions about the second round. In districts where Macron's centrists are in the best position to beat the RN, the Left candidate dropped out of the race to prevent vote splitting. In places where, say, the Socialist or the Green has the best match up against the local fascist, the centrist left the race. (Well, mostly. A few of Marcon's people are truly gits... "Connard!" as they would say here.)

The parties organized this deal and talked to each other to sort it out within days after the first turn. They fanned people out to make sure everyone knew what to do, voters had proxies, everyone who needed help got it. But despite the second round having an unusual number of candidates, most have dropped out in favor of beating back the fascists. People who couldn't stand each other came together and talked strategy.

As an American, I found this very weird. But definitely good weird.

The campaigning itself, well, I found more familiar to my American sensibilities.

France's Toxic Grampa



Jean-Luc Mélenchon during his last try at the French Presidency in 2017.

The best way to win an election is picking your opponent, but so much of the media has done the Rassemblement National's work for them by picking Jean Luc Mélenchon to be the fascists' presumptive opponent. And that's a problem, because Socialist Grampa and Hot Mess Mélenchon is not only detested by most French, he's not actually the Left, at least not anymore. He is decidedly *out of the game* and the only people who don't know that are Mélenchon himself, a few fanboys, and journalists on a deadline with a shitty rolodex. When they talk about the political Left, the media always name checks Mélenchon. When the Right wants a boogyman, they drop Mélenchon's name and grin. He grabs the mic at any opportunity, totally unchastised by his own *three presidential electoral defeats* over the last 12 years. But he's the famous guy. It's as if we kept talking about Ralph Nader for more than a decade after the 2000 election.

Mélenchon has won a few elections in his career, holding positions and two different French electoral bodies and the EU. But he's lost a lot of elections, even more than those three

presidential runs. He has a history of saying truly stupid things. He's a boomer, he's a liability, and maybe even a bit of a narcissist. He's the classic French version of the boomer grampa politician that doesn't know when it's just time to get out of the damn way. (For clarification I am not speaking of any American boomer politician in general, I'm speaking about *literally all of them.*)

The man has become toxic, and appears too wrapped up in being the Great Left Hope to know to actually get out of the way of the people who can stop the march of the National Rally. But he's getting told and he is starting to listen. I'm still guessing there's a tiny dog involved.

Today, Mélenchon holds no position in the Nouveau Front Populaire, the current left coalition contesting this election. He doesn't even hold a position in the La France Insoumise party he founded, except for "Founder." Mélenchon's main job, as far as I can find, is a position at a think tank called Institut La Boétie which he co-runs with a French MP named Clémence Guetté, where I presume he makes the money he needs to feed his tiny dog. He is not the left. He is not Nouveau Front Populaire, he is not the former NUPES coalition.

He's just a dude with a very long wikipedia page.

**The Left is More
Competent Than
Their Messaging,
Again**



Marine Tondelier and other members of the New Popular Front. They're probably build consensus right now, something no journalist has ever experienced.

But the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) hasn't done itself any favors with the media either. Their leadership status on Facebook is "It's Complicated." The press don't like that, and the electorate doesn't understand it. They have three main people they trot out to rally the faithful, talk to the media, and debate the fascists. They are Manuel Bompard, current leader of La France Insoumise (Mélenchon's old party), Marine Tondelier, of the Greens, and Olivier Faure of the Socialists Party. (My fellow Americans do not be weirded out by the "Socialists Party." It's not what you think of as Socialism. It's indistinguishable from the Democrats, right down to the tinge of neoliberal economic theory and penchant for self-sabotage.)

Marine Tondelier was not well known as the boys until recently. But she is a goddamn boss in a green jacket. (The green jacket is a Whole Thing, people look for the green jacket to come talk to her, and she's by all accounts a great and inspiring speaker. Certainly great enough to scare the fascists, who do not like her ONE BIT.) She walked out of the tortured left negotiations before the first round and announced a coalition, come hell or high water. It's not at all clear there was one when she went and told the press, but there was by the time she finished talking.

As a French woman and a Green MP, Marine Tondelier must certainly be used to being disappointed, but making shit happen anyway. But in this case the boys.. well, they shut up. They fell in line and got to work. And there as a lot of work to do, especially by this week.

There was also this week supposed to be a debate with MidJourney Fuhrer Jordan Bardella, and Tondelier agreed to debate him. He threw a temper tantrum and declared Mélenchon was the leader of the NFP (he is not) and he would only debate Mélenchon, (who did not agree) and not the girl in a green jacket, who is *scary*. The left held their ground; it was Tondelier or no one.

It was no one; the RN walked away, reasonably concluding that she would wipe the floor with Failed Boyband Front Man Bardella.

Mélenchon, presumably aware that his little dog's life was on the line, stayed silent and had to forgo the limelight. He amazingly said no, pleading that the NFP had decided and there was nothing he could do, before glancing at a picture of the little pooch and wiping a single tear away.

(Don't @ me.)

When the King is a Coward, but His Loyal Courtier is Not.

I want to take a moment away from making fun of everyone in French politics to give props to current Renaissance Party Prime Minister, and dead man walking, Gabriel Attal. The night of the first turn of the election, the night that Le Pen's fascists won Macron's stupid and self destructive snap election, PM Attal walked to a podium in front of the office of the Prime

Minister. He did not plead or scold. He accepted what had happened, but then said that all effort had to be put on stopping the National Rally.

"The Far Right is climbing the steps to power. What we must do is clear: stopping the National Rally from achieving an absolute majority in the second round... I would call on France.. not one vote should go to the National Rally." It was after that moment the center mostly got on board with working with the left to keep the RN out of power. My dude here may very well have saved the republic – time will tell.

He is the youngest PM of the Fifth Republic, and the first openly gay person to hold the post. It seems, perhaps as a gay man, that he knew the stakes much better than his boss. He did not wait for any blessing, and none was coming. He just went out, said what had to be said, and invited the Left to help him defeat the Fascists before it was too late.

That night he proved he was too good for Macron's cabinet.

President Emmanuel Macron was not seen that night, and has said nothing since. There is definitely feeling in the air that he *might* prefer Le Pen and her Nazi fuck boy to the Left, or Mélenchon, if he also still thinks that Mélenchon is the entire left. Because why would Macron bother to understand his people? It's their duty to understand him, and they've been doing a terrible job of it.

There's no way to be sure what Macron thinks, because he decided to sulk instead of lead. It's why I've barely been able to discuss him this whole time. He vanished and took no calls. He abandoned the party he created in their true hour of need.

Turns out he went off to a spare house he has in a fancy seaside town called Le Touquet.

It's good to be the king.

■ Cette image du Président souriant,

tellement cool, tellement rock, alors qu'il a provoqué des élections qui risquent de pousser le pays dans les bras du RN (ou l'instabilité parlementaire) est une catastrophe.

Presque une provocation.

pic.twitter.com/ulz6RKSI5i

– Laurent Bazin (@laurentbazin) June 30, 2024

The Guillotine jokes just write themselves.

Macron off to visit his beach house.

Photo credit: Le Parisien

Tomorrow France will battle it out between a regressive isolationist Right that is violently afraid of everything, and a Left that *might actually* (fingers crossed) be shaking off some of their necrotic and problematic forebearers to deal with some of the very real problems France is facing. And they are real problems. Immigrants and poor people need services. The bureaucracy is failing to the point of being a human rights abuse. Someone has to balance the books after Macron's disastrous budget decisions. Climate adaptation isn't moving fast enough, and French farmers are often in conflict with both the adaptation process and the abuses of big agribusinesses. France has struggled with the cost of living, even if less than most of its peer nations. More and more cities are falling into housing crises. Much reasonable fear and demand for proactive and competent government gets channeled into destructive othering, by the like of the Far Right, but also through the entire political spectrum. But France has everything it needs to fix itself, it is a rich and well-built country. It could even do right by its former colonies, if it wanted to.

It can choose a healthy and sustainable life for its native children and its talented and lovely immigrants both. It just has to choose.

I'm going to give the last word to a thousand academics, historians, activists and general smarty pants French people who are begging the French people to do the right thing at the Guardian:

"For the first time since the second world war, the far right is at the gates of power in France. As historians from differing political backgrounds who share an attachment to democratic values and the rule of law, we cannot remain silent in the face of an alarming prospect that we still have the capacity to resist..."

Good luck France, and God Bless.