

## A Republic in Crisis - The Fallout from France's 2024 Legislative Gridlock

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January 21, 2025

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



In a recent statement, President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged the deepening political crisis in France, asserting, "My responsibility is that the country is not blocked nor weakened." This declaration came as he ruled out the possibility of appointing a left-wing prime minister; a move he argued would threaten "institutional stability."<sup>1</sup>

These remarks reflect the profound political instability that has gripped France following the snap legislative elections held in June and July 2024.

The dissolution of the National Assembly by President Macron, intended to reassert control amidst growing public dissatisfaction and political fragmentation, instead plunged the country into an unprecedented political gridlock. Observers feel that this situation threatens not only the efficacy of the French government but also the stability of the nation's democratic institutions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Macron rejects left-wing government amid France's political deadlock", Aljazeera, published on August 26, 2024.  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/26/macron-meets-marine-le-pen-amid-france-prime-minister-talks>

<sup>2</sup> Lauren Collins, "President Emmanuel Macron has plunged France into chaos", The New Yorker, published on December 7, 2024.  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/12/16/president-emmanuel-macron-has-plunged-france-into-chaos>

The elections, marred by threats, violence, and a highly polarized electorate, have left France without a clear governing majority, raising serious concerns<sup>3</sup> about the country's ability to navigate the complex challenges ahead.

Following the elections, President Macron appointed Michel Barnier as Prime Minister in September 2024. His appointment was aimed at bridging divides among centrist, conservative, and moderate left parties. However, Barnier's government faced significant resistance due to its austerity-driven 2025 budget proposal, leading to a successful no-confidence vote in December 2024—the first such vote since 1962. This resulted in Barnier's removal and the appointment of François Bayrou as the new Prime Minister later that month.<sup>4</sup>

The snap elections were a response to a series of political setbacks for the Macron government, including a poor performance in the European Union parliamentary elections held just weeks earlier. Macron's decision to dissolve the National Assembly on June 9, 2024, was a calculated risk aimed at consolidating power through fresh legislative support.<sup>5</sup> However, the gamble did not pay off. Instead of securing a dominant position, Macron's Ensemble coalition was outmanoeuvred by a newly formed left-wing alliance, the New Popular Front (NFP), which won the most seats in the election, although it still fell short of an absolute majority.

The election campaign, the shortest in French history, was characterized by intense polarization and frequent episodes of violence, with racist abuse and threats targeting candidates and canvassers alike.

Despite this, voter turnout was relatively high, reflecting the electorate's engagement with the critical issues at stake. However, the election results have led to a political impasse<sup>6</sup>, with no party or coalition able to secure the 289 seats required for an outright majority in the 577-seat National Assembly.

### The Fragmented Parliament and Coalition Building Challenges

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<sup>3</sup> Mariama Darame, "French elections: Majority-less Assemblée Nationale risks being paralyzed", Le Monde, published on July 8, 2024.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/07/08/french-elections-majority-less-assemblee-nationale-risks-being-paralyzed\\_6677999\\_5.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/07/08/french-elections-majority-less-assemblee-nationale-risks-being-paralyzed_6677999_5.html)

<sup>4</sup> "France has a new government. Now it must fix the budget while avoiding collapse", AP News, published on December 23, 2024.

<https://apnews.com/article/france-new-government-macron-ea2398230392fd433f4dd9ff11f20d83>

<sup>5</sup> Cole Stangler, "Macron's Disastrous Election", TIME, published on July 8, 2024.

<https://time.com/6995779/france-macron-disastrous-election/>

<sup>6</sup> Mariama Darame, "French elections: Majority-less Assemblée Nationale risks being paralyzed", Le Monde, published on July 8, 2024.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/07/08/french-elections-majority-less-assemblee-nationale-risks-being-paralyzed\\_6677999\\_5.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/07/08/french-elections-majority-less-assemblee-nationale-risks-being-paralyzed_6677999_5.html)

The current composition of the French National Assembly reflects deep divisions within the country. The New Popular Front (NFP), an alliance of left-wing parties including the Socialists, Greens, Communists, and La France Insoumise (LFI), emerged as the largest bloc with 188 seats. The far-right National Rally (RN), led by Marine Le Pen, secured 143 seats, solidifying its position as a formidable force in French politics. President Macron's centrist Ensemble coalition obtained 161 seats, leaving the president without a clear majority in the 577-seat Assembly.<sup>7</sup>

In the aftermath of the elections, Barnier's efforts to form a minority government were fraught with challenges. His proposed austerity budget faced significant opposition from both left and right factions in the Assembly, leading to his ouster as the Prime Minister.<sup>8</sup>

In response, President Macron appointed François Bayrou as the new Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> Bayrou's cabinet, which includes prominent figures from Macron's previous administrations, now faces similar coalition-building challenges. The Bayrou government is perceived as increasingly dependent on the National Rally for legislative support, further complicating its legitimacy and ability to govern effectively.

### **Implications for Governance and Institutional Stability**

The inability to form a stable government has profound implications for France's governance. The country is now facing the prospect of prolonged legislative paralysis at a time when decisive action is needed on critical issues, including economic reform, social welfare, and international diplomacy.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the political turmoil, a stopgap budget bill was passed in the Senate to ensure the government's functionality through January 2025. The Bayrou administration, with Finance Minister Éric Lombard, is drafting a new budget aimed at reducing France's deficit to approximately 5% of GDP

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<sup>7</sup> Cokelaere & Victor, "France election results 2024: Who won across the country", POLITICO, published on July 7, 2024.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/france-election-results-2024-map-constituencies-emmanuel-macron-marine-le-pen-live-new-popular-front-national-rally/>

<sup>8</sup> Amy Walker, "French government collapses in no-confidence vote", BBC, published on December 5, 2024.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdxz934p56qo>

<sup>9</sup> Helena Gisbert, "Macron appoints a continuity government and place Manuel Valls in the overseas portfolio", El País, published on December 23, 2024.

<https://elpais.com/internacional/2024-12-23/macron-nombra-un-gobierno-continuista-en-un-nuevo-intento-de-sacar-a-francia-del-bloqueo-politico.html>

<sup>10</sup> Angela Charlton, "France has a new government, again. Politics and crushing debt complicate next steps", AP News, published on December 24, 2024.

<https://apnews.com/article/france-macron-bayrou-government-budget-96bb8e0e1740bdaf49d98cece0fac28a>

by the end of 2025.<sup>11</sup> However, these measures must navigate the divided Assembly, further testing the government's stability.

The historical precedents of cohabitation, where the president and prime minister hailed from opposing parties, provided a framework for governance during periods of political division.

However, the current situation is markedly different. The extreme polarization and the rise of both far-left and far-right movements have eroded the traditional bases of political compromise. Macron's refusal to consider a left-wing government, coupled with the left's insistence that their candidate, Lucie Castets, should become the prime minister, sets the stage for an intense constitutional and political confrontation.

### **Public Sentiment and the Road Ahead**

The ongoing political crisis has fuelled public protests and growing disillusionment with France's democratic institutions. Citizens have criticized the frequent governmental changes and reliance on executive decrees as undermining democratic accountability.<sup>12</sup>

The appointment of Prime Minister François Bayrou marked France's fourth government in a year, reflecting the deepening political instability.<sup>13</sup>

The Bayrou administration also faces significant challenges in securing approval for the 2025 budget amid a fractured parliament. The government's survival depends on support from centrist lawmakers, amidst ongoing threats of no-confidence votes.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Moody's hands France surprise downgrade over deteriorating finances", Reuters, published on December 14, 2024.  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moodys-cuts-frances-rating-aa3-waning-public-finances-2024-12-13/>

<sup>12</sup> John Irish, "Thousands protest in France after Macron's choice of prime minister", Reuters, published on September 7, 2024.  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-france-after-macron-picks-barnier-prime-minister-2024-09-07/>

<sup>13</sup> Victor Goury-Laffont, "Yet another French government. These are the names you need to know", POLITICO, published on December 23, 2024.  
<https://www.politico.eu/article/france-new-government-prime-minister-francois-bayrou/>

<sup>14</sup> Angela Charlton, "France has a new government, again. Politics and crushing debt complicate next steps", AP News, published on December 24, 2024.  
<https://apnews.com/article/france-macron-bayrou-government-budget-96bb8e0e1740bdaf49d98cece0fac28a>

Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Rally, has stated that President Macron has lost all authority and will soon be forced to resign, potentially paving the way for an early presidential election.<sup>15</sup>

The alternative of another snap election looms large if the Bayrou administration fails to stabilize governance. However, this could exacerbate political polarization and further fragment the Assembly, making governance even more difficult.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

The ongoing political gridlock in France is not merely a test of governance but a broader challenge to the resilience of its democratic institutions. The inability to secure a stable majority has exposed deep fissures, reflecting a polarized electorate and fragmented political landscape. While Bayrou's appointment presents a temporary resolution, the reliance on contentious alliances and the challenges of passing critical legislation highlight the fragility of this arrangement.

Moving forward, France's leaders must prioritize coalition-building and political dialogue to navigate the political and legislative deadlock. The urgency of passing the 2025 budget and addressing critical issues such as economic reform and social welfare demands a united approach. Without meaningful collaboration and compromise, the risk of prolonged instability could further erode public trust in democratic institutions and jeopardize France's international standing.

However, this crisis also presents an opportunity for renewal. By fostering a spirit of bipartisanship and addressing the grievances of both the electorate and opposition parties, France can set a precedent for overcoming polarization. The stakes are high, but decisive and inclusive leadership in the coming months can pave the way for a more resilient and adaptive French Republic.

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<sup>15</sup> David Chazan, "Marine Le Pen: Macron is finished and will soon have to resign", *The Times*, published on December 18, 2024.

[https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/marine-le-pen-macron-is-finished-and-will-soon-have-to-resign-67m3f6q2t?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com&region=global](https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/marine-le-pen-macron-is-finished-and-will-soon-have-to-resign-67m3f6q2t?utm_source=chatgpt.com&region=global)

<sup>16</sup> "France awaits fourth government of the year", *news24*, published on December 22, 2024.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/world/news/france-awaits-fourth-government-of-the-year-20241222>