

Between two parties, one falls to the ground?

The effect of the French municipal elections in 2022

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The second round of the municipal elections, postponed by two months due to the coronavirus pandemic, wrapped France in green with the gains of the Ecologist Party – a possible ally for the Socialist Party for the 2022 presidential election, aiming to win the second round even without Emmanuel Macron. But who will stand on the other side? Marine Le Pen, or possibly her niece, Marion Maréchal, who has been building up her right-wing circles of intellectual capital for years? Will a new conservative right emerge with the cooperation of republicans, or will the party disappear for good after taking the greatest blow ever since 1979 – the first election of the Union – at last year’s elections to the European Parliament?

Although the second round of the municipal elections took place with extremely low participation over a month ago, the processes it triggered may thoroughly transform French domestic policy, in turn effecting the presidential election of 2022.

The election was a definite Green breakthrough. At first glance, this may seem favorable for Emmanuel Macron, but if we take a look at the results and the processes deep down, we can discover some surprises. At present, the Greens and the Socialists are becoming more and more active in drawing near. Upon seeing the Green-Socialist success in large cities, the secretary general of the Socialist Party declared a willingness on the part of the party to stand behind a Green presidential candidate. This may transform the political palette a great deal because that would mean an opponent for Emmanuel Macron right on his side from the Greens. Several of Macron’s policies coincides with those of the Greens, but the majority of them have not been feasible due to political opposition. In the spring of 2022, in case the Ecologist Party finds the right button to the coat, Macron might have to fight hard to make it to the second round of the presidential election at all, and not have it be a fight between the Greens and the radical right only.

Surveys indicate that the Socialist Party no longer conveys classical left-wing values, and the majority of French people believe that the party no longer benefits French politics. For them, the only way to survive is to team up with the Greens. Results of the municipal elections already foreshadowed the success of such a combination. This seems to squeeze out Emmanuel Macron from the left, while the Le Pen party may push him into a vacuum from the right. The only solution for him seems to be this: winning part of the right-wing camp. The republican side tries to cover that, with vanishing support for now. However, Macron will definitely need votes coming from there.

The French president will have to answer this challenge, and the changing political circumstances. The Green wave brought a transformation of government, which clearly proves Macron making steps to prepare for the 2022 elections. The president is in the middle of a sudden political maneuver, trying to move the government towards the right center. This is more of an optical, not a real ideological change of direction. Macron will have to govern the less than 600 days left in a way that will give him a chance in the 2022 elections. The liberal track followed so far does not seem to be enough, this is where opening to the right comes from. The Greens might have already found the button for the coat in Yannick Jadot, who resigned in favor of the Socialist aspirant in 2017 in order to defeat Marine Le Pen and is considered a decisive force in his party.

Based on past experiences, we may say that Marine Le Pen's party, the National Rally, is stable and unchanging. However, this does not seem all that sure right now. The radical right has lost much in terms of its presence in inland France but has remained a persuasive force in settlements with many immigrants (especially in Northern and Southeastern France). One explanation to this phenomenon is the extremely low participation at the elections. We also have to note that the standpoints of the President and Marine Le Pen drew near in topics – formerly themed by the Le Pen party – such as condemning the vandalism on statues and memorials that symbolize the colonization sweeping through Western Europe over the past weeks. Marine Le Pen was able to differentiate her opinion from that of Emmanuel Macron only by accusing him of being hard in communication only, but not being able to act.

In the meantime, many ask the question: Is Marion Maréchal, the niece of Marine Le Pen preparing for 2022 or for 2027? This Le Pen nestling, more consolidated by two generations, may even be compatible with the presidential chair in the eyes of the French.

The republicans may be in great trouble, because their historical defeat at the 2019 EU elections took them so low that – in spite of almost a year passing since the presidential election – they cannot find their own narrative on which to gain new strength.

As the 2022 presidential election approaches, more and more actors appear in the political arena, but the voters' willingness to vote across is a huge question. The year and a half left before the campaign will reveal whether or not the classic political palette will remain the same in France, or aspirants of a new national-conservative right and a green-left alliance will be up against one another for the presidential chair. And it will also reveal where Emmanuel Macron will have a place on this palette.

Municipal elections: low participation, significant effects

The second round – postponed with 3 months due to the coronavirus pandemic – of the municipal elections in France took place with extremely low, 41.6 percent participation, which is 23 percent less¹ than the turnout at the first round in the middle of March, when 30 thousand out of the 35 thousand French mayors got elected. Although precaution in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic may have also contributed to the high number of people staying away, other contributing factors must have included a range of wrong political decisions (workforce-, rail-, pension reform, ignoring Yellow vest protests), along with a loss of confidence in the president ever since the beginning of his term.

The greatest winners of the election have been the Greens for sure because they were the only ones able to gain more support. Back in the 2014 municipal elections, they only gained 313 municipal seats², but now gained 65 percent more, sending 515 representatives to the newly forming municipalities.

At the same time, Emmanuel Macron's party, *La République en Marche* proved to be a great disappointment, gaining only 624 seats in settlements with at least a thousand inhabitants, lagging way behind even the Socialists. The latter has not much reason to be optimistic, either – they were able to gain only the fourth (2,593) of the seats gained in 2014 (12,278)³.

Les Républicains also had a drastic drop of seats. The Republicans (running as UMP in 2014) gained 46 percent less seats in comparison to six years ago: only 5,152 from 11,151 seats. Although their presence in large cities has dropped considerably, they gained some strength in medium size settlements.

This voting brought a significant loss (-55%) for *Rassemblement National* as well: the party running as *Front National* in 2014 can manage 827 seats only in the next six years from the 1 498 they used to have.

¹ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/municipales/carte-resultats-des-municipales-2020-decouvrez-le-candidat-arrive-en-tete-du-second-tour-dans-votre-commune_4025771.html

² https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Élections_municipales_françaises_de_2020#Résultats

³ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Élections_municipales_françaises_de_2014#Résultats_généraux

Green turnover – with Socialist support

The voting brought a definite Green breakthrough, because the Ecologist Party took seven of the 42 largest settlements with over 100 thousand inhabitants, with strategic importance: Lyon, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Tours, Annecy, Besançon, and kept Grenoble⁴ already gained in 2014. This is a great victory, even in comparison to the municipal elections six years ago, because back then the Greens were able to gain only 333 seats⁵ countrywide. (The Ifop poll conducted before the first round of the municipal elections indicated that half of the people in settlements with over 100 hundred inhabitants would surely or most likely vote for the Green party.⁶) However, it is important to note that – with the exception of Lyon and Strasbourg – their victories in the cities listed above was due to their alliance with the Socialists made in the first round. This fact becomes even more noteworthy in light of the declaration made by Olivier Faure, the secretary general of the Socialist Party, on the day after the second round of the municipal election, saying that his party was ready to stand behind a Green presidential candidate in two years. This may transform the political palette a great deal because that would mean an opponent for Emmanuel Macron right on his side from the Greens. On his side, because regardless of how much he tries to fill the political center, Macron was built up by the left-wing capitalists.

Several of Macron's policies coincide with those of the Greens – as early as 2017, the French parliament adopted a law stating that from 2040, hydrocarbon mining, petroleum and natural gas extraction will stop in the entire country⁷. There were green campaign elements in the 2019 EP elections as well – by 2040, the French government would phase out internal combustion engines entirely.

In the spring of 2022, in case the Ecologist Party finds the right button to the coat, Macron might have to fight hard to make it to the second round of the presidential election at all, and not have it be a fight between the Greens and the radical right only. As we know, this could not have happened back in 2017, when the presidential candidate of the Greens – Yannick Jadot – stepped down in favor of the Socialists, but even with this political maneuver, they still did not make it to the second round of the presidential election.

⁴ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/la-republique-en-marche/infographies-municipales-2020-tous-les-partis-revendiquent-la-victoire-mais-qui-a-vraiment-gagne-les-elections_4029831.html

⁵ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Élections_municipales_françaises_de_2014#Contexte_général

⁶ <https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/117162-Rapport-JDD.pdf>

⁷ The country does not have a substantial hydrocarbon industry, the decision had theoretical importance.

The green wave brought a new prime minister

The same line of thought could have prompted Emmanuel Macron when he appointed Jean Castex, the right-wing mayor of Prades (elected with a broad majority right in the first round), a small town in Southern France, as head of the government. Castex used to be deputy secretary general during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy. The old UMP politician (whom the president has been keeping in the background) became responsible for easing the pandemic lockdown, and calls himself the man of dialog and agreement, with this motto: *Go to the field!* He believes that one can understand the people and assess the effect of governmental decisions only by meeting them – the citizens, the contractors, the local government representatives – personally. This was never a strong side of Macron, who falls out of his role when venturing among the people. The press has reported several embarrassing situations over the years: In 2018, he lectured a teenager on his conduct, believing that he did not address him in a way appropriate for a president at an event (in a bustling crowd), and did not answer him respectfully enough. The president later shared this incident on Twitter as well. The world also watched another initiative of his amazedly, when he picked out a young unemployed person from the crowd, took him to the bakery across the street, and said he would work there from the next day.

Jean Castex does not do role play like Macron but promises a new social agenda. The long-time due pension reform topic has to be reconsidered, considering that the world pandemic was also hard on the pension reserve funds. In addition, Castex declared that environmental protection was no longer an option, but an obligation. This includes fighting against the decreased productivity of the land, putting a stop to constant pipe bursts due to the defects of the pipe system, and gathering and using of solar energy with a wider scope. Of course, we do not know how he will handle the lobbyists against environmental protection appearing from time to time at the conference table of the president. When Nicolas Hulot, former State Secretary responsible for the ecological transition, left office, he mentioned that such discrepancies were present during his term.

A change of trends: Socialists hitting bottom, Macron shifting to the right

69 percent⁸ of the French do not expect tangible political changes until the end of this term, while 73 percent would welcome it. The majority of the opposition would have supported Edouard Philippe staying on as head of the government (Les Républicains: 78%, Greens: 75%, Socialists: 61%, Communists: 60%).⁹ At the beginning of May, even the president of the far-left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon acknowledged the suitability of Philippe – not without an ulterior motive: he wanted to highlight the inadequacy of Macron.

Former head of government, Philippe managed to conquer a settlement that had been considered a left-win bastion for three decades: Le Havre in Normandy (the Socialist, then UMP Philippe led the city for over 6 years, and was the region’s representative to the national assembly for 5 years). However, his popularity was to no avail – Macron had to find a scapegoat for the disastrous numbers of the coronavirus pandemic, and Édouard Philippe as head of the government had a high enough rank to serve as sacrifice. In addition, as early as the middle of June, Philippe talked about returning to Le Havre by 2022 the latest¹⁰ – and thus Macron replaced him with a less known old-timer.

Jean Castex’s popularity is far behind that of the former prime minister for now – only 29 of the French consider him a good choice for the head of the government position.¹¹

Emmanuel Macron did an unexpected political maneuver by putting the man formerly close to Sarkozy into the government, which is an attempt to move towards the right-center on his part but will hardly bring an ideological turn. Macron will have to govern the less than 600 days left in a way that will give him a chance in 2022. The liberal track followed so far does not seem to be enough, this is where opening to the right comes from.

The Socialists have gotten to a historical low over the last few years, and the former head of state, François Hollande, played a decisive role in their shrinking – which is not likely reversible. According to surveys, 55 percent¹² of respondents believe that the Socialist Party no

⁸ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/remaniement-65-des-francais-souhaitent-que-philippe-reste-a-matignon-20200604>

⁹ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/remaniement-65-des-francais-souhaitent-que-philippe-reste-a-matignon-20200604>

¹⁰ <https://www.paris-normandie.fr/actualites/politique/entretien-exclusif-s-il-est-reelu-maire-edouard-philippe-sera-de-retour-au-havre-au-plus-tard-en-mai-2022-MP16916309>

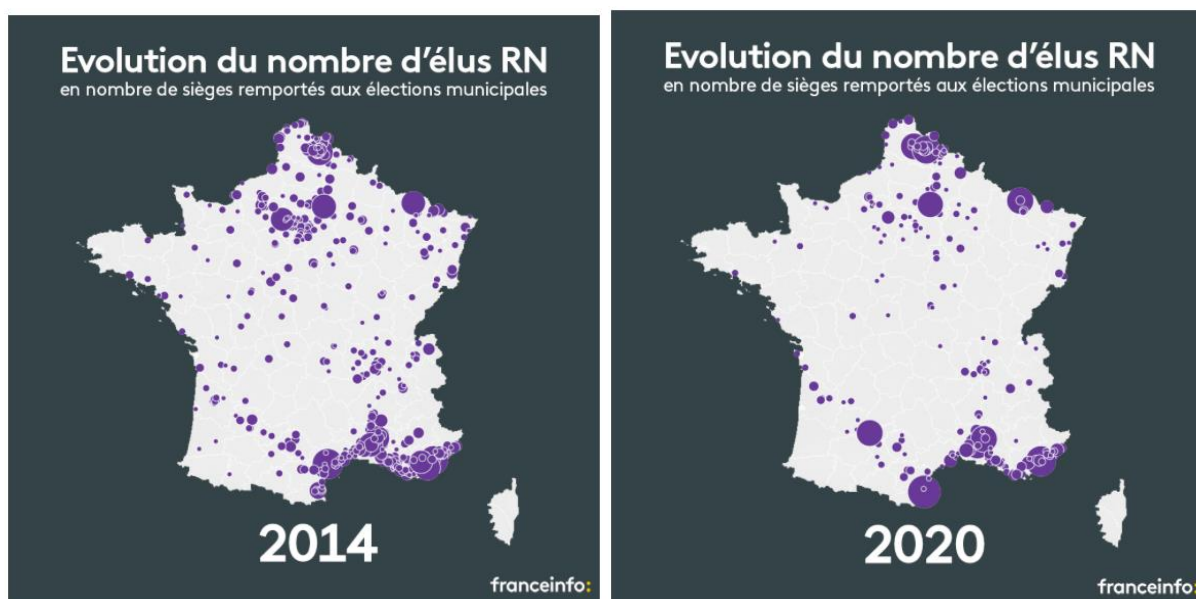
¹¹ <https://www.ouest-france.fr/elections/sondages/sondage-les-francais-sont-partages-sur-jean-castex-et-son-gouvernement-6899128>

¹² <https://www.ouest-france.fr/elections/municipales/le-parti-socialiste-t-il-encore-un-avenir-en-france-6735834>

longer conveys classical left-wing values, 61 percent say that the political formation no longer has stable convictions, and 66 percent believe that they are not close to the people. 59 percent downright indicated that the party no longer benefited French politics.¹³

For them, the only way to survive is to team up with the Greens. Results of the municipal elections already foreshadowed the success of such a cooperation. This seems to squeeze out Emmanuel Macron from the left, while the Le Pen party may push him into a vacuum from the right – which vacuum is presently the republican side with vanishing support. He will need votes coming from there.

Compared to 2014, the ranks of *Rassemblement National* (The National Rally) have also decreased considerably (the party now gained 826 seats, as opposed to 1,438 back then). The radical right has lost much in terms of its presence in inland France but has remained a persuasive force in settlements with many immigrants (especially in Northern and Southeastern France). There might not necessarily be traitors behind the phenomenon – the exceptionally low participation greatly contributed to the radical right’s weaker performance. We also have to note that the standpoints of the President and Marine Le Pen drew near in topics – formerly themed by the Le Pen party – such as condemning the vandalism on statues and memorials that symbolize the colonization sweeping through Western Europe over the past weeks. Marine Le Pen was able to differentiate her opinion from that of Emmanuel Macron only by accusing him of being hard in communication only, but not being able to act.



¹³ <https://www.ouest-france.fr/elections/municipales/le-parti-socialiste-t-il-encore-un-avenir-en-france-6735834>

A The distribution of places won by Rassemblement National in the 2014 and the 2020 municipal elections (source: www.francetvinfo.fr)

Government reconstruction: familiar people in the new government

The drastic decrease of the governing party's and his own popularity, failures in handling the coronavirus pandemic, and the expected economical downfall drifted Emmanuel Macron towards a government reconstruction, hoping for a "*rebondissement*"¹⁴. The new type of a president he has been building up since the spring of 2016 – at first only as a pretense movement –, the tycoon patronage, seems to be falling apart. The image of a man to bridge the spasm between the right-wing and the left-wing, surpassing the agenda of the two classic political platforms did not bring the historical turnabout voters disillusioned with both the right-wing and the left-wing had expected. Although Macron put several successful (formerly) right-wing politicians at the forefront in his government right at the start, he had to keep replacing them due to their embarrassing affairs, some with corruption, or because they simply did not prove to be capable of the job. Now Macron tries to give a new boost to the government with charismatic personalities, and invited familiar people from the media to his government, such as Roselyne Bachelot, who used to have her own show, and is now appointed as minister of culture, or the legal expert Eric Dupond-Moretti, also well known from the media. As an interesting note about the latter, he was going to ban the former Front National, which is now the largest party in opposition; his name was mentioned in connection with repatriating jihadists; and he plans to ban anonymity on the Internet. (Which is an interesting idea in the land of people vehemently defending the freedom of speech and opinion.)

In recognition of her performance as Secretary of State in charge of equality between men and women during the former part of the term, Marlène Schiappa became undersecretary responsible for citizenship next to the interior secretary, intensifying her feminist fight. Schiappa acknowledged herself to be a feminist since her teenage years, and only a few days after her appointment, emphasized that she would not allow anyone to veto her right to feminist fighting, especially people protesting not against sexually motivated violence, but against the government trying to stop it. The female politician considers laicism to be of utmost importance, she believes it should be a main pillar of national cohesion and had condemned Arabian women wearing hijab in France on this stance.

¹⁴ prosperity, revival

On the other hand, Schiappa still believes the naive thesis that anyone coming to France from a Muslim country is free to practice his or her religion and will integrate and keep the French laws in return. This is contradicted by the declaration of the former interior secretary, Gérard Collomb upon resigning, according to which some suburban areas in certain parts of the country have the most strict laws in effect, since they are ruled by the drug market and radical Islam. The new interior secretary, Gérald Darmanin finds this insufferable, saying that Islam separatism must be defeated once and for all. He believes that everyone should be allowed the freedom of religion and conscience, but religion (e.g. the Saria) can not in any case suppress the law. Darmanin is so serious about this that he published a book about laicity in 2018, and right now, when illegal immigration and its serious consequences are becoming more and more apparent for Europe, Macron greatly needed such an anti-jihadist person in his old-new government. Darmanin, with his youthful momentum (and formerly right-wing past) and his stunning political background (became a mayor at age 30, and national assembly representative at 34) looks good in the newly assembled, youthful government. However, the fact that the court reopened the file of an investigation against Darmanin for an alleged sexual harassment in 2009¹⁵ does not look that good. The prosecution says that the former UMP politician promised a lady – in exchange for sexual intimacy – to move her court case in a positive direction.

This is the team boosted with youngsters that Emmanuel Macron expects to have more success with than before. With the same hopes he also put the youngest member of the national assembly, Gabriel Attal on his government, appointing him as government spokesperson. Bringing youth in is not a sure formula, though – it is memorable that the former government spokesperson, Sibeth Ndiaye (who was 37 when taking this position) made mistakes that caused serious damage to the president's reputation. One case was right in 2017, when she sent an offensive message to a journalist in connection with the death of Simone Weil¹⁶, and another when she said she would be willing to lie to protect the president¹⁷.

¹⁵ <https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20200707.OBS30975/remaniement-la-promotion-de-gerald-darmanin-accuse-de-viol-choque-les-feministes.html>

¹⁶ „Yes, la meuf est dead.”

¹⁷ <https://www.lalibre.be/international/j-assume-de-mentir-pour-protger-le-president-ces-propos-qui-eclaboussent-la-nouvelle-porte-parole-du-gouvernement-francais-5ca1ba999978e263332db2b3>

Macron and the green project

Instead of fulfilling hopes for a young, reforming, dynamic president that builds the French grandiose, Emmanuel Macron had to resort to crisis management, and a reactive role instead of being proactive and creative as a president. Instead of realizing his own political agenda, the first three years of his presidency were themed with social tensions. Basically, the camp of people disillusioned with both the classic left-wing and the classic right-wing had great expectations for the new president in 2017 (strengthen security, eliminate migration-integration problems, economic consolidation, stronger presence on the European stage, regain trust in the political elite), which would have been a challenge even for a skilled president, so it is understandable that a president with only minimal political experience did not know how to embark on the journey of renewal. In his campaign, he presented himself as a competent politician ready to act. However, he turned into an abrupt actor, increasingly concentrating on popularity indicators.

His plans to go forward kept generating social discontentment (rail-, educational-, pension reform, fuel gas taxing), taking ten and hundred thousands of protesters on the street, the most obvious formation of which became the yellow vest protests starting in the late fall of 2018. Emmanuel Macron tried to handle this phenomenon – which brought several hundred thousand people peacefully processing on the streets of Paris on Saturdays at the start – by ignoring it first, but when the demonstration did not wear out but seemed to become constant and stable, he decided to use the police. The explanation was that he could not let chaos and anarchy take over France.

It is also noteworthy that the trigger of the demonstrations going from peaceful marches to riots was a green measure from the president – plans to introduce a carbon tax brought the great mass of people wearing yellow visibility vests to the streets first, and then Macron opened a front with people using diesel cars as well – the majority of the French use diesel for their vehicles – , and started giving out five- and seven thousand Euro bonus checks for people buying electric or hybrid cars to boost the car industry.

Thus, Emmanuel Macron has repeatedly tried to introduce green themes to public discourse, but their implementation somehow kept hitting barriers. Yet he has to include green measures such as the above in his agenda, otherwise the lofty sounding promises of the Greens will take his place – which they can easily do without governmental responsibility and the obligation to act. Although the party has been having internal tensions for years – which Daniel Cohn-Bendit

repeatedly mentioned to the press –, the challenge of going for the seat of the president can be a promising one for them.

The founder of the *En Marche!* political product of 2016, which placed him in the presidential seat in 2017, Emmanuel Macron won the second round of the elections due to protest votes. People who almost heard soldiers marching down the streets of Paris in brown boots right away upon hearing the name Le Pen, and – with closed eyes – put their X mark next to the name of Macron in May of 2017. However, they could not prevent Le Pen making it into the second round – and this prospect does not seem to change for 2022 –, but Macron's place is not that sure anymore. With the green turnover, the political palette is taking a more interesting form – the Greens, gaining strength on their own, and the Socialists, shrinking to almost non-visibility, seem to back out from behind Macron.

This must be rather puzzling for Emmanuel Macron, because the survey of Ifop, the largest polling company of France, indicated that in addition to the voter base of the far-left (La France insoumise) and the Socialists (Parti Socialiste), his voters also voted for the Greens in the first round of the municipal elections in large (37%)¹⁸ proportions. In addition, 47 percent of the people who voted for him in the first round of the presidential elections in 2017 said that they would surely or most likely support a Green candidate in the municipal elections. The Greens have gained stable support in the country as well, because 37 percent of the voters said that they would most likely put their X by the Green party, with another 10 percent promising their vote for the Greens for sure.

Thus, Macron has to think about looking for a new ally if he wants to make it to the second round in 2022. It is surely not by accident that the inauguration speech of the new prime minister, delivered in front of the national assembly, announced a 20 billion Euro budget – within the framework of a hundred billion Euro restart fund – for an ecologic transition (while health care got 6 billion only). The money would mainly be spent for improving the heat isolation of buildings, reducing harmful gas emissions, and supporting green technologies.

Greens: On a straight path to the presidential chair?

The Greens might have already found the button for the coat. Yannick Jadot, who resigned in favor of the Socialist aspirant in 2017 in order to defeat Marine Le Pen, is considered a divisive,

¹⁸ <https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/117162-Rapport-JDD.pdf>

yet decisive force in his party, and there is always action in the air around him. However, many believe Jadot to be a contradictory figure, producing division and loss, and former representative to the European Parliament, Daniel Cohn-Bendit accused him and the malevolent strains generated by him to be responsible for the failure of the party's important project (and Cohn-Bendit) in 2010.

Still, Jadot dreams big, and while others have lost, his popularity greatly increased – from 18 to 22 percent¹⁹ – with the victory of the Greens. He plans to skip the primary election procedures of his party to aim for the presidential seat in 2022, but he already has an opponent within the party, the mayor of Grenoble, Eric Piolle, whose city is the first big city with over 100 thousand inhabitants that has been functioning with a green leadership for 6 years. Piolle promises victory with a new strategy within less than 2 years. For now, he has only said that it was based on team building – anyone who wants to join can come from the Greens and from the left-wing. The mayor believes that there has to be a right person for each post, but much of it depends on timing, and the time has not yet arrived.

However, it is questionable that the voters will want to choose a politician for president that is known for not caring about the everyday problems of the inhabitants, and the demolishing city quarters, but uses his seat as mayor for building his own career only. In order to make it to the top, he is not ashamed to do things like plastering the face of his left-wing and far-left opponents on election posters²⁰. In front of the press, Piolle talks about Jadot as a friend, but as soon as the microphones are off, he is ready to declare that his rival is a traitor, who does not distance himself enough from Emmanuel Macron, and would be happy to sit in his government²¹.

If this scrum is not solved, the well known “green formula” might repeat itself (as the Greens themselves fear) – in spite of the Ecologist y Party winning a rather good position in the EP elections, fighting within the party might consume its strength, with the far-left getting at it as well, which will lead to a huge defeat at the presidential election. (In 2014, when the Greens left the government, the party dissolved.) This is where the Socialists might easily come to the rescue. 74 percent of the French²² believe that the Socialist Party is in such a state that it will disappear in the foreseeable future (even 71 percent of their own voters think so), but they could keep their reserves with the Greens, while turning them into a defining political force.

¹⁹ <https://www.lesechos.fr/politique-societe/politique/observatoire-politique-elabe-les-echos-1017387>

²⁰ <https://grenoble-le-changement.fr/2020/06/24/piolle-contre-jadot-la-lutte-finale/>

²¹ <https://grenoble-le-changement.fr/2020/06/24/piolle-contre-jadot-la-lutte-finale/>

²² <http://www.odoxa.fr/sondage/parti-socialiste-temps-renouveau-nest-arrive/>

Where does the right-wing stand?

Rassemblement National really underperformed at the municipal elections compared to the results of 2014, and Ifop measured a declining popularity for Marine Le Pen in June.²³ Emmanuel Macron, the far-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and the Green Yannick Jadot also come before the 28 percent popularity index of the far-right party president. One reason for this is that the communication of Le Pen did not become more conciliatory, or at least more ready to give and take during the health care crisis of the coronavirus, but aggressively attacked each governmental measure (whether it was about the amount of masks or the extension of testing). Her activity during the pandemic resorted to sonorously accusing the government in all media platforms with “*lying about everything*”²⁴.

In the meantime, many ask the question: Is Marion Maréchal, the niece of Marine Le Pen preparing for 2022 or for 2027? The national assembly representative from Southern France (Vaucluse), who abandoned the Le Pen name in 2018, and established ISSEP²⁵, the private Institute for Social Sciences, Economics and Politics in Lyon, professes having been resigned from active politics, but still publishes her views in all recent topics of public life in the French papers and in overseas as well.

Maréchal is in her early thirties, a mother of one, and does not have a cordial relationship with her aunt, Marine Le Pen, who just recently made a derogative comment about the young politician in relation to the American BLM movement appearing in France. Besides, Maréchal has been building up a respectable intellectual capital, with many joining her ranks from among papers, Internet sites, and think tanks established in the spirit of the new right-wing ideology. And her grandfather, Jean-Marie Le Pen, can tell her much about founding a party, even if in this case it will not be a succession. In addition, the former challenger of Jacques Chirac has a decidedly good relationship with her granddaughter, while his relationship with his daughter, Marine, is rather grim. This Le Pen nestling, more consolidated by two generations, may even be compatible with the presidential chair in the eyes of the French.

²³ <https://www.ifop.com/publication/le-tableau-de-bord-des-personnalites-juin-2020/>

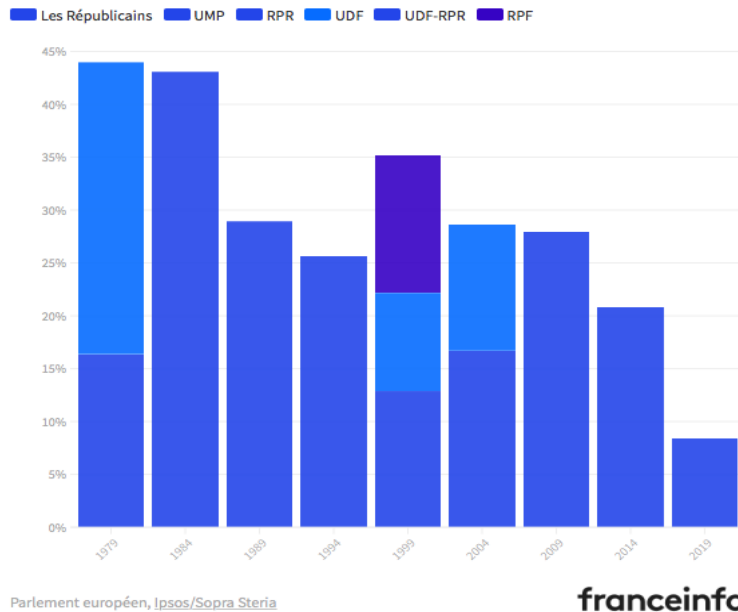
²⁴ <https://www.lesechos.fr/politique-societe/politique/coronavirus-marine-le-pen-ne-tire-pas-profit-de-sa-strategie-agressive-dans-lopinion-1191440>

²⁵ Institut de sciences sociales, économiques et politiques (Lyon)

The Republican party took a serious blow in the EP elections of 2019 – getting the lowest results in the history of European elections with 8.48 percent²⁶, way behind the predictions of polls (12-14 percent). Even the Greens came out better, with their 13.47 percent.

Score de la droite aux européennes depuis 1979

(Estimation Ipsos/Sopra Steria pour 2019)



Their defeat in the 2017 presidential campaign, the scandal of presidential candidate François Fillon²⁷ already tore down the popularity of *Les Républicains* (LR), and the party was eroded further when the formerly Republican Nicolas Dupont-Aignan founded a decidedly right-wing, conservative party called *Debout La France!*²⁸, taking away many votes from the Republicans. The greatest winner of the election was *Rassemblement National* (RN) (23,31%), with a good proportion of Republican voters voting across as a reaction to Macron’s failed politics. François-Xavier Bellamy, the conservative, Catholic philosopher and teacher on top of the LR list for the EP elections, gave another reason for voters of these two right-wing parties to pull together.

²⁶ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/les-republicains/les-republicains-s-effondrent-avec-8-3-des-voix-selon-notre-estimation-ipsos-sopra-steria-le-pire-score-de-la-droite-aux-europeennes_3451715.html

²⁷ After winning the right-wing preliminary elections, proceedings have been initiated against Fillon – former prime minister of Sarkozy – for suspected fictive employment of his family members.

²⁸ *Get up, France!*

Although the Republicans won over half of the settlements with more than 9,000 inhabitants at this year's municipal elections²⁹, the party still seems to be stagnating ever since the party leader elections of last October, when Christian Jacob was elected as president. Although they try to make their activities visible – now launching twelve thematic forums to address the most important challenges, such as health care, security, work, law, environmental protection –, while their membership abhors the advances of national-conservative Marion Maréchal, and does not see opportunities in cooperation (at least along certain causes), a breakthrough cannot be expected.

Who will score better in 2022?

As the 2022 presidential election approaches, more and more actors appear in the political arena, but the voters' willingness to vote across is a huge question. The Ipsos survey of 2019, made right after the EP elections³⁰ not surprisingly indicates that the Greens are open to the Socialist Party (Parti socialiste – PS) and to the left-wing in general. On the other side, 16 and 32 percent of voters choosing Macron's party (La République en Marche – LREM) would be willing to vote to the right (but only 1 percent of them would choose the far-right instead of LREM).

In light of these numbers, Macron's swing to the right is understandable – as Jean-Luc Mélenchon, president of the far-left (La France insoumise – LFI) party already noted³¹. He believes Macron sent a message about opening to the right with the government reconstruction – more bluntly than before. According to the far-left politician, Macron did not select his crew for the rest of his time in government but started to build a campaign team for 2022 already.

The values Ipsos came out with also indicate that Emmanuel Macron might have gains on the right side of the political palette, and it would be worthwhile to raise his popularity there. Since there is a 16 percent cross section between the voters of *Les Républicains* (LR) and LREM, while 18 percent of the Republicans would vote for *Rassemblement National* (RN), it makes sense for Macron to want to get 16 percent of the Republicans and with that number of votes from the right (51 percent), have a good chance of defeating Marine Le Pen. According to Ipsos

²⁹ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/municipales/resultats-des-elections-municipales-2020-pour-lr-deux-revers-historiques-mais-une-grosse-implantation-dans-les-villes-moyennes_4022823.html

³⁰ https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2019-05/ipsos_sociologie_europeennes_2019_26_mai_20h21.pdf - page 10

³¹ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/macron-s-affiche-comme-le-chef-de-la-droite-selon-melenchon-20200707>

measures, Marine Le Pen may expect votes only from her own side – as opposed to Macron –, she could not get a perceptible number of votes from the left. However, a fact in favor of the radical right is an important aspect of reserve votes – people considering themselves without party preferences would vote for RN in the greatest proportion (26 percent) if they did go to vote.

And the republicans may be in great trouble, because their historical defeat at the 2019 EP elections took them so low that – in spite of almost a year passing since the presidential election – they cannot find their own narrative on which to gain new strength. And while their membership argues about cooperating or not cooperating with the national-conservative right-wing presently led by Marion Maréchal and her heartland (Éric Zemmour, Natacha Polony, Raphaël Enthoven), even along certain issues, Emmanuel Macron is already working on eliminating them with the salami technique that already worked in destroying the left-wing. In the meantime, Maréchal is building relationships not only in France but also in Europe and overseas, carrying the message of a new conservative right-wing. In addition to the private institute established in Lyon in 2018, she also opened a partner university in Madrid (and signed cooperations with further partner schools in Beirut and Saint Petersburg). Besides, she continues to share her sovereigntist views on familiar media platforms of the French right-wing.

Thus, the presidential election map of 2022 is rather diverse, with all political sides still present. The year and a half left before the campaign will reveal whether or not the classic political palette will remain the same in France, or aspirants of a new national-conservative right and a green-left alliance will be up against one another for the presidential chair. And it will also reveal where Emmanuel Macron – taking turns snapping at the left and at the right – will end up having a place left on this palette.