



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The Fifth Republic's most unpopular duo and the consequences of political inertia



An opinion poll **published** on 20 July by the Institut français d'opinion publique (**IFOP**), or French Institute for Public Opinion Research, on behalf of Le Journal du Dimanche, shows a historic low level of trust in the executive of the Fifth Republic.

President Emmanuel Macron enjoys only 19% support, while Prime Minister François Bayrou scores even worse with 18%.

Overall, the executive enjoys only 37% of citizens' support, which is the lowest overall result for a president and prime minister **duo** in modern French history.

Compared to previous times of crisis, this figure is devastating. At the low point of François Hollande's **presidency** in 2014, he had 13% support, while the then Prime Minister Manuel Valls received 38%, totalling 51%.

The current Macron-Bayrou duo is far below this threshold, indicating a deeper crisis of political legitimacy.

Prime Minister Bayrou's announcement of a **budget** consolidation of 43.8 billion euros by 2027 contributes significantly to this decline. The **reforms** include the abolition of public holidays and the freezing of public spending in several sectors.

According to a survey conducted by TF1 (Télévision Française 1), and the news channel LCI, 59% of citizens believe that Bayrou should resign, while 26% consider the measures 'unfair' and 'discriminatory towards workers'.

Rising public pressure

The situation is exacerbated by the frequent **use** of Article 49.3 of the French Constitution, which allows the Prime Minister to pass a law without a vote in the National Assembly if a vote of no confidence in the government is not passed within 24 hours.

Bayrou has already **used** this mechanism twice to push through fiscal measures, which led to a backlash in parliament and announcements of

a general strike by the trade unions.

In this context, major European rating agencies such as **S&P**, **Moody's**, and **Fitch Ratings** are warning of a possible downgrade of France's credit rating, which would lead to higher borrowing costs and an additional burden on public finances.

In the eurozone such turbulence is not isolated: chain reactions on the capital markets and political regrouping within the European Union are possible.

Rassemblement National continues to gain support and is seeking to mobilise the trade union electorate

Public pressure to end the institutional blockade is rising. According to a survey conducted by the Institute for Market and Opinion Research (BVA) for RTL, 44% of citizens believe that President Macron should **call** an early general election.

Opposition parties—from the Socialists to the Republicans—are already working on coordinated platforms, while the far right, rallying around the Rassemblement National (RN), continues to gain support and is seeking to mobilise the trade union electorate.

The Bayrou **government** does not have a stable majority in the National Assembly (the lower house of parliament). Up to this point, the Bayrou government has survived several motions of no confidence, primarily due to the division within the opposition and the tactical manoeuvres employed by the centrists. As the legislative period draws to a close, any new attempt could be successful.

Loss of confidence in Macron's centralised model

From an institutional perspective, this situation - in which the president and the prime minister together have less than 40 per

cent support - raises the question of the functioning of the executive within the presidential system of the Fifth Republic.

The situation is particularly problematic given that Bayrou comes from the MoDem (Mouvement démocrate), a party without a strong parliamentary base.

He acts as a nominal prime minister within the presidential majority, but without any real political weight. This further limits the government's ability to carry out serious reforms.

The presidential camp itself is already talking about a possible replacement of the prime minister.

However, changing the person at the head of the government without changing the political course would not solve the main problem - the loss of confidence in the management model that Emmanuel Macron has been practising since 2017: a personalised, centralised, and institutionally closed system with weak support from parliament.

France's reputation as a leading European power has been seriously shaken

The economic consequences of the crisis are already measurable. Yields on 10-year French bonds **rose** by around 15 basis points between May and July 2025. Although Italy has higher public debt, its yields are more stable thanks to a more coherent political situation.

This perception of France as an institutionally insecure country has a negative impact on the investment environment, long-term political predictability, and European fiscal policy coordination.

In the area of foreign policy, France's reputation as a leading European power has been seriously shaken.

On the margins of the NATO **summit** in The Hague in July, several diplomats - including

representatives of the Netherlands, Poland, and Canada - expressed concern that Paris will not be able to take the lead in the strategic reorganisation of NATO's eastern flank planned for 2026.

This makes coordination with the US and Eastern European allies even more difficult at a time when France is expected to play a leading role in the areas of defence, energy, and digital security.

Time is running out

Unless President Macron decides to radically change his political strategy - including opening a space for dialogue with the opposition, redefining the role of the National Assembly, and abandoning the excessive use of Article 49.3 - a further loss of confidence is almost certain.

In this scenario, early parliamentary elections by the summer of 2026 are the most likely political outcome.



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This would also mean the beginning of cohabitation - a situation in which the president and prime minister come from different political camps.

There have been similar cases in France: Mitterrand-Chirac (1986-1988) and Chirac-Jospin (1997-2002), but in the modern context this would mean a serious limitation of the powers of the president and a fundamental

change in the relationship between the executive powers.

The debate about reforming the constitutional model is becoming increasingly public. Prominent French jurists are proposing to redefine the powers of the president, limit the use of 49.3, and move towards a more parliamentary system with a greater role for legislative control.

So, this crisis goes beyond the current political actors - it raises the question of the sustainability of a political model in which there is less trust and more procedural authoritarianism.

If the system is not reformed from within, it will be changed from without - through pressure from the street, institutional setbacks, or the loss of international credibility.

All three options are already in circulation. And political time, in France as everywhere else, is running out faster than the authorities would like to admit.