



By: Zaki Laïdi

# Macron blew up the system but has no vision on what to put in its place



France has broken an all-time record. Its prime minister, Sébastien Lecornu, **resigned** less than 24 hours after forming his government.

In a country where the 1958 constitution underwrote institutional stability based on the political primacy of the presidency, this is a huge political shock.

So, how did France get to this point? At a time when market pressure is increasing as French **debt** becomes increasingly unsustainable, what should we expect next?

To understand this crisis, we must return to the beginning of President Emmanuel Macron's second term in 2022.

Generally, after the election of a president, the subsequent parliamentary elections lead to a victory for the presidential camp, aligning the executive and legislature.

This did not happen in 2022. So, in order to govern, Macron had to ram legislation through the National Assembly without a majority vote.

He could do so because the French constitution permits the government to enact legislation without it being voted on, unless the government falls.

That, too, did not happen. Macron's highly unpopular pension reforms, which raised the retirement age from 62 to 64, were enacted this way.

## The worst case

These **difficulties** in forming a parliamentary majority may seem trivial, as cobbling together viable coalitions is a time-consuming practice throughout the European Union.

But the French political system makes this process more problematic because it is a hybrid: both presidential and parliamentary.

When the parliamentary majority reflects the president's politics, the system works well

because it is largely dominated by the president.

When the parliamentary majority is opposed to the president, the system can still work, but this time in a way more like parliamentary republics.

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The worst case is when there is no majority in the National Assembly, as is the case today. Parliament is neither for the president nor against him.

There are currently three blocs of roughly equal size in the National Assembly: the far right (National Rally), the center and right (which more or less support Macron), and the left.

The left and the far right agree on repealing the pension law and on taxing the rich more heavily.

But it is inconceivable that they would govern together, as they differ profoundly on issues of identity, security, the environment, and immigration.

The center-right bloc and the far right can agree on issues such as immigration and security, but fundamentally disagree about economic policy – especially pensions.

## Divided groups

But the reality is even more complex, because these three groups, with the exception of the National Rally, are also divided.

The left is **divided** between a reform-minded Socialist Party and a radicalized populist fringe led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, while centrist forces include right, center-right, and center-left tendencies, with very noticeable tactical differences between them.

Logically, one could imagine a coalition between the Socialists and a bloc comprising the center and the right.

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But this seems increasingly difficult, because the calculations that the political parties are making now are being overshadowed by their calculations for the 2027 presidential election.

Beyond these difficulties are two other problems: the political system's hyper-presidentialism and the lack of a common vision on the future of the country's social model.

## International image

Macron has a good international image. In France, he has pursued a supply-side policy that undeniably improved economic performance – strongly so before the pandemic, and also during and after it.

But Macron remains ill-equipped to understand the rules and reality of current French politics.

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He was never elected before 2017 and has no local roots. He sees and thinks of himself as someone hovering above the fray – and gives little consideration to those who challenge him for even the slightest bit of power.

This is a typical French pattern inherited from the monarchy. Today, most of Macron's followers are rejecting him to save themselves

from a possible debacle.

## Macron's disastrous decision

Macron is now paying the price of his disastrous decision in 2024 to **dissolve** the National Assembly after the European elections, when he objectively had no reason to do so.

Today's crisis is the consequence of that decision, which has led to the appointment of three prime ministers in just 13 months.

Macron is about to appoint a fourth prime minister in order to buy time and avoid calling for new elections.

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But if this new prime minister also fails, and if new elections lead once again to a hung parliament, the pressure on Macron to resign will be huge.

The best scenario, then, is to have a fragile government buying time before the 2027 presidential election. But this is far from guaranteed.

## The tragedy of Macron's presidency

But while Macron's responsibility is overwhelming, France's political parties' fecklessness is also to blame for the current situation.

With all of them focused on the 2027 presidential election, each acts as if it has an absolute majority on its own and refuses to compromise.



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The current crisis also stems from a total absence of reflection and consensus on the future of the French social system.

Out of every €1,000 (\$1,160) of public spending, which is the highest in Europe, some €250 is used to pay pensions and €200 to finance health care.

Everyone knows this, but there is no consensus on how to modernize a social system which offers real advantages but is financially unsustainable in the medium term.

To understand the depths of denial by the French of the scale of their problems, one need only see that both the left and the National Rally are campaigning for the repeal of the pension reform and are advocating a return to the previous retirement age of 62.

They do so despite recognizing the mounting risk that France's national debt is posing to the economy.

The tragedy of Macron's presidency is that his project to modernize the French political system has failed.

He blew up the system but has no real vision on what to put in its place. His responsibility is huge, but he is not the only one to blame.

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