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Emilien Houard-Vial, Nicolas Sauger

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France: Political Development and data for 2019

EMILIEN HOUARD-VIAL¹ & NICOLAS SAUGER²

¹Sciences Po, Center for European Studies and Comparative Politics (CEE), CNRS, Paris, France; ²Sciences Po, Center for European Studies and Comparative Politics (CEE) and Center for Socio-Political Data (CDSP), CNRS, Paris, France

Introduction

The year 2019 was relatively quiet on the electoral front while social and political discontent and sometimes violence kept characterizing the period. The European elections confirmed the electoral upheaval of 2017. The new centrist and presidential movement launched in 2016, The Republic on the Move/*La République en Marche* (LREM), performed well enough in the European election of 2019. This election was nonetheless once again a success for the radical right National Rally/*Rassemblement National* (RN), the new name introduced by Marine Le Pen in 2018 as a replacement of the former Front National. The reshuffle of the party system was confirmed in 2019, with most of the traditional and established parties being progressively marginalized. The new format of the new party system remains, however, quite uncertain, the traditional bipolar structure divided between left and right being challenged on all fronts. If 2019 started with a progressive diminution in intensity of the Yellow Vests movement (due to the organization of the ‘Grand débat national’ (Great national debate) and the announcement of new massive public expenditures), 2019 ended as in 2018 with major social protests. This time, the reform of the pension system provoked massive opposition and a near paralysis of the public transportation system, as in 1995.

Election report

Since the legislative and presidential elections of 2017, only the European election has been organized. Local elections and the renewal of half of the *Sénat* (Upper House) are to be held in 2020.

European elections

For the first time, European elections in France took place in a single national district, instead of eight regional districts. As required by the European statutes, proportional representation was maintained with a D’Hondt electoral system. Due to Brexit, 79 French members were elected in the European Parliament (EP), instead of 74 members in 2014 (five members had to wait for their seat until the British members officially left Parliament). The turnout of slightly more than 50 per cent had been the highest for 25 years, partly because of the strong opposition on European issues between the presidential party, LREM, and its

main opponent, the National Rally, which both received almost one-fourth of the votes. Once again, the National Rally came first in the European election, but with a reduced margin with regards to the party coming second. The Socialist Party/*Parti socialiste (Envie d'Europe Ecologique et Sociale)* (PS) confirmed its decline with just enough votes to reach the electoral threshold of 5 per cent despite the decision to open the list to Public Square/*Place Publique*, a small movement led by a well-known intellectual figure Raphaël Glucksmann. France Unbowed/*La France Insoumise (La France Insoumise)* (LFI) also managed a disappointing performance, barely surpassing the Socialist Party. The success in the presidential election of 2017 was not reached again.

There were two major surprises. The main right-wing party The Republicans/*Les Républicains (Union de la droite et du centre)* (LR) did not reach 10 per cent of the votes, which appeared as a terrible performance. On the contrary, Europe Ecology/*Europe Ecologie* (EE), even though it did not achieve the best result of its history, achieved first place among the left parties, which appeared as an admirable result. In total, the European Election of 2019 proves the ongoing fragmentation of the French party system. A total of 34 lists were registered, among which 13 gather at least 1 per cent at the ballot box. The performance of the LREM contributed also to the reconfiguration of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group in Parliament into Renew. The LREM, however, failed to position one of its own at the leadership position, and Renew did not transform radically coalition politics.

Cabinet report

The Philippe II government was formed after the 2017 legislative elections (Faucher & Garcia 2018). This Cabinet is composed of centrist ministers, some coming from the centre-right and The Republicans, some from the centre-left and the Socialist Party. Most are now members of the presidential party, the LREM. This Cabinet is supported by an oversized coalition, as LREM has the parliamentary majority by its own, but also receives the support and includes ministers from the centrist Democratic Movement/*Mouvement Démocrate* (MoDem) and from the Act/*Agir (Agir)* (centre-right). The Philippe II government has increasingly been considered as a centre-right government due, for instance, to the thrifty reform on unemployment allowances or to the restrictive reform on asylum and immigration. Edouard Philippe himself, former member of the main right-wing party, is not a member of the presidential party LREM, even if his support for this party is explicit.

In 2019, changes in the government were limited at the ministerial level. In March, the Minister of European Affairs left the government to lead the presidential party list for the European election. In July, the Minister of Ecological Transition and former President of the Lower House, François de Rugy, was accused of using public funds to organize personal and expensive dinners. He finally resigned. Meanwhile, changes were more important at the Secretary of State level (not registered in Table 2). Beyond a few changes linked to ambitions for local elections, Jean-Paul Delevoye (formally Haut Commissaire/High Commissioner), in charge of the reform of the pension system, resigned in December amid general protests against this reform; a very untimely move. This resignation follows a growing scandal due to the holding of multiple mandates and clear conflicts of interest.

Table 1. Elections to the European Parliament (*Parlement européen*) in France in 2019

Party ^a	EP group	Previous election		25 May 2014			
		N	%	N ^b	%		
Date of election		26 May 2019		25 May 2014			
Electorate		47,345,328		74			
Total votes cast		23,730,740		50.1%			
Valid votes cast		22,655,174		47.8%			
		Votes		Seats			
		N	%	N ^b	%		
			Δ %		Δ N		
					Δ %		
National Rally	(RN)	5,286,939	23.3%	22 (23)	29.7%	-2	-2.7%
The Republic on the Move	(LREM)	5,079,015	22.4%	21 (23)	28.4%	21	28.4%
Europe Ecology – The Greens	(EELV)	3,055,023	13.5%	12 (13)	16.2%	6	8.1%
The Republicans	(LR)	1,920,407	8.5%	8 (8)	10.8%	-12	-16.2%
France Unbowed	(LFI)	1,428,548	6.3%	6 (6)	8.1%	0	0.0%
Socialist Party	(PS)	1,403,170	6.2%	5 (6)	6.7%	-8	-10.9%
France Arise	(DLF)	795,508	3.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Generations	(Génération.s)	741,772	3.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Union of Independents	(UDI)	566,057	2.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
French Communist Party	(PCF)	564,949	2.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Animalist Party	(PA)	490,074	2.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Ecology Generation	(GE)	412,136	1.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Popular and Republican Union	(UPR)	265,469	1.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Workers' Struggle	(LO)	176,339	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Patriots!	(Patriotes)	147,140	0.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
		121,209	0.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
		201,419	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Notes: ^aIn the second column, the main party supporting the list precedes the official list names. Note that some lists represent coalitions of parties or are not affiliated to any party.

^bNumber of seats to be increased in 2019. In parentheses, number of MEPs attributed after Brexit as French representation is increased from 74 to 79 seats. Source: Ministry of Interior website (2020).

Table 2. Cabinet composition of Philippe II in France in 2019

Duration of Cabinet	Inception	21 June 2017	Dissolution	Still in office at the end of the year
Period covered by table	From	1 January 2019	Until	31 December 2019
Type of Cabinet	Oversized Coalition			
A. Party/gender composition on 1 January 2019				
		Seats in Cabinet ^a	Seats held by women	Seats in Parliament ^b
		N	N	N
		%	% of party	%
The Republic on the Move	<i>La République en Marche</i>	11	2	309
Democratic Movement	<i>Mouvement Démocrate</i>	2	1	46
Radical Movement	<i>Mouvement radical</i>	1	1	10
Act	<i>Agir</i>	1	0	9
Unifilialted	<i>Sans étiquette</i>	7	4	12
Totals		22	8	386
B. Composition of Philippe II Cabinet on 1 January 2019				
See previous editions of the <i>Political Data Yearbook for France</i> or http://politicaldatayearbook.com				
C. Changes in composition of Philippe II Cabinet during 2019				
Ministerial title	Outgoing minister	Outgoing date	Incoming minister	Comments
Minister of European Affairs	Nathalie Loiseau	27 March 2019	Female	Resignation for running EP elections; portfolio allocated to Secrétariat d'Etat
Minister of Ecological and Inclusive Transition	François de Rugy	16 July 2019	Male	1961 Female LREM
				Resignation of de Rugy after scandal on expenses
D. Party/gender composition on 31 December 2019				
		Seats in Cabinet	Seats held by women	Seats in Parliament
		N	N	N
		%	% of party	%
The Republic on the Move	<i>La République en Marche</i>	10	2	303
Democratic Movement	<i>Mouvement Démocrate</i>	2	1	46
Radical Movement	<i>Mouvement radical</i>	1	1	—
Act	<i>Agir</i>	1	0	—
Unifilialted	<i>Sans étiquette</i>	7	4	15
Totals		21	8	364

Notes: ^a Count of seats in Cabinet includes all ministers, but excludes Secretaries of State (Secrétaire d'Etat).

^b For the Radical Movement and Agir, the count takes into account only MPs from these parties and not from the parliamentary group they belong to as these parties represent only minorities within their group and these parties are present in several groups.

Source: French Government, Assemblée Nationale and Sénat, 2020.

Table 3. Party and gender composition of *Assemblée Nationale* in France in 2019

Party			1 January 2019				31 December 2019			
			All N ^d	%	Women N	%	All N	%	Women N	%
The Republic on the Move	<i>La République en Marche</i>	(LREM)	309	53.6%	152	49.2%	303	52.5%	147	48.5%
The Republicans	<i>Les Républicains</i>	(LR)	104	18.0%	24	23.1%	104	18.0%	24	23.1%
Democratic Movement	<i>Mouvement Démocrate</i>	(MoDem)	46	8.0%	17	37.0%	46	8.0%	16	34.8%
Socialist Party	<i>Parti socialiste</i>	(PS)	29	5.0%	13	44.8%	29	5.0%	13	44.8%
Union of Independents	<i>UDI, et Indépendants^a</i>	(UDI)	27	4.7%	8	29.6%	27	4.7%	8	29.6%
Liberties and Territories	<i>Libertés et Territoires^b</i>	(LT)	17	2.9%	2	11.8%	20	3.5%	4	20.0%
France Unbowed	<i>La France Insoumise</i>	(LFI)	17	2.9%	7	41.2%	17	2.9%	7	41.2%
Democratic and Republican Left	<i>Gauche Démocrate et Républicaine^c</i>	(GDR)	16	2.8%	4	25.0%	16	2.8%	4	25.0%
Unaffiliated Totals	<i>Non inscrits</i>	(NI)	12	2.1%	4	33.3%	15	2.6%	6	40.0%
			577	100.0%	231	40.0%	577	100.0%	229	39.7%

Notes: ^aGroup name transformed into ‘Groupe UDI, AGIR et Indépendants’ on 27 December 2019.

^bGroup formed by a loose coalition of parties from the moderate left, moderate right and Corsican nationalists.

^cThis group is mainly composed of members of the French Communist Party.

^dHere are indifferently counted groups’ members and related members (‘apparentés’).

Source: *Assemblée Nationale*, 2020.

Parliament report

No major changes affected either parliamentary assembly in 2019. Dissent in the main parliamentary group of the lower house, LREM, was quite contained, with few departures. The majority of LREM remained sufficient at the end of the period, but weakened over the years. The Union of Independents/*Union des Démocrates Indépendants (Les européens)* (UDI) group, one of the two smaller centre-right groupings, officially joined the majority on 28 September, enlarging the coalition to now the three centre parties in the Assembly (LREM, MoDem and UDI). Relations between the junior partners and the LREM remained, however, sometimes confrontational without representing any risks in terms of majority status.

The Senate politics were even more calm, without any significant change over the period.

The year 2019, however, saw ongoing discussions on parliamentary reforms, with a project of constitutional revision aiming at reducing the number of MPs by 25 per cent, on the one hand, and reforming the electoral system for the elections of members of the National Assembly, on the other. The proposal consisted of moving towards a mixed electoral system, complementing the two-round majority system by a small number of representatives elected through a proportional system, with a target of 20 per cent of the total number of seats. While the Senate in particular proved very reluctant to approve this reform over the summer, the project was suspended because of lack of support and the developments in social unrest.

Table 4. Party and gender composition of *Sénat* in France in 2019

Party			1 January 2019				31 December 2019			
			All		Women		All		Women	
			N ^a	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The Republicans	<i>Les Républicains</i>	(LR)	144	41.4%	43	29.9%	144	41.4%	43	29.9%
Socialist and Republican	<i>Socialiste et Républicain</i>	(SR)	74	21.3%	26	35.1%	71	20.4%	26	36.6%
Centrist Union	<i>Union Centriste</i>	(UC)	51	14.7%	21	41.2%	51	14.7%	21	41.2%
The Republic on the Move	<i>La République en Marche</i>	(LREM)	23	6.6%	3	13.0%	23	6.6%	3	13.0%
Democratic, Social and European Rally	<i>Rassemblement démocratique et Social Européen</i>	(RDSE)	22	6.3%	5	22.7%	23	6.6%	5	21.7%
Communist, Republican, Citizen and Ecologist	<i>Communiste Républicain Citoyen et écologiste</i>	(CRCE)	16	4.6%	8	50.0%	16	4.6%	9	56.2%
Independents – Republic and Territories	<i>Indépendants – République et Territoires</i>	(IRT)	12	3.4%	1	8.3%	14	4.0%	2	14.3%
Unaffiliated	<i>Non Inscrits</i>	(NI)	6	1.7%	2	33.3%	6	1.7%	2	33.3%
Totals			348	100.0%	109	31.3%	348	100.0%	111	31.9%

Note: ^aHere are indifferently counted groups' members, related members ('apparentés') and attached members ('rattachés').

Source: *Sénat* (2020).

Political party report

The most recent developments about party politics in France were in line with the electoral earthquake of 2017. The most stable party appeared to be the National Rally, with few internal troubles. In 2018, Marine Le Pen was unanimously re-elected as its head, abandoning the historic name of National Front/*Front National* without changing the party's symbols. During the European campaign, the party renounced its promise of exiting of the Eurozone and promoted the concept of 'localism' in line with a conservative ecology. Given its complete alignment with the president and the government, the LREM experienced little or no internal debates, but had some difficulty (as a new party) in asserting its own identity. A president was elected in 2017 (Christophe Castaner) and also in 2018 (Stanislas Guérini). The leadership remains, however, weak and we observe little progress on the party's organizational institutionalization.

France Unbowed has also suffered from a quite undetermined organizational structure and from criticisms over its lack of internal democracy. It seemed to have renounced part of their populist strategy to get back to a self-proclaimed left-wing party, but experienced difficulties (or an unwillingness) to build sustainable coalitions with the other leftist parties. The change in leadership, Quatennens succeeding Bompard, has not greatly changed the firm grasp of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the actual leader, on the organization.

Europe Ecology, the green party, also experienced ideological and strategic disputes, torn between a left-wing union strategy and the hypothetical perspective of a wider coalition essentially based on environmental issues. The Socialist Party remains profoundly weakened by the numerous defections to the LREM, France Unbowed or the small party *Generations.Génération.s*, led by its former presidential candidate Benoît Hamon. François Hollande, former President, keeps making regular appearances, signalling his availability for the future.

Finally, The Republicans had the hardest times with the resignation of its president Laurent Wauquiez after the surprisingly low result in the European elections. A large number of historic and second-order leaders have retired or left the party to join the LREM or to create their own small movements, during three waves: after the presidential and legislative defeats, the election of Laurent Wauquiez (considered too radical in his move to the right) and the European defeat. The Republicans lost three-fourths of their members from 2015 to 2019. They have no more sustainable alliance with another significant party, and seem stuck between the extreme right of the National Rally and the centrist LREM. In this sense, the election of Christian Jacob (former leader of their parliamentary group at the lower house) as president can be seen as an attempt to rebuild consensus among their members in order to find new electoral perspectives.

Institutional change report

The government presented several law proposals in May 2018, which were revised in August 2019 following the opposition of the upper house and the Yellow Vests protests. It proposed to reinforce the independence of the judicial power; the end of the special jurisdiction for ministers; the end of the automatic participation of former presidents in the Constitutional Council; the lowering of the signature threshold for the shared initiative referenda; the constitution of a Citizen participation council as a third (consultative) assembly; an increased autonomy for overseas territories; a reduction in the number of parliamentarians (from 577 to 433 deputies and from 348 to 261 senators); a limit of three successive identical mandates for parliamentarians and local executive members; and 20% of the MPs elected with a proportional ballot. At the end of 2019, the probability that this reform would actually be adopted and implemented was very uncertain.

Issues in national politics

The year 2018 ended on major civil unrests in the wake of the Yellow Vests movement (Schön-Quinlvian 2019). The beginning of 2019 was just the continuation of it. The protest started in 2018 in reaction to economic difficulties and rising oil prices (due to a new taxation on carbon). Beyond traditional demonstrations (soon only on Saturdays), it manifested itself by the occupation of roundabouts, especially in rural France. It soon transformed itself as a quite broad movement protesting against the government and elites in general. President Macron reacted late, but massively, at the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019 with two main measures. On the one hand, a massive plan of new public expenditures was announced to increase the purchasing power of the middle class; and, on the other, it organized the ‘Great

Table 5. Changes in political parties in France in 2019

A. Party leadership changes in 2019											
Party	Party	Party	Party	Party	Party	Party	Party	Party	Party	Party	Party
Unbowed France	LFI	Coordinator	Manuel	Bompard	1986	Male	Resignation	22 June	Adrien	Quatennes	1990
Europe Ecology	EELV	General	David	Command	1974	Male	Internal	30 November	Julien	Bayou	1980
The Greens		Secretary					election				
The Republicans	LR	President	Laurent	Wauquiez	1975	Male	Resignation	2 June	Jean	Leonetti	1948
The Republicans	LR	President	Jean	Leonetti	1948	Male	Internal	13 October	Christian	Jacob	1959
							election				

Source: Websites of political parties, 2020.

national debate' over the course of 14 weeks from January to March 2019. This series of debates, in many of which President Macron participated himself for hours, was designed to uncover sources of discontent and identify new proposals on a government predetermined agenda.

Before new social unrests to come, the fire in April that consumed the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris triggered much emotion. While the Yellow Vests lost steam during the spring, new sources of discontent appeared, on a sectoral basis but also because of social reforms. In June, the announcement of changes in unemployment benefits raised important concerns as the plan involved significant cuts in spending. From the summer, a general reform of the pension system had started being designed and announced. Based on the principle of universality, its linkage with the principle of the stabilization of public expenditure on this matter soon generated outrage. As with the previous large scheme of pension reform in 1995, public transportation unions were at the forefront of the protests. From 5 December, they put in effect a renewable strike till the end of the year. Traffic was indeed blocked until the new year.

The year 2019 also witnessed the first attempt actually to put into practice the new constitutional provision of the shared initiative referendum (*Référendum d'initiative partagée*). The attempt was launched in reaction against the bill initiating the privatization of the public owned firm Aéroport de Paris (Paris Airports). Despite early success, with 1 million signatures, the petition to initiate this referendum failed by a large margin, more than 4.7 million signatures being needed to launch the process.

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