

France in a New Political Era

Can France Adapt its Political Practices to Maintaining Domestic Stability and Economic Reform?



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With four rounds of elections between April and June, the French electorate had to decide on the new direction the country should take in the five coming years. And the process was different than usual. In contrast with previous presidential and legislative elections, a five-year-term president was re-elected – which has never happened before –, and his absolute majority in the National Assembly was reduced to a relative one – which has only happened once in 1988, but with a lesser distance from an absolute majority (13 seats vs. 39 today).

In a country characterized by these absolute majorities that allow the elected President to easily implement her/his program, the political configuration facing France today is completely unprecedented. In what follows, we analyse the key elements characterising this new political situation. We also retrace the path taken by the French government and, against that background, we present a likely scenario for the coming months and years, and an ideal one to preserve political stability. The respective scenarios might also differently impact Macron's agenda to reform the EU. Our findings can be summarised as follows:

1. The unprecedentedly split National Assembly stems from (1) strong abstention, (2) a shift of votes to the far-left and – more so – the far-right, (3) a willingness of youths to find alternatives to usual governmental parties, (4) a large share of uneducated voters reinforcing far-left and far-right votes.
2. The government should – like the Germans do with coalition contracts – keep on looking for a long-term commitment to pass legislation with the centre-right party LR. Otherwise, the “project majority” strategy could rapidly lead to political deadlock caused by unavoidable frustration among all parliamentary partners. This is the only way for Macron to create some leeway for the next five years – which could be useful, as the geopolitical and economic context seems to durably toughen – and for France to avoid political unrest, which could favour far-right parties in 2027.
3. Given the large legislative program (unemployment benefit reform, energy price shield and sobriety plan), the occasions of political deadlock should multiply in the National Assembly, increasing the likelihood of social unrest. Nevertheless, the potential 2023 recession of the French economy should incentivise deputies to find consensus in order to avoid intensifying adverse economic effects.

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1 Introduction

In 2022, the French people went to the polls four times: twice in April for the presidential elections and twice in June for the legislative elections, i.e., the election of deputies to the National Assembly, the lower house of the French Parliament. The results were surprising because they broke with what has almost always been a constant under the Fifth Republic: "the majority fact".¹ The President is no longer supported by a clear absolute majority. From now on, ten parliamentary groups, plus the unlisted members, are present in the hemicycle.

This situation first led observers to expect complete political deadlock and worry about the possible dissolution by President Macron of the new assembly. This dissolution would have increased the risk of further instability: new parliamentary elections could have led to Macron again failing to win an absolute majority, thus forcing him to resign. Nevertheless, inspired by other European democracies, Macron quickly went to trivialization, taking note of the vote and avoiding weakening his position. He mitigated the situation by saying "[it was necessary] to build compromises» and commenting that "[the French situation was] frightfully banal at the European level".²

Indeed, Germany and Italy for instance are familiar with parliamentary fragmentation and the establishment of coalitions to govern. They have a certain culture of compromise and have developed creative methods to do so. For instance, deliberation is now part of the DNA of the German federal regime and is used to develop coalition contracts³ – although political practice during the legislative mandate may sometimes distance itself from this roadmap. As for Italy, its experience of "national unity government" led by Draghi is coming to an end in a country used to short-lived governments.

This cepInput seeks to develop a better understanding of where France now stands politically, how it can find inspiration in the political practices of Germany and Italy, and where it could be heading next. It first details the results of the new French National Assembly election (Section 2). Next, it analyses these results based on a socio-demographic comparison with Germany and Italy (Section 3). This is followed by a comparison between the French, German and Italian habits for establishing and collapsing government in order to identify new practices France might use to adapt to its new political context (Section 4). Finally, the paper reviews the latest political developments in France (Section 5) and concludes with an expected scenario, and an ideal one for guaranteeing political stability over the five next years (Section 6).

2 The Results of the French Elections

The new composition of the National Assembly is unprecedented. In the 2017 legislative elections, the French gave "La République en Marche" (LREM, Macron's centrist party now called "Renaissance") and its ally MODEM (centrist party) 361 seats⁴. With this very large majority by French standards, Macron was able to easily implement his program. After the recent June parliamentary election, the presidential majority Ensemble obtained only 250 seats: 245 seats within the official majority (Renaissance,

¹ In 1988, the socialist François Mitterrand also obtained a relative majority in the Assembly, but with only 13 seats away from the absolute majority, against 39 for the current presidential majority. Conseil Constitutionnel, [Que change le régime de la Vème République institué par la Constitution du 4 octobre 1958 par rapport aux régimes précédents ?](#).

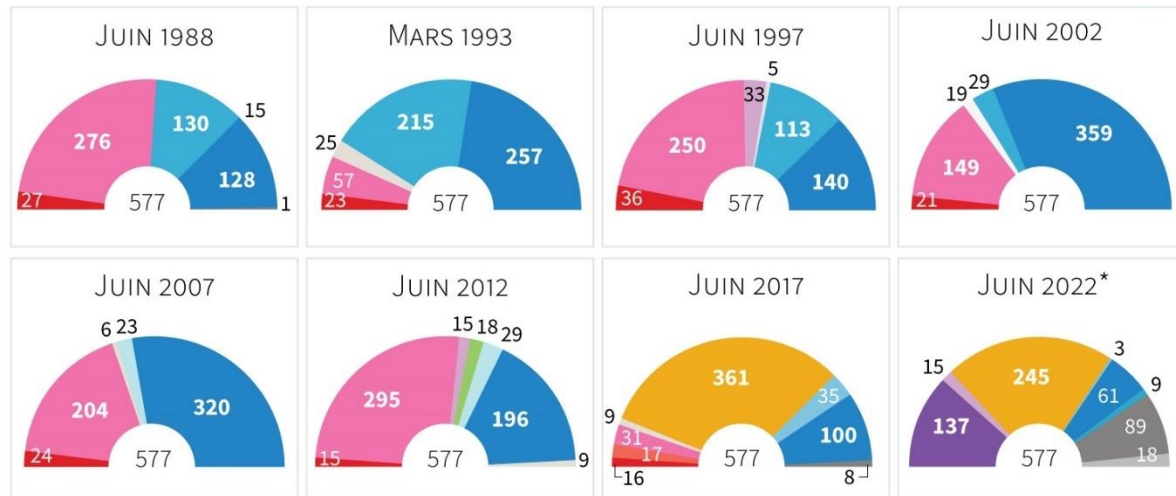
² Le Monde, [Emmanuel Macron estime qu'il faut « bâtir des compromis » à l'Assemblée et juge la situation française « affreusement banale au niveau européen »](#), 24.06.2022.

³ Koalitionsvertrag, [Mehr Fortschritt Wagen](#), 11.2021.

⁴ See Figure 1 below.

MODEM, Horizons) and 5 seats from affiliates. This result was 39 seats short of an absolute majority (289 out of 577).⁵

Figure 1: The French National Assembly since 1988



Parliamentary forces - Red: Communist Party and affiliates (far-left), Light Red: LFI (far-left), Pink: Socialist Party and affiliates (left-wing), Green: Ecologists (far-left/left-wing), Violet: NUPES (combination of Communists, Socialists, Ecologists, and LFI), Light Violet: Miscellaneous Centre-Left, Light Grey: Unlisted and Others, Orange: LREM/Renaissance (centre/centre-left), MODEM (centre) and Horizons (centre-right) forming the presidential majority, Very Light Blue: Miscellaneous Centre-Right, Light Blue: Union Démocrate Française (UDF – extinguished centre-right party), Blue: RPR/UMP/LR (conservative), Grey: FN/RN (far-right).⁶

Source: French Ministry of the Interior.

The other surprise of this parliamentary election was the large score of the “Rassemblement National” (RN, far-right party), which obtained a historic number of 89 seats, even though most polls expected a score below 50.⁷ As for the first round of the legislative election, it produced an Assembly with a proportional distribution of seats along the political spectrum – with a premium for the winner – although the electoral system is designed to avoid this type of situation. More than two-thirds of the French people were satisfied with this situation.⁸

This unprecedented turn of events begs the question of why France chose this path at the polls.

3 Comparison of Legislative Results in France, Germany, and Italy by Socio-Demographic Criteria

To better understand what drove these results, we compare along different socio-demographic criteria the composition of the vote in the last parliamentary elections in France, Germany, and Italy. We studied gender (Section 3.1), age (Section 3.2), qualification (Section 3.3), and professional class (Section 3.4) and focused on far-right and far-left party results to understand the current polarization in the French National Assembly.

⁵ Assemblée nationale, [Effectif des groupes politiques](#), XVIème législature.

⁶ Challenges, [Législatives 2022 : on vous résume les dates clés à retenir après le scrutin](#), 22.06.2022.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ BFMTV, [71% des Français sont satisfaits qu’il n’y ait pas de majorité absolue à l’Assemblée](#), 22.06.2022.

3.1 Gender

In France, 27% of women voted for the left/far-left (NUPES – the coalition of left-wing parties) compared to 23% of men, while only 17% of women voted for the far-right (RN) compared to 21% of men. Abstention reached 52% for both genders.⁹

In Germany, 48% of women voted for the left/far left (SPD/Grünen/Die Linke) compared to 44% of men, while 12% of men voted for the far right (AfD) compared to 8% of women. Abstention reached 23.5% for women and slightly less for men.¹⁰

In Italy 22.1%, of women and 22.5% of men voted for the left/far left (PD, Free and Equal). Women and men voted respectively at 17.6% and 17.1% in favour of the far-right, (Lega). Abstention showed a different pattern: 31.7% of women abstained against 27.5% of men.¹¹

Thus, in terms of abstention, only Italy stands out with a significantly higher rate for women. This is coupled with the fact that Italian women vote much more to the right than Italian men, whereas in Germany and France the pattern is reverse. Also, Italy and France display a political configuration whose barycentre is more on the right than Germany, given the far lower share of votes for left-wing parties in both countries (between 20% and 30%) compared to Germany (almost 50%).

3.2 Age

In France, abstention remains most marked among 18–24-year-olds at 69%, compared to 31% among those aged 70 and over. The youngest clearly vote for the left/far left (NUPES at 42% for 18–24-year-olds), then the vote gradually shifts to the presidential majority Ensemble (Macron's centrist coalition including Renaissance, MODEM and Horizons: 38% of 70+ year-olds).¹²

In Germany, in the 2021 elections, turnout among young people remained at 70%, and even higher among older people. The over-70s maintain the traditional left (SPD with 35%) and right (CDU with 38%) divide, while the young are divided between the Greens (Grünen with 23%) and the Liberals (FDP with 21%).¹³

In Italy, the 2018 elections saw the rise of a new, populist, but centrist party, the 5-Star Movement (M5S). It increased youth turnout, which was higher than that of the over 63s. The M5S won among young people (35.3%). Among the over 63s, the left (PD) was first (27.3%), although the M5S also scored well (27.1%), as did Salvini's far right (Lega at 14.6%) and Berlusconi's right (16.1%).¹⁴

Italy still stands out, with a higher turnout of young people than older people. Nevertheless, as in France and Germany, young people more than older people are looking for alternatives to the traditional right- and left-wing perspectives. This can help explain why the results have been very split in the last French legislative elections.

⁹ Ipsos, "[Qui a voté quoi ? The sociology of the electorate](#)", survey conducted from 8 to 11 June 2022

¹⁰ Statista, "[Ergebnisse der Bundestagswahl am 26. September 2021](#)", 30.05.2022

¹¹ Ipsos Public Affairs survey published in *Il sole 24 ore*, "Elezioni 2018. Genere, età, professione : identikit dei nuovi elettori a Cinque stelle", 06.03.2018

¹² Ipsos, Op. Cit. (9).

¹³ Statista, Op. Cit. (10).

¹⁴ Ipsos Public Affairs, Op. Cit. (11).

3.3 Qualification

In France, there is a clear divide between the levels of education of those who support the left/far-left (NUPES) and the far-right (RN). The former receives support from the most educated (32% of those with three or more years of higher education) and the latter attracts 28% of those with less than a bachelor's degree. From this point of view, the presidential majority Ensemble is more neutral, collecting 27% of both categories.¹⁵

In Germany, citizens with the highest level of education vote for the left/far left (SPD/Grünen/die Linke) accounting for 50% in total. The far-right (AfD) attracts more people with lower levels of education with 13% of voters with low education against 6% of those with higher education.¹⁶

In Italy, the most and least educated are equally attracted to the M5S with 29.3% and 30% respectively, while the far-right appeals to those with a secondary school diploma or less: 22.4% of those with only a secondary school diploma vote for the Liga.¹⁷

In conclusion, there is a general trend for those who are less educated to prefer the far-right and those who have higher degrees to cast a more progressive vote. Moreover, the central and disruptive parties are equally suitable to both categories of education. Hence, the surprising results of the RN in the last French legislative elections can in part be related to a large share of uneducated voters.

3.4 Professional Class

In France, the centre-right (Ensemble) attracts 35% of retirees, while the far-right (RN) is the clear favourite among workers (45%). The left/far left (NUPES) remains homogeneous but attracts more civil servants (33%) while Ensemble pulls from the self-employed (33%). The unemployed are divided between the NUPES (30%) and the RN (27%).¹⁸

In Germany, although a large share of workers (21%) vote for the far right (AfD), they still prefer the left/far left (39%). The same is true for the unemployed (51% for the left/far left and especially the Greens, against 17% for AfD), employees (46% for left/far left against 11% for AfD) and retirees (49% for the left/far left against 7% for AfD). The Liberals lead only among the self-employed, attracting 19% of that category.¹⁹

In Italy, the M5S is the leading party for all socio-professional categories (almost always above 30%). Nevertheless, the left (PD) also won over 22.5% of the upper professional class 27.6% of retirees. Like in France, the far-right also scored well among workers (23.8%) and the unemployed (18.2%), as well as among the self-employed (23.6%) and housewives (19.8%).²⁰

In France and Italy, the far right has successfully made inroads into large parts of the socio-professional strata. It has not been as successful in Germany where the left/far left has been more resistant, particularly among workers and the unemployed. Again, this explains in part the success of the RN in the last French legislative elections.

¹⁵ Ipsos, Op. Cit. (9).

¹⁶ Statista, Op. Cit. (10).

¹⁷ Ipsos Public Affairs, Op. Cit. (11).

¹⁸ Ipsos, Op. Cit. (9).

¹⁹ Statista, Op. Cit. (10).

²⁰ Ipsos Public Affairs, Op. Cit. (11).

Hence, in France, the unprecedentedly split National Assembly relies on (1) a strong abstention, (2) a shift of votes to the far-left and – even more – the far-right, (3) a willingness of youths to find alternatives to usual governmental parties, (4) a large share of uneducated voters reinforcing far-left and far-right votes.

Having broadly explained the results of the last legislative elections, we turn now to an investigation of the practices for establishing and collapsing government in France, Germany and Italy to determine how the French might adapt to this unprecedented political situation and avoid political deadlock.

4 Comparison of the French, German and Italian Political Systems Regarding Government Establishment and Collapse

Because the presidential majority does not have an absolute majority in the hemicycle for the first time since 1988, the modalities of government formation no longer seem so obvious. Indeed, in practice, the government comes from the parliamentary majority. But when the majority is plural, how can one govern effectively? Our European neighbours, who are used to compromise and cooperation, could appear as sources of inspiration: How, then, does the establishment and collapse of governments in Germany and Italy usually proceed? This section is dedicated to identifying the specificity of French, German, and Italian practices on six aspects of government establishment and collapse to better understand the current choices of the French government and whether it could be influenced.

4.1 Periods for Government Establishment and Reshuffling

Table 1: Broad Comparison of Practices in France, Germany and Italy regarding the Periods of Government Establishment and Reshuffling

Comparison criteria	France ²¹	Germany ²²	Italy ²³
Periods for Government Establishment and Reshuffling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After the presidential elections. - After other types of elections. - After scandals or loss of political capital by certain ministers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After the Bundestag's elections and negotiations between coalesced parties. - In case of a successful motion of constructive no-confidence (censure motion) which leads to the establishment of a new coalition in the Bundestag. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After the Deputies' Chamber and Senate elections. - Each time a coalition has fallen after a lost vote of confidence.

Source: own conception.

²¹ Assemblée Nationale, [Fact Sheet 3: The Government](#)

²² Article 69 paragraph 2 and 3 of the Grundgesetz of 1949. Bundestag, ["Wie das Grundgesetz eine Kanzlerlose Zeit verhindert"](#), 2021

²³ Stanislas de Livonnière for *Le Parisien*, ["Italy, Europe's champion of governmental instability"](#), 20.08.2019. Alessandro Lauro for Jus Politicum Blog, ["The 'silent power': around the 2022 residential elections in Italy"](#), 16.11.2021 Article 92 of the Italian Constitution of 1947

There is a certain leeway in France when it comes to the period of government establishment and reshuffling. Indeed, the President can appoint a new government when needed, i.e., after any election that redesigns the political equilibrium or after a scandal. In Germany, the establishment of government usually occurs in two specific cases: after the Bundestag's election and once a coalition has signed a contract, or after a motion of constructive no-confidence (censure motion), if there is an alternative absolute majority in the Bundestag. Of course, ministers can resign which also leads to a reshuffling. In Italy, since 1946, there have been 71 governments with 26 different Heads of Governments (President of the Council): the ill-disciplined parties within both the Deputies' Chamber and the Senate are prone to overthrow governments quite often, leading to frequent government establishment and reshuffling.

It seems then that the French political system conceives the government as an adjustable power instrument for the President, leading to frequent reshuffling; the German political system as the guarantor of the balance within a governing coalition, leading to limited establishment and reshuffling cases; and the Italian political system as a fragile power instrument submitted to impulsive political parties. Said otherwise, France favours efficiency and verticality, Germany stability and democracy, and Italy instability and democracy.

In the context of a more fragmented National Assembly in France, it appears that the government has chosen a creative way to challenge all these three models: the government remains an adjustable instrument of power for the president – as he did not open it to personalities outside the majority –, but at the expense of its real influence. Since the end of June 2022, French deputies, especially the ones leading Commissions in the National Assembly, are marginalizing certain ministers in terms of responsibility in the law-making process.²⁴

4.2 Appointment of the Head of Government

Table 2: Broad Comparison of Practices in France, Germany, and Italy regarding the Appointment of Head of Government

Comparison criteria	France ²⁵	Germany ²⁶	Italy ²⁷
Appointment of the Head of Government	- the Prime Minister is appointed by the President of the Republic depending on the political equilibrium in the National Assembly.	- The Chancellor is appointed by the Federal President after a coalition has been established, and a coalition contract sealed. It usually is the leader of the party which won the Bundestag's elections.	- After consultations with the Presidents of the chambers of parliament, the former Presidents and the different political groups, the President of the Council appointed by the President of the Republic depending on

²⁴ La Nouvelle République, [Les députés de la Vienne racontent l'Assemblée nationale](#), de l'intérieur, 08.08.2022.

²⁵ Op. Cit. (21)

²⁶ Bundesregierung, [Wie funktioniert die Kanzlerwahl?](#). Bundestag, ["Wie das Grundgesetz eine Kanzlerlose Zeit verhindert"](#), 2021. Article 63 of the Grundgesetz of 1949.

²⁷ Op. Cit. (23)

		<p>- She/he can also be removed by the Federal President if a vote of constructive no-confidence has been adopted.</p>	<p>the political equilibrium in the National Assembly.</p>
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Source: own conception.

In France, the President, who usually has the freedom to choose given her/his majority in the National Assembly, appoints the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, three times in the past (1986, 1993, 1997), the majority was held by the opposition, which forced the President to choose the leader of the opposition as Prime Minister. In Germany, the Federal President only appoints the Chancellor when a majority is established in the Bundestag. Usually, it is the leader of the main coalesced party. Her/his degree of freedom in choosing the Chancellor is thus extremely low. In Italy, the President of the Republic appoints the President of the Council after consulting with multiple political forces: she/he has more power to appoint someone than the German Federal President, but far less than the French one. The Italian President of the Republic plays a key role in Italian politics, without the power to conduct any policy.

In the new French political setup, Macron chose to keep a “technocratic” Prime Minister instead of picking a more “political” one: he still took into account the new political equilibrium in the Assembly, but as an opportunity to change the way the government works with the Parliament rather than as a change in the government itself. This is why – in contrast to previous legislatures – there won’t be a paradoxically usual “extraordinary session” of the Parliament in September. Deputies and Senators will only come back to work on October 3, to give them time to establish new habits of government-parliament interactions.²⁸

4.3 Appointment of Ministers

Table 3: Broad Comparison of Practices in France, Germany, and Italy regarding the Appointment of Ministers

Comparison criteria	France ²⁹	Germany ³⁰	Italy ³¹
Appointment of Ministers	<p>- Appointed by the President of the Republic on the proposals of the Prime Minister.</p>	<p>- Proposed by the Chancellor after her/his election as Chancellor, and confirmed by the Federal President, who signs the nomination decrees.</p>	<p>- Proposed by the President of the Council after consultations, and confirmed by the President of the Republic, who signs the nomination decrees.</p>

Source: own conception.

²⁸ Franceinfo, [Pas de session parlementaire en septembre : les députés seront-ils pour autant en vacances ?](#), 02.08.2022.

²⁹ Op. Cit. (21).

³⁰ Op. Cit. (22).

³¹ Op. Cit. (23).

In France, the President keeps the upper hand on ministerial appointments, even though it is assumed that the Prime Minister has the power to propose different alternatives –at most the President and the Prime Minister work together to establish a list of ministers. In Germany and Italy, the President usually does not oppose any proposals from the Head of Government as it is the latter who has democratic legitimacy. In these three cases, ministers can be any type of individuals.

In France, after the June legislative elections, there was a reshuffling that led to better inclusion of alternative political forces within the majority. For example, Horizons, the former Prime Minister’s party, obtained specific ministries, after a net win during the second round of the legislative elections.

4.4 Votes of Confidence after Government Establishment

Table 4: Broad Comparison of Practices in France, Germany, and Italy regarding the Votes of Confidence after Government Establishment

Comparison criteria	France ³²	Germany ³³	Italy ³⁴
Votes of Confidence after Government Establishment	- Never mandatory once the government is appointed. Nevertheless, given the “majority fact” in most legislatures – i.e., the government benefits from an absolute majority in the National Assembly –, a vote of confidence is performed after the general orientation speech of the Prime Minister.	- Never mandatory once the government is appointed.	- Mandatory within ten days after the government has been appointed, both in front of the Senate and the Deputies’ Chamber. The vote of confidence is an essential parliamentary instrument in Italian politics.

Source: own conception.

In France and in Germany, the government does not necessarily need a vote of confidence to pass laws. Nevertheless, given the usual absolute majority in the French National Assembly, the French government does. In Italy, on the contrary, the vote of confidence is a vital instrument to make sure the government still benefits from a majority in both chambers.

In France, for the first time in a very long time, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne did not proceed to a vote of confidence after her general orientation speech on July 6th.³⁵ This corroborates the fact that Macron and Borne have chosen to govern with their relative majority, also because they were prevented from establishing a larger majority by other political groups in the National Assembly.

³² Assemblée Nationale, [La mise en cause de la responsabilité du Gouvernement](#).

³³ DW, [What is a Confidence Vote?](#).

³⁴ Reuters, [Italy’s Draghi wins confidence vote, but 5-Star boycotts motion](#), 14.07.2022.

³⁵ Franceinfo, [Remaniement : un discours de politique générale sans vote de confiance, un aveu de fragilité pour Elisabeth Borne ?](#), 05.07.2022.

4.5 Censure Motions

Table 5: Broad Comparison of Practices in France, Germany, and Italy regarding Censure Motions

Comparison criteria	France ³⁶	Germany ³⁷	Italy ³⁸
Censure Motions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissible if signed by at least one tenth of the deputies (58). The vote takes place at least 48 hours after it is tabled. - The only time a censure motion was adopted in France, in 1962, the General De Gaulle dissolved the National Assembly and gained a new chamber willing to implement his reform of the presidential elections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After the admission of the motion of constructive no-confidence, a period of 48 hours and an absolute majority vote are required for the Bundestag to overthrow the Chancellor. They elect a new head of government after this vote. - This motion has only been voted on twice, and only once was successful. Both times the assembly was dissolved. In practice, this motion has therefore been used to call early elections.³⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissible if signed by at least one tenth of the members of one of the two chambers and that it is debated three days late. A simple majority in one of the two chambers is sufficient to overthrow the government. - Moreover, it can be voted against a single minister if the government is jeopardized by him/her alone. The motion becomes a means of cleaning up the government. This possibility has been determined by practice and then confirmed by the Constitutional Court.

Source: own conception.

Censure motions don't usually pass in France. it happened only once – and failed to overthrow the President and his government⁴⁰ – while it happened twice in Germany, but only to organize snap legislative elections. In Italy, the censure motion also exists, but governments are usually overthrown by insufficient votes of confidence: it is more common to lack a majority than to have an opposite one, ready to overthrow the government.

A censure motion was implemented in France on July 11th, 2022, but failed, as usual. Its purpose was merely to unite the opposition forces, the NUPES (Ecologists, Communists, LFI, and Socialists). The four left-wing parties all voted in favour of the censure motion.⁴¹

³⁶ Vie Publique, [La motion de censure : véritable moyen de contrôle ?](#), 30.06.2018.

³⁷ Bundestag, [Election of the Federal Chancellor](#).

³⁸ Chamber of Deputies, [Parliamentary Confidence in the Government](#).

³⁹ See footnote 42.

⁴⁰ INA, [1962 : l'unique adoption d'une motion de censure](#), 11.07.2022.

⁴¹ Franceinfo, ["Le congrès de la Nupes est terminé", réagit Olivier Véran après le rejet de la motion de censure](#), 12.07.2022.

4.6 Dissolution of the Lower House

Table 6: Broad Comparison of Practices in France, Germany, and Italy regarding the Dissolution of the Lower House

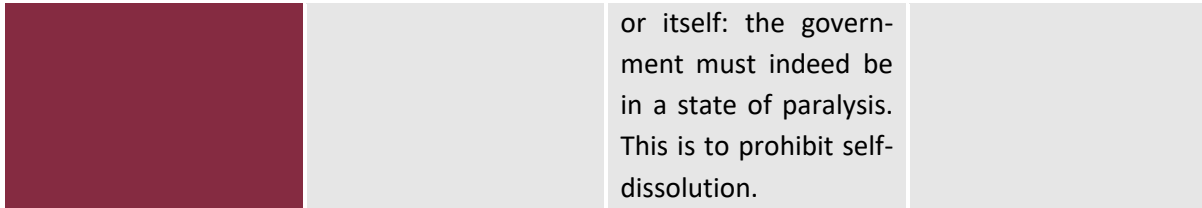
Comparison criteria	France ⁴²	Germany ⁴³	Italy ⁴⁴
Dissolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After consultation with the Prime Minister, the President can dissolve the National Assembly. - Dissolution is not possible: when the crisis powers of Article 16 are in force; during interim periods of the presidency; and within one year of a first dissolution. - 5 dissolutions have occurred since 1958. Only one was not successful for the President, in 1997, which led Jacques Chirac enter a cohabitation period with the Socialist Party. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The dissolution of the Bundestag is only admitted in two cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Federal President can dissolve the Bundestag if, when a new Chancellor is elected, the persons he proposes do not win an absolute majority after several votes. Otherwise, he is obliged to appoint the last person proposed. - Secondly, the Chancellor can also ask for a vote of confidence - which he loses voluntarily - to demand the President's dissolution. - This ingenious diversion has been used successfully twice: first with Willy Brandt in 1972 and then in 1982 with Helmut Kohl. - However, concerned about the possible consequences of this second practice, the Constitutional Court imposed in 1983 a material obligation verified by the President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The President may use the right of dissolution for both chambers, although it remains limited. Thus, unlike in France, the President's act is subject to countersignature by the President of the Council of Ministers. - Dissolution is prohibited only during the last six months of the presidential term, so as not to favour the re-election of the outgoing President chosen by the new Parliament. - However, in order to avoid an institutional vacuum, this exception falls when the legislature ends at the same time. - Italy would indeed be in the unfortunate situation of having neither a President nor a legitimate Parliament to elect him.

⁴² Vie Publique, [La dissolution de l'Assemblée nationale, une arme présidentielle ?](#), 10.01.2022.

⁴³ Sénat, [L'expérience des parlements nationaux au sein de l'Union européenne : quels enseignements pour le Sénat ? Les exemples allemand, britannique, espagnol, finlandais, italien et polonais.](#)

Bundesverfassungsgericht, [Judgment of 25 August 2005.](#)

⁴⁴ Op. Cit. (38).



Source: own conception.

In the French and Italian systems, the power of dissolution is much broader than in Germany, as their constitutions define the modalities of dissolution in a negative way. They both specify only when dissolution is impossible and not when it is possible. In all three countries, whether established by constitutional obligations (as in Germany) or found in practice (as in Italy and France), dissolution is used as a remedy for intentional crises when the government no longer has the support of a clear majority.

Hence in the new political French configuration, Macron maintains the right to dissolve the National Assembly, should political deadlock arise – which so far is not the case. If turmoil occurred next fall for instance, Macron could dissolve and trigger new legislative elections. But this is a risky bet, as high uncertainty would surround the results of the new elections: Macron could in the end be even worse off in terms of seats in the National Assembly.

Considering the possible inspiration from German and Italian practices surrounding the establishment and collapse of governments, we now turn to a description of the path taken by the French government since the second round of the legislative elections in June, thus illustrating the creativity in adapting to this new situation.

5 The Path to a New Political Way of Life in France

5.1 The Government is Forced to Choose the “Project Majority” Strategy

After the surprising parliamentary election results, Macron consulted with all new parliamentary group presidents before announcing how he pass his presidential program. Discarding a “national union government”, Macron affirmed that a coalition should first be sought with moderate “republican” forces, i.e., without “La France Insoumise” (LFI, far-left party) nor the “Rassemblement National” (RN, far-right party). The Prime Minister named after the presidential elections, Elisabeth Borne, was called upon to build this majority, if possible.⁴⁵

However, no parliamentary group in the Assembly has been willing to sign a coalition contract with the presidential majority. In this context, Elisabeth Borne pronounced her “Déclaration de Politique Générale” (general political orientation speech, i.e., the first address of the Prime Minister to the Assembly, which defines the governmental program of the coming legislature). She explained that the presidential majority would eventually seek “project majorities”, i.e., building text by text majorities with moderate forces in the Assembly. She called on deputies to act responsibly and summoned them to a constructive opposition.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Franceinfo, [Une "coalition de LR aux communistes" : pour Emmanuel Macron, LFI et le RN ne sont pas républicains](#), 26.06.2022.

⁴⁶ Gouvernement, [Déclaration de Politique Générale](#), 06.07.2022.

5.2 The National Assembly Regains Power

This moment also marked a quick return to a strong parliamentary power, for instance with the independent decision by the majority to elect the President of the Assembly. Yael Braun-Pivet, a Renaissance deputy who was named minister after the presidential elections, was chosen, even though she was not the official candidate of the government.⁴⁷

There were other battles for which the government had no sway. The most important of these regarded the chairmanship of the Finance Committee. The rules of the chamber only state that the post is to be held by an elected member of the opposition, without any further details. It usually goes to the largest opposition group, i.e., the RN in these circumstances. Nevertheless, the NUPES united to elect Éric Coquerel. He promised to implement a strict control of the government's actions. Coquerel declared that he "does not wish to block for the sake of blocking" but he promised to use all of his prerogatives".⁴⁸ The government may face strong opposition from this commission.

The hemicycle also voted for its six vice-presidents and the RN managed to impose two of its members with the support of the presidential majority and the LR. After a week the far right has become institutionalized, in its search for respectability and ability to govern.⁴⁹

5.3 The Government Mostly Passes Laws With LR

After this three-week phase, the government faced its first challenge with the vote of a censure motion deposited by NUPES, the left-wing electoral coalition. The RN and LR voted against it, allowing the government to survive its first weeks in the Assembly. This vote provided a flavour for the coming political agreements that will appear in the Assembly, especially between LR and Ensemble, the presidential majority.⁵⁰

Indeed, a comparison of the behaviour of the opposition in terms of text and amendment voting during the first month of work at the National Assembly in 2022 and the previous legislature reveals that LR has voted much more like LREM/Renaissance than before. For the first 121 votes of the first month, LR voted like LREM/Renaissance 74% of the time, vs. 36% between 2017 and 2022. The RN is voting more like LREM/Renaissance than before too, with 42% of agreement, vs. less than 30% between 2017 and 2022. However, LFI is voting less like LREM/Renaissance (14% vs. 20%), like the Socialists (21% vs. 27%) and the Ecologists (20% vs. 34%). Hence, the presidential majority is rather counting on the conservative wing political groups LR, and even the RN even if not sought, to pass the presidential program.⁵¹

Nevertheless, we observe that the presidential majority can still count on favourable behaviours like constructive abstention from the Socialists in certain cases (housing benefits revalorization, coal plant reopening in case of tensions, purchase power law) and even positive votes (health security law). Paradoxically, it may also benefit in the long term from the willingness of the RN to resemble a viable

⁴⁷ Assemblée Nationale, [Yaël Braun-Pivet élue Présidente de l'Assemblée Nationale](#), 28.06.2022.

⁴⁸ Le Monde, [Eric Coquerel élu à la présidence de la commission des finances de l'Assemblée nationale, la majorité obtient sept présidences de commissions permanentes](#), 30.06.2022.

⁴⁹ Le Monde, [Le Rassemblement national obtient deux des six vice-présidences, Eric Ciotti réélu à la questure... Les députés ont élu le bureau de l'Assemblée nationale](#), 29.06.2022.

⁵⁰ Le Monde, [Les oppositions se saisissent des « Uber Files » pour viser Emmanuel Macron ; la motion de censure de la Nupes rejetée : revivez la journée politique du 11 juillet](#), 11.07.2022.

⁵¹ Datapolitics, [Voilà un mois que nous avons une nouvelle Assemblée Nationale](#), 25.07.2022. [Un gouvernement d'union est-il possible ?](#), 22.06.2022.

party, which may incite them to be reasonable frequently and vote in favour of the presidential majority.⁵²

The government will have to pay attention to counter-majorities which arose already in the case of the covid-19 surveillance systems, or the covid-19 border controls: for these two law provisions, the presidential majority was beaten by a coalition of LFI, the RN and LR.⁵³

6 Conclusion and Perspectives

In conclusion, French political life has profoundly changed in just a few weeks. After twenty years of vertical exercise of power by successive Presidents, the successful re-election of Macron in April was followed by a completely new set up of Parliament, with the loss of the absolute majority for the President in June. Most observers are satisfied with this situation, with more than two-third of the French people stating that they approve of the results of the election.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the presidential majority may not have it so easy starting on October 3, when the new session will begin. Here are the main challenges it could face: (1) LR could refuse to vote in favour of the 2023 budget, although so far it has shown inclination to vote like the presidential majority and (2) the opposition could deliberately seek political deadlock to force Macron to dissolve the Parliament. Ideally, the presidential majority should keep on looking for a long-term commitment to pass legislation with the centre-right party LR – like the Germans are used to doing with coalition contracts –. Otherwise, the “project majority” strategy could rapidly lead to political deadlock due to growing frustration among all parliamentary partners. This is the only way for Macron to benefit from leeway for the full next five years – which could be useful as the geopolitical and economic context seems to durably toughen - and for France to avoid political unrest which could favour far-right parties in 2027.

This political deadlock might even come sooner than we think given the difficult context France is entering. After the declaration of Macron on August 24th on the “end of abundance and carelessness” that should characterise the new era France is entering,⁵⁵ gloomy economic prospects and social unrest are expected. For the second, it is even more likely to occur knowing that Macron wants to pass as many ambitious reforms as possible before the 2024 European elections, which will correspond, for observers, to the moment when his potential successors may undermine his capacity to conduct policies.

Regarding the National Assembly, the government can expect multiple incidents beyond the negotiation of the 2023 law of finance mentioned above:

- First, Macron is preparing a pension reform, in concertation with social partners, which has finally been delayed to next year.⁵⁶ In this context, it is likely there will be some civil unrest in France, as there have always been for the previous pension reforms.⁵⁷

⁵² Le Monde, [L'unité de la Nupes à l'épreuve du vote sur le pouvoir d'achat : « On dit tous la même chose avec des musiques différentes »](#), 20.07.2022

⁵³ Le Monde, [Projet de loi sur le Covid-19 : le ministre de la santé, François Braun, et le gouvernement regrettent « une alliance de circonstance entre LFI, le RN et LR »](#), 13.07.2022.

⁵⁴ BFMTV, [71% des Français sont satisfaits qu'il n'y ait pas de majorité absolue à l'Assemblée](#), 22.06.2022.

⁵⁵ BFMTV, [Macron et „la fin de l'abondance“](#), 24.08.2022.

⁵⁶ Les Échos, [Retraites : le scénario d'une réforme à l'automne se précise](#), 14.09.2022.

⁵⁷ France Info, [Grève : le souvenir de 2010](#), 25.05.2016.

- The French government also wants to pass a new unemployment benefit reform to make unemployed benefit amounts depend on unemployment rates – less benefits would be provided when the macroeconomic situation is favourable, more when the situation is unfavourable.⁵⁸
- Finally, it wants implement its policies related to its energy sobriety plan (10% energy consumption reduction by 2024 at the latest), its energy price shield (natural gas and electricity price increases capped to 15% - in 2023, vs. 4% for electricity and 0% for natural gas in 2022).⁵⁹ It also wants to distribute before the end of the year 100 to 200 euros to 12 million modest households to help them deal with these energy price increases.⁶⁰

Hence, the oppositions on the National Assembly will have many ammunition against the government, but should be careful not to totally block the country as it may be heading towards recession 2023 according to latest forecasts, despite relatively low expected inflation compared to the rest of the European Union.

According to the Banque de France, France is expected to benefit from +2,6% GDP growth in 2022, but growth in 2023 could vary between +0,8% and -0,5% depending on macroeconomic scenarios. The Ministry of Finance still expects +1% in 2023.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the introduction of the law of finance on October 10th may lead to an update of this decisive forecast for the 2023 budget.⁶² Given the energy price shields implemented in 2022 and 2023, the level of inflation is not expected to exceed 5% next year (4,7% according to the Banque de France), and should be below 6% this year (5,8% according the Banque de France).⁶³ The risk of a wage-price spiral in 2022 and 2023 is low, especially given the “purchasing power” instruments the government introduced to avoid wage increases: hence, employers can give until 3000-euro tax-free premiums to their employees if they earn up to three times the minimum wage (6000 for firms below 50 employees). In 2022, wages in the private sector have only increased by 3% so far.⁶⁴

Hence, given the ambitious legislative program which started on October 3rd on (unemployment benefit reform, energy price shield and sobriety plan, then pension reform), the occasions of political deadlock should multiply in the National Assembly, increasing the likelihood of unrest. Nevertheless, the potential 2023 recession of the French economy should incentivise deputies to be cold-blooded and to find consensus to avoid intensifying and amplifying adverse economic effects. Finally, a successful censure motion against the French government seems unlikely until the next round of elections (2024 for the European Parliament elections, and 2026 for municipal elections).⁶⁵ Until then, the government can expect to benefit from a willingness to compromise within the Assembly.

⁵⁸ Ouest France, [Retraites, budget, chômage ... Quel est le calendrier de la rentrée parlementaire ?](#), 16.09.2022.

⁵⁹ France Info, [Prix du gaz et de l'électricité : „Nous allons limiter les haussers à 15%“ début 2023, annonce Elisabeth Borne](#), 14.09.2022.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Les Échos, [la Banque de France juge possible une récession en 2023](#), 15.09.2022.

⁶² Ouest France, [Retraites, budget, chômage ... Quel est le calendrier de la rentrée parlementaire ?](#), 16.09.2022.

⁶³ Les Échos, [la Banque de France juge possible une récession en 2023](#), 15.09.2022.

⁶⁴ Les Échos, [Prime Macron, heures supplémentaires : ces nouveaux outils „pouvoir d'achat“ des employeurs](#), 15.09.2022.

⁶⁵ Vie Publique, [Quelle sont les dates des prochaines élections ?](#), 20.06.2022.



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