

# The Fractured Republic: Anatomy of France's Political Crisis and its Consequences for Europe

## Executive Summary

The French political crisis of 2024-2025, which witnessed widespread social unrest and the collapse of successive governments, represents a systemic rupture rather than a fleeting political squabble. This report argues that the turmoil is the culmination of intersecting political, socio-economic, and institutional failures. The crisis was ignited by President Emmanuel Macron's strategic miscalculation in calling a snap legislative election in June 2024, a decision that shattered his parliamentary majority and exposed the profound fragility of the Fifth Republic's governing framework in an era of political fragmentation. This political error, however, landed on a pre-existing tinderbox of severe fiscal precarity, deepening social and economic inequality, and a pervasive public mistrust in the political establishment. The resulting parliamentary deadlock has not only paralyzed domestic policymaking but has also significantly diminished France's standing and credibility within the European Union, creating a leadership vacuum at a critical geopolitical juncture. The cycle of governmental collapse has called into question the viability of the Fifth Republic's "hyper-presidential" model, which appears ill-equipped to manage a tri-polar political landscape. This sets the stage for a volatile and unpredictable period leading up to the 2027 presidential election, with the potential for a far-right accession to power that would fundamentally reshape both France and the European project.

## I. The Unraveling: Political Miscalculation and Institutional Paralysis

The immediate catalyst for the governmental collapse was a chain of political events that began with a presidential overreach and culminated in institutional dysfunction. President

Macron's attempt to reassert authority collided with the reality of a deeply fragmented electorate, rendering the established mechanisms of the Fifth Republic unworkable and setting off a cycle of instability.

### **Macron's Gambit: The Snap Election of June 2024**

The crisis began in earnest following the 2024 European Parliament elections. The decisive victory of the far-right National Rally (RN), which secured 30 of France's 80 seats, prompted President Macron to make the "stunning decision" to dissolve the National Assembly and call a snap legislative election for late June and early July.<sup>1</sup> This was a high-stakes political gamble intended to confront what Macron termed "the extremes" and, he hoped, to deliver his centrist alliance a clear mandate to govern.<sup>3</sup>

The gambit backfired spectacularly. Instead of consolidating his power, the election produced a hung parliament, a first in the modern history of the Fifth Republic.<sup>2</sup> The legislature was splintered into three irreconcilable blocs: the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP) coalition emerged with a slim plurality of 193 seats; Macron's centrist

*Ensemble* alliance was reduced to 166 seats; and the RN secured 142 seats.<sup>1</sup> This tripartite deadlock created a state of legislative paralysis, or

*blocage*, making it arithmetically impossible for any government to command a stable majority without forming an unlikely and culturally unprecedented cross-spectrum coalition.<sup>4</sup>

Compounding the crisis, President Macron chose to defy the electoral verdict. Despite the NFP winning the most seats, he refused to appoint their nominated candidate, Lucie Castets, as Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> This decision broke with the established constitutional norm of

*cohabitation*, where a president from one party governs with a prime minister from an opposing party that controls the National Assembly.<sup>7</sup> The move was widely condemned by the left as an "institutional fault" and a "power grab," further poisoning an already toxic political atmosphere and leading the hard-left La France Insoumise (LFI) party to initiate impeachment proceedings against the president.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Revolving Door at Matignon: The Collapse of the Barnier and Bayrou Governments**

Macron's refusal to appoint a prime minister from the left led to a period of unprecedented governmental instability, with his chosen heads of government unable to pass their central policy objective: a budget designed to rein in France's spiraling debt.

The first attempt to break the deadlock involved the appointment of Michel Barnier, a veteran conservative and former EU Brexit negotiator, in September 2024.<sup>1</sup> The choice was intended to reassure financial markets and potentially build a governing coalition with the centre-right Les Républicains party.<sup>10</sup> Barnier's government, however, lasted a mere three months. Facing intractable opposition to his proposed €60 billion deficit-reduction budget, he invoked Article 49.3 of the Constitution to force a social security financing bill through the Assembly without a vote.<sup>1</sup> This procedural maneuver, while constitutional, is politically inflammatory and triggered a motion of no confidence. In a rare display of unity, the motion was jointly supported by the NFP and the RN, leading to the first ousting of a French prime minister in this manner since 1962.<sup>1</sup>

Following Barnier's fall, Macron turned to his longtime centrist ally, François Bayrou, in December 2024.<sup>1</sup> Bayrou inherited the same intractable parliamentary arithmetic. His government's central task was to pass an austerity budget for 2026, which proposed savings of over €40 billion (later specified as €44 billion) through deeply unpopular measures, including a freeze on most welfare benefits, cuts to civil service jobs, and the scrapping of two public holidays.<sup>4</sup> The proposals were met with near-universal condemnation from across the political spectrum.<sup>13</sup>

In a move widely described as a "staggering political miscalculation," Bayrou decided to call a confidence vote on his own government under Article 49.1 of the Constitution.<sup>1</sup> He gambled that he could force lawmakers to back his fiscal strategy by framing the vote as a "moment of truth" for the nation's finances.<sup>2</sup> The strategy backfired catastrophically. Instead of fracturing the opposition, it united them. The NFP and the RN, along with other minor parties and even some members of the governing coalition, seized the opportunity to oust the government.<sup>1</sup> Bayrou's government was defeated in a crushing 364-194 vote, marking the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic that a government has fallen after a prime minister initiated a confidence vote.<sup>1</sup>

The crisis reveals a fundamental flaw in the Fifth Republic's institutional architecture when the President lacks a parliamentary majority. The system, designed by Charles de Gaulle in 1958 to overcome the chronic instability of the parliamentary Fourth Republic, is built on the premise of a strong, pre-eminent executive.<sup>19</sup> It functions optimally when the President's party or coalition controls the National Assembly, allowing the Prime Minister to act as the effective agent of the President's agenda. The 2024 snap election shattered this precondition. Macron's response was not to adapt to the new reality by seeking a genuine power-sharing

arrangement, but to attempt to govern

against the grain of the legislature. He appointed prime ministers (Barnier, Bayrou, and subsequently Sébastien Lecornu) who were loyal to his pro-business economic agenda but lacked political legitimacy in the eyes of the parliamentary majority.<sup>11</sup> This created a structural conflict, with the annual budget process becoming the primary battleground. The opposition blocs, though ideologically opposed to one another, could unite tactically to reject austerity measures and, by extension, topple the government.<sup>1</sup> The "revolving door" at the Prime Minister's office is therefore not a failure of individuals but a systemic consequence of a President attempting to assert executive will over a hostile and fragmented legislature, a scenario the Fifth Republic's framework is ill-equipped to handle without generating chronic instability.

## II. The Tinderbox: Socio-Economic Drivers of National Discontent

The political crisis did not occur in a vacuum. It is the surface manifestation of deep-seated economic and social grievances that have eroded the French social contract. The parliamentary rejection of austerity was a direct reflection of a broader public sentiment that the economic system is fundamentally unjust and that the state is failing in its core mission of providing security and prosperity.

### An Economy on the Brink: The Vicious Cycle of Debt, Deficits, and Austerity

France entered the crisis with its public finances in a precarious state, a condition that both necessitated and doomed the austerity measures that triggered the government's collapse. At the end of the first quarter of 2025, public debt stood at a staggering €3.346 trillion, equivalent to 114% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>2</sup> The budget deficit for 2024 reached 5.8% of GDP, nearly double the 3% limit mandated by European Union fiscal rules for eurozone members.<sup>11</sup> This dire fiscal situation, exacerbated by massive state spending to cushion the economic blows of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent energy crisis, placed France under formal EU disciplinary action and intense pressure from financial markets and credit rating agencies like Moody's, which changed the country's

outlook to negative.<sup>1</sup>

The austerity budgets proposed by both the Barnier and Bayrou governments were direct, if politically clumsy, attempts to address this fiscal reality. Barnier's plan called for €60 billion in deficit reduction, while Bayrou's sought €44 billion in savings for the 2026 budget.<sup>10</sup> Bayrou's proposals were particularly inflammatory, including a freeze on most welfare benefits, cuts to civil service jobs, and the symbolic scrapping of two public holidays, which many French citizens see as part of their national identity.<sup>4</sup> He framed these measures as a moral imperative, warning that unchecked debt would lead to "domination by creditors" and unfairly burden future generations.<sup>2</sup>

This political instability has further clouded an already weak economic outlook. The European Commission and other forecasters project French GDP growth to slow significantly to just 0.6% in 2025, while unemployment is expected to rise to around 7.9%.<sup>29</sup> While headline inflation has fallen sharply to a projected 0.9% for 2025, this has not translated into renewed consumer confidence, which remains stagnant amid the political and economic uncertainty.<sup>29</sup>

## A Tale of Two Frances: The Deepening Chasm of Inequality

The fierce public and political rejection of austerity cannot be understood through fiscal data alone. It is rooted in a widespread perception of deepening inequality and a failing social model. Despite France having one of the highest levels of public spending and taxation in the world, a significant portion of the population feels left behind.<sup>23</sup>

Recent data paints a stark picture of this social fracture. According to the national statistics agency INSEE, the poverty rate hit a record high of 15.4% in 2023, the highest level since tracking began in 1996. This means approximately 9.8 million people were living below the poverty line, defined as 60% of the median income, or €1,288 per month for a single person.<sup>33</sup> Reports from organizations like Oxfam France have confirmed a trend of widening economic inequality, noting that in 2022 the standard of living decreased for the poorest 90% of the population while it increased for the wealthiest 10%.<sup>35</sup> This trend is starkly illustrated by the fact that the collective wealth of France's 500 richest individuals has doubled since President Macron's first election in 2017, a period during which his government enacted significant tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy, including the controversial scrapping of the solidarity tax on wealth (ISF).<sup>17</sup>

This growing concentration of wealth has been accompanied by a widely shared perception of decaying public services. Citizens report that hospitals, schools, and rural transport links are suffering from years of underfunding and cuts, creating a deep sense of injustice when they

are asked to make further sacrifices.<sup>5</sup> The proposed 2025 budget, for example, included significant cuts to funding for ecology, higher education and research, and official development assistance.<sup>37</sup>

The austerity measures were ultimately rejected because they were seen as fundamentally unfair. The public's anger was fueled by a perceived double standard, epitomized by a Senate report revealing that the state provides €211 billion in annual, unconditional public funds to businesses.<sup>17</sup> In this context, calls for ordinary citizens to sacrifice public holidays and welfare benefits were seen as hypocritical and insulting. This has fostered what one sociologist described as a "pre-revolutionary" atmosphere, characterized by a feeling of "the little people versus the big".<sup>5</sup> Macron's signature pro-business economic agenda is viewed by a large part of the population as a system that socializes costs while privatizing profits, further eroding the social contract.

Indicator	2023	2024	2025 (Forecast)	2026 (Forecast)	Source Snippets
Real GDP Growth (%)	0.9%	1.1%	0.6%	1.3%	<sup>29</sup>
Inflation (CPI, YoY %)	4.9%	2.3%	0.9%	1.2%	<sup>29</sup>
Unemployment Rate (%)	7.4%	7.4%	7.9%	7.8%	<sup>29</sup>
Budget Deficit (% of GDP)	-5.5%	-5.8%	-5.6%	-5.7%	<sup>11</sup>
Gross Public Debt (% of GDP)	113.0%	113.9%	116.0%	118.4%	<sup>2</sup>
Gini Coefficient (Disposable)	0.297	N/A	N/A	N/A	<sup>45</sup>

Income)					
Poverty Rate (% at 60% median)	15.4%	N/A	N/A	N/A	33

The crisis is fueled by a deep and damaging contradiction at the heart of the modern French state. France maintains one of the highest tax and public spending burdens in the developed world, a system built around a social model of pensions, healthcare, and education that is central to its national identity.<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite this massive fiscal footprint, a significant and growing portion of its population perceives a steady decline in the quality of these very public services and feels increasingly economically insecure. This disconnect creates a powerful and politically explosive narrative: that the state is both omnipresent and ineffective, squandering vast resources on an inefficient bureaucracy and generous corporate subsidies while failing in its core mission of social protection and solidarity.<sup>17</sup> This perception makes any call for "shared sacrifice" through austerity politically toxic. The public does not see a proposal to cut welfare as a necessary evil for the common good; they see it as the final confirmation that the social contract is broken, where they are expected to pay high taxes for deteriorating services while the wealthy and corporate interests are shielded from pain.

### III. The People's Verdict: From the Ballot Box to the Streets

The profound rejection of the political establishment and its economic agenda manifested in two distinct but interconnected ways: through the fragmented vote that produced a paralyzed parliament, and through a powerful wave of social mobilization that took to the streets. These are two facets of the same popular verdict against the status quo.

#### 'Bloquons Tout': The Rebirth of Leaderless Protest

In the immediate aftermath of the Bayrou government's collapse, a new grassroots movement emerged virally on social media platforms under the potent slogan "*Bloquons tout*" ("Block Everything").<sup>4</sup> The movement, which had been building momentum over the summer, called for a national day of action with the explicit goal of paralyzing the country by shutting down

critical infrastructure, including fuel depots, highways, city centers, schools, and logistics hubs.<sup>4</sup> The government responded by deploying 80,000 police and gendarmes across the country to counter the disruptions.<sup>4</sup>

Analysts immediately highlighted the striking parallels between "*Bloquons tout*" and the 2018 *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) movement, which at its peak brought France to a standstill.<sup>4</sup> Both movements are characterized by their acephalous nature—a lack of central leadership or formal organization—and their reliance on social media for spontaneous and viral mobilization.<sup>46</sup> They share a focus on economic injustice, a deep-seated mistrust of the political class, and a preference for more radical tactics of direct action, such as blockades, over traditional, union-led protest marches.<sup>46</sup>

However, observers noted that the anger fueling the 2025 protests appeared to run deeper and be more diffuse than in 2018. While the *Gilets Jaunes* were initially sparked by a specific grievance—a proposed fuel tax—the "*Bloquons tout*" movement was a reaction to a broader and more cumulative set of frustrations. It was not just about one reform but about a general feeling of being ignored and a profound disillusionment with a political system where "governments keep collapsing while nothing changes".<sup>4</sup> The movement's explicit goal was to use widespread disruption to force a political establishment, perceived as deaf to popular discontent, to finally listen.<sup>17</sup>

## The United Front: Organized Labor Joins the Fray

A key feature of the 2025 mobilization, distinguishing it from the initial phases of the *Gilets Jaunes*, was the swift and unified support it received from France's established trade unions. The CGT Cheminots, the country's largest rail union, and SUD-Rail were among the first major unions to endorse and call for participation in the September 10 day of action.<sup>14</sup>

This convergence of grassroots anger and organized labor culminated in the call for a broader, inter-union day of "massive" strikes and demonstrations on September 18, an initiative supported by all eight of France's major union confederations, including the CFDT, CGT, and Force Ouvrière (FO).<sup>14</sup> This created a powerful, united front of opposition that threatened to bring large swathes of the country's economy and public services to a halt.

The mobilization was remarkably multi-sectoral, with numerous specific grievances feeding into the general discontent with the government's austerity agenda. Unions representing hospital workers protested €5 billion in planned savings for public hospitals; pharmacists' organizations planned strikes to oppose cuts to their margins on generic drugs; air traffic controllers demanded inflation-adjusted salaries and denounced a "failure of social dialogue";

and taxi unions organized against new rules for medical transport that they claimed would slash their revenues.<sup>14</sup> This broad-based participation demonstrated how the government's fiscal consolidation plans managed to galvanize disparate and often competing interest groups into a single, potent protest movement.

The 2025 protest movements signify a critical evolution in the nature of social unrest in France. They have shifted from being a force of opposition to a specific policy to acting as a popular veto *on the very process of governing*. The sequence of events is telling: first, widespread celebrations of the Bayrou government's ouster in "Bye Bye Bayrou" gatherings, followed immediately by the "*Bloquons tout*" movement aimed at preventing the formation of any new government on similar terms.<sup>4</sup> This two-step process reveals a public that not only rejects the government's policies but also approves of the resulting political deadlock. The protests are no longer just a "message" to the government; they represent a direct physical and economic challenge to its ability to function. In the absence of a functional parliamentary process where their concerns are represented, a significant portion of the French public has turned to direct action as a tool of paralysis, effectively wielding a de facto popular veto power from the streets.

## IV. The Political Fallout and the Path to 2027

The governmental and social crisis has profoundly reshaped France's political landscape, accelerating the decline of traditional parties and creating a volatile environment ahead of the pivotal 2027 presidential election. The primary beneficiary of this chaos has been the far-right, which has skillfully positioned itself as an alternative to the perceived incompetence of the mainstream.

### **The Beneficiary of Chaos: The Strategic Ascent of the National Rally**

Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) has emerged as the main political beneficiary of the protracted instability. Polling in the wake of the government's collapse consistently placed the party with around 33% of public support, making it the most popular political force in the country.<sup>11</sup> The RN's core narrative has been to frame the chaos as the inevitable result of the failure of the mainstream political establishment, arguing that only the RN can restore order and stability.<sup>5</sup>

This message has found an increasingly receptive audience. The RN's support is no longer

confined to its traditional working-class and rural base. The 2024 European elections demonstrated a significant broadening of its appeal across all socio-professional categories, including substantial gains among white-collar workers and even a 20% share of the executive vote.<sup>51</sup> This is the fruit of a years-long "de-demonization" strategy, which has sought to soften the party's image and focus its platform on pressing cost-of-living issues alongside its traditional hardline stance on immigration and national identity.<sup>3</sup>

In the National Assembly, the RN has played a shrewd tactical game. It has often abstained on no-confidence motions it knew would fail, allowing the government to survive temporarily and thus prolonging the spectacle of instability that damages its rivals.<sup>1</sup> It has chosen to join motions of no confidence only when they were certain to succeed, as they did against both the Barnier and Bayrou governments, thereby maximizing the political impact of their downfall.<sup>1</sup> A significant legal and political uncertainty hangs over the party's future, however, with Marine Le Pen's eligibility for the 2027 presidential election in doubt following a March 2025 conviction for embezzlement, which carried a five-year ban from holding office. While she is appealing the verdict, the situation has elevated the public profile of her designated successor, Jordan Bardella.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Lecornu Interregnum: A Mandate for Continuity Amidst Crisis**

Following Bayrou's ouster, President Macron appointed his fourth prime minister in under two years: Sébastien Lecornu, the 39-year-old Minister of Defense.<sup>1</sup> The choice of Lecornu, a staunch Macron loyalist with political roots in the traditional right who has been called "Macron's spiritual son," was widely interpreted as an act of continuity rather than a gesture of compromise.<sup>53</sup> Once again, Macron defied calls from the opposition to appoint a prime minister who could command a majority in the Assembly, choosing instead to double down on his pro-business economic agenda.<sup>11</sup>

Lecornu faces the same seemingly impossible task as his predecessors: securing the passage of a budget for 2026 in a deeply divided and hostile parliament.<sup>22</sup> Upon taking office, he promised a "profound break" with past methods and a new "humility" in his approach to working with the opposition.<sup>53</sup> In an unusual move for the Fifth Republic, Macron tasked him with holding consultations with all political parties

before forming a new cabinet, a clear signal of the extreme difficulty of his mission.<sup>22</sup>

The opposition, however, remains deeply skeptical. The hard-left La France Insoumise announced its intention to file a no-confidence motion immediately.<sup>53</sup> The Socialist Party has made it clear that any support is conditional on a complete reversal of Macron's signature

economic policies, such as the abolition of the wealth tax and the increase in the pension age—demands Macron is unwilling to meet.<sup>36</sup> The National Rally has stated that it will judge Lecornu on his actions and will not hesitate to vote no-confidence unless its own "red lines" are met, particularly regarding immigration and security.<sup>58</sup> With such entrenched positions, the potential for a durable compromise appears minimal, and the risk of Lecornu meeting the same fate as Barnier and Bayrou remains exceptionally high.<sup>15</sup>

The protracted political crisis is accelerating the "normalization" of the National Rally, not primarily through its own actions, but through the perceived and demonstrated failure of all other political forces. The party's most effective campaign tool has become the daily spectacle of parliamentary gridlock, governmental instability, and social unrest. By tactically remaining somewhat aloof from the budgetary fray, the RN projects an image of being above the chaos, allowing it to position itself as the default option for a growing number of voters exhausted by the dysfunction of the mainstream. The traditional "republican front," where mainstream parties unite to block the far-right from power, is rendered ineffective when those same mainstream parties are seen as the source of the country's paralysis.<sup>5</sup> The RN is thus winning by default, benefiting from the collapse of public trust in its traditional opponents and framing the choice for 2027 as one between continued chaos and its own brand of authoritarian stability.

## V. The European Dimension: A Weakened France in a Volatile World

France's domestic turmoil has profound implications beyond its borders, significantly impacting its international standing and undermining its influence and credibility within the European Union at a moment of acute geopolitical volatility.

### The Franco-German Engine Stalls: A Power Vacuum in Brussels

As the eurozone's second-largest economy and historically one of its primary political drivers, France's prolonged instability reverberates throughout the EU.<sup>4</sup> European partners have grown accustomed to the rolling crisis, with the constant change of ministers in Paris disrupting the continuity of EU business. This has led smaller member states, tired of the unpredictability, to increasingly look to Germany as the more reliable anchor for leadership

and coalition-building.<sup>62</sup>

This has created a significant credibility gap. Paradoxically, the EU's strategic agenda has never been more aligned with long-standing French priorities, such as the pursuit of "strategic autonomy," stronger defense cooperation, and an ambitious industrial policy.<sup>62</sup> However, France's ability to lead on these issues is severely hampered by its domestic weakness. Its calls for more EU joint borrowing to fund these ambitions, for example, are met with skepticism from fiscally conservative member states who point to France's own uncontrolled deficit and rising debt.<sup>62</sup>

With Paris consumed by its internal political maneuvering, France is paying less attention to the day-to-day work of EU negotiations. This has allowed Germany to take an even greater lead in shaping the bloc's agenda, with French officials often joining talks only in the final stages rather than steering them from the outset.<sup>62</sup> This dynamic weakens the crucial Franco-German tandem, the "engine" that has historically driven European integration, threatening to slow or stall progress on key European initiatives.<sup>62</sup> Officials in Berlin are reportedly "concerned" by the instability in their most important partner.<sup>64</sup>

## Geopolitical Consequences of Domestic Paralysis

The crisis distracts President Macron, who under the French constitution retains primary responsibility for foreign and defense policy, at a critical moment for European security. With the ongoing war in Ukraine and the uncertainty surrounding the future of U.S. commitment to European defense, a focused and stable French leadership is seen as essential.<sup>2</sup>

While Macron has personally shown leadership on the Ukraine file, the inability of his government to pass a stable, long-term budget casts doubt on France's ability to meet its own defense spending pledges. This uncertainty worries allies and weakens Europe's collective security and defense posture, undermining trust in France's reliability as a security partner.<sup>62</sup>

The most significant long-term consequence for Europe is the political trajectory the crisis has set for France. The instability is widely seen as a "gift to Marine Le Pen".<sup>11</sup> The prospect of a far-right, nationalist government coming to power in France in 2027 is a source of profound concern for mainstream European leaders. Such an outcome would represent a political earthquake, potentially leading to a French administration hostile to further European integration, skeptical of the rule of law, and more sympathetic to Russia. This "domino effect" is a scenario that many in Brussels and other European capitals are dreading, as it could threaten the stability and cohesion of the entire EU project.<sup>11</sup>

While official statements from EU leaders on the French crisis have been conspicuously

absent, analysis from European think tanks and media suggests a reaction of deep concern mixed with growing frustration. The concern is for the paralysis of a key member state at a time of global crisis. The frustration stems from the fact that this crisis is widely viewed as a self-inflicted wound, directly resulting from President Macron's 2024 election gamble rather than an external shock. France is not a victim of a global financial crisis, as some countries were in 2010, but of its own political dynamics. This makes France a frustratingly unpredictable and inwardly-focused partner, whose positions on key European issues, from trade deals like Mercosur to fiscal rules, are seen as being held hostage by its internal dysfunctions.<sup>62</sup>

## VI. Conclusion: The Future of the Fifth Republic

The events of 2024-2025 are more than a period of acute political instability; they represent a fundamental stress test of the institutional design of the French Fifth Republic. The crisis has exposed the system's vulnerabilities in an era of political fragmentation and has opened a debate about its long-term viability, with the potential to trigger significant constitutional and political transformation.

### A 'Crise de Régime'?

A growing number of analysts are drawing parallels between the current situation and the "*crise de régime*" (crisis of the regime) that led to the collapse of the parliamentary Fourth Republic and the establishment of the Fifth Republic by Charles de Gaulle in 1958.<sup>11</sup> The defining characteristic of the late Fourth Republic was chronic governmental instability and an inability to resolve major national crises, most notably the Algerian War of Independence.<sup>19</sup> This historical echo resonates strongly with the current legislative deadlock over the budget and the rapid succession of failed governments.

The Fifth Republic was explicitly designed to create a strong, stable executive centered on a powerful president, in direct contrast to the perceived weaknesses of its predecessor.<sup>20</sup> However, the system's stability fundamentally presupposes that the president can command a working majority in the National Assembly. In the current fragmented, tri-polar political landscape, the system's core feature—a powerful president—has become a source of gridlock rather than decisive action. When the president's will is directly at odds with the parliamentary arithmetic, the result is paralysis.<sup>6</sup> This dysfunction has amplified calls for constitutional reform. Figures such as the leftist firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon have explicitly

urged a rewrite of the Constitution to weaken what he terms a "presidential monarchy" and shift power towards a more parliamentary system.<sup>4</sup>

## Scenarios for the Path to 2027

As France looks toward the end of Macron's term, several scenarios present themselves, none of which offer an easy resolution.

The most probable immediate scenario is a continuation of the status quo: "muddling through" with continued legislative deadlock. The Lecornu government, like those of Barnier and Bayrou before it, will likely struggle to pass a budget and may be forced to survive on a vote-by-vote basis, lurching from one crisis to the next until the 2027 election.<sup>16</sup> This path of prolonged instability risks further eroding public trust in democratic institutions and strengthening the political extremes.

A second possibility is another dissolution of the National Assembly and new elections. This is the persistent demand of the RN and other opposition figures who hope to capitalize on the government's weakness.<sup>2</sup> However, President Macron has remained reluctant to take this step, as current polling suggests it would likely result in an even stronger performance by the RN and could very well produce another hung parliament, thus resolving nothing while potentially worsening the deadlock.<sup>4</sup>

The third and most transformative scenario is that the current trajectory culminates in a victory for the National Rally in the 2027 presidential election. Given the party's consistent lead in the polls and the disarray of its opponents, this is an increasingly plausible outcome. Such a victory would represent a political earthquake for France and Europe, fundamentally altering the country's domestic and foreign policy and marking a historic break with the post-war political consensus.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, the crisis may signal the end of the long-held notion of "French exceptionalism" in governance. The Fifth Republic's unique semi-presidential system, for decades seen as a model of stability that insulated France from the coalition politics of its neighbors, is now exhibiting the same dysfunctions—polarization, gridlock, and executive-legislative conflict—that are common to other Western democracies. The tri-polar split between a populist right, a radical left, and a technocratic center is a pattern visible across Europe and North America.<sup>4</sup> The rise of leaderless, anti-establishment protest movements like the

*Gilets Jaunes* and *Bloquons tout* is part of a global phenomenon of popular backlash against perceived elite indifference and economic inequality.<sup>47</sup> Rather than being a uniquely French crisis, the events of 2024-2025 demonstrate that France's political system is succumbing to

the same powerful pressures that have destabilized other democracies. The current "*crise de régime*" is not just about the political failure of one president, but about the potential failure of the entire Gaullist model to contain and manage the political forces of the 21st century.

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