

FAILING TO CHANGE THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: LA RÉPUBLIQUE EN MARCHE IN THE PROCESS OF ITS INSTITUTIONAL ROOTING

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The LREM's remarkable victory in the 2017 legislative elections led to the historic elimination of the traditional major parties, Republicans and Socialists, indicating a reversal of the 5th French Republic's party system polarity. Like any political party, LREM had to face several territorially determined electoral races between 2017 and 2021 – two senate, municipal, regional, and departmental elections. Territorial anchoring is a prerequisite for any party that seeks to permanently establish oneself in political life in France. The paper aims to analyse and assess whether the balance of political forces has also changed at the subnational level of politics. It tries to answer the question "Is the nature of party recomposition absolute?" or "Has LREM become rooted in other representative bodies at different government levels in France?" Following the overall developments, we argue that LREM currently fails to change the traditional poles and pivotal forces of the French political spectrum in the Senate as well as subnationally.

Key words: Emmanuel Macron; La République en marche; Les Républicains; Parti socialiste; senate elections; municipal elections; regional elections.

1 INTRODUCTION

The election of Emmanuel Macron as the eighth president since the founding of the 5th Republic has unprecedentedly marked the French political environment. Although the institutional rules of the 5th Republic encourage voters to group around one of two large party blocs, each representing different position on the political spectrum, Macron has managed to break through this competitive structure. Candidates from the two main party blocs did not even qualify for the second round of the presidential election. Republican candidate (*Les Républicains*, LR) François Fillon finished third with 20% of the vote and Benoît Hamon, the Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste*, PS) candidate, finished fifth with 6.3% behind the

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radical left-wing candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. For the first time since Charles de Gaulle's return to power, a candidate who was not supported by any of the well-established parties at the national level managed to get into the Elysee Palace. Moreover, Macron became the first President of France to win a re-election bid since Jacques Chirac won in 2002.

Macron's party, The Republic on the Move (*La République en marche*, LREM), disrupted the French party system on two levels. First, it is a quantitative level, as a new entity has appeared on the political scene, which has taken a dominant position in the so-called *majorité présidentielle* – the presidential majority – which implies the break-up of the former bipolar “cartel” of PS and the descendant of the Gaullist² party LR in the lower house of the legislature. In addition, the election results led to fundamentally different power distribution within the National Assembly, to the disadvantage of both central political forces, PS and LR. In the legislative elections, these parties gathered less than 50% of seats in the Assembly (a similar situation existed only in 1958–1962). In the background, the second round was marked by the absence of the traditional left-right (PS vs LR) duel (Durovic 2019). Dolez and Laurent (2018) show that the traditional PS vs LR duel decreased from 443 in 2012 to only 16 duels in 577 electoral districts. The coalition LREM–Democratic Movement (*Mouvement démocrate*, MoDem) competed with the right in 273 constituencies, with the left in 135 constituencies and the extreme right in 103 constituencies (Dolez and Laurent 2018). The overall result of LR and PS indicated the collapse of traditional political parties at the national level. However, at the beginning of the term, the Macron's Party had an absolute majority of legislature members - 309 out of 577 deputies. Thus, the election result not only brought a “political earthquake” (Rouban 2018), which dropped the parties on the left and the right. At the same time, the structural criteria of the former party system were significantly violated (Choffat 2017).

The 2022 legislative elections confirmed that the comeback of the “old world” of left-right bipolarity does not take place. Three new poles have emerged, representing three ideological families: liberal (presidential majority coalition *Ensemble*), nationalist (*Rassemblement national*, RN) and socialist (left-wing coalition *Nouvelle Union populaire écologique et sociale*, NUPES). Still, it is not clear whether it is a new and absolute recomposition that will persist. Our paper aims to shed light on the following questions: does LREM represent a stable and enduring political force that will form a key pillar of the party system in the future? How has LREM become rooted in other representative bodies at different government levels in France? Is the Macronist party entrenched only at the level of national politics, or does it dominate at different territorial levels of French politics? We try to answer this question by analysing the territorial and institutional rooting ability of LREM in connection with a series of elections between 2017–2021.

To what extent LREM represents an established political force in French politics, like other major political parties, can be examined precisely in territorially determined elections. In the case of the senate, regional, departmental and municipal elections, the party's electoral success is primarily a matter of how the party has managed to penetrate the regions, establish itself at the local level and build functional party structures. We provide an analytical view of the election

² Traditionally, this term refers to the largest political movement at the national level that Charles de Gaulle's party has ever been. We use the “Gaullist party” as a term expressing the continuity of specific political parties within the 5th Republic, not as a term describing a particular value orientation or political style (Gaullism).

results in the Senate elections in 2017 and 2020, the municipal elections in 2020, the regional and departmental elections in 2021. For each of these elections, we unified an approach so that, given the existence of diverse electoral systems, it enables us to assess the real political influence of individual parties, coalitions, alliance blocs or electoral lists. This paper does not examine the geographical distribution of voter support for LREM or the change in the voter support for other parties from a geographical perspective. Instead, our goal is to assess the overall LREM's power potential through the presence of LREM representatives and allied parties at the subnational level. We therefore decided to reflect on it through the number of seats occupied in the relevant representative bodies. In case of the Senate elections, it is the number of seats won according to the political groups created in the Senate. We preferred the number of seats won nationwide for the coalition blocks of individual electoral lists in the municipal elections. In the regional and departmental elections, we considered the sum of seats obtained nationally by members of the regional / departmental councils according to their political affiliation on the electoral list. When recalculating the seats, we proceeded following the official labels of electoral lists established by a circular of the Minister of the Interior, Christophe Castaner, on December 10, 2019, then, after its suspension, a new circular of February 4, 2020. In this way, we can observe the institutional entrenchment of LREM as a new political entity at various territorial levels in collective political bodies. This approach will allow us to identify the extent of the political recomposition of the party system and the change in the power potential of its pillars at various government / territorial levels.

2 CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Evans and Ivaldi (2018) examined a set of political conditions and parallels between Sarkozy's and Holland's terms, characterized by strong institutional and competitive inertia. Their main argument was that these variables worked similarly for both presidents, resulting in unprecedented political developments. Fougère and Barthold (2020) state that the elections in 2017 were carried out in an atmosphere of anti-elite *dégagisme*, which allowed Macron to occupy a broad space in the middle of the political spectrum, leaving behind a very specific political agenda of LR and PS. The remarkable claim "neither left nor right", which has been rather typical of anti-establishment forces as the National Front³, sounded in the campaign from Emmanuel Macron himself.

The polarity of the French party system is represented by ideologically different allied blocs of political parties. The most common interpretative framework for depicting this polarity was the spatial metaphor of the left-right continuum (Knapp 2004; Bornschieer and Lachat 2009; Evans and Ivaldi 2013; Cole 2013; Gougou and Labouret 2013). Due to its dichotomous nature, this polarity still maintains an extraordinary influence in French politics (Andersen and Evans 2003). It implies the two poles of the political universe around which the pivotal political forces of the 5th Republic were concentrated: the Gaullist and Socialist pole. Various attributes have been used in recent decades to express the internal dynamics of this political polarity: *quadrille bipolaire*, bipolar multipartism or tripartition (König and Waldwogel 2021). The breakdown of this structure by Macron and LREM in 2017 has given impetus to reconsider the nature of the political spectrum in France.

³ From 2018 existing under the new name National Rally (*Rassemblement national*, RN).

The future of the Republicans and the right-centre remained uncertain after the leading figures left LR in several waves, at the earliest in 2017, Xavier Bertrand, head of the *Hauts-de-France* region, later, other personalities left after the European elections in 2019, including Valérie Pécresse, president of the *Île-de-France* region. After almost two years and a catastrophic defeat in the European elections, the extremely low popularity of the party chairman Laurent Wauquiez led to his abdication. In addition, several leading Republicans supported Macron's policies and reforms, which rather evoked the traditional centre-right agenda and, as a result, it was problematic for LR to criticize government proposals (Rispin 2021). However, the staffing crisis was not a reality only on the right. It became evident among the Socialists even before the presidential election, in which they were not able to offer any "big name". Some perceive the causes of PS's decline as a longer-term process linked to the trend set by François Hollande and linked to the party's identity problem (Treille 2019), its ideological emptiness and "rightwardization" of the party (Lefebvre 2017) or the internal division of the left movement as such (Wormser 2017). However, what affected the Socialists the most was the gradual regrouping of the traditional left-wing electorate and the emergence of new cleavages described by Piketty (2018). After the bitter failure of 2017, when many PS voters supported Macron and LREM, the rise from the ashes is highly complicated for the party, especially as the PS remains highly divided (Bréchon 2019a) and impoverished by many prominent cadres who have chosen to leave politics.

All the authors mentioned above dealt with the implications of Macron's and LREM's victory for national politics. However, they do not discuss whether a similar political earthquake occurred at the subnational level. Lefebvre (2020), Margulies (2020) and Costa (2019) analysed the preconditions for the municipal establishment LREM in terms of members' activation in building local networks and structures or criticized the verticality of the candidate selection process and "de-professionalization" of political life. Emmanuel Macron's political figure was built against PS but also with it, as, especially in the beginning, he relied on socialist networks and converted "pink" notables (Dolez, Fretel and Lefebvre 2019). 47% of the LREM's deputies elected in 2017 represented politicians who already had political experience as local politicians and 16 % others as political assistants, but 44 % were complete political newcomers (Ollion 2021). Major parties in France have long benefited from established local / regional structures which tended to create stronger relationships between voters and their representatives. Strong party personalities on a national scale were usually regional presidents or mayors of big cities. In the past, the most prominent ones from PS or LR, who had the potential to gather the most votes, were recruited to the party leadership and potentially nominated for the legislative or presidential elections. In 2012, 82 % of members of parliament and 77 % of senators held the dual mandate (Cumul des mandats 2020). However, after adopting the new law in 2014, the cumulation of a National Assembly or Senate member with a local executive mandate (mayor, president, or vice president of a department / region) is not possible anymore. This reform fundamentally changed the balance of the French political system (Dolez 2015). The new legal obstacle may have resulted in withdrawing candidates, thereby creating opportunities for other, less locally well-established candidates.⁴

⁴ However, the verification of this hypothesis would require additional research, since we have not found comprehensive data that would document the share of outgoing MPs with an executive local mandate who decided not to run in the legislative elections in 2017.

Formal membership in political parties with enrolled individual members who participated in the local party's life became the widely accepted political ideal of representative democracy during the second half of the twelfth century in Western European countries. Nowadays, membership-based local organisations and the subscriber-democracy party's model are challenged (Scarrow 2015). However, the current transformation of political parties is not just about the LREM case. Except for Emmanuel Macron, there was Jean-Luc Mélenchon in 2017 and, most recently Éric Zemmour in 2022, who followed the party's model as an ad hoc organisation established for their personal political ambitions (Lefebvre 2022). LREM, presented as a bottom-up project, is in fact a top-down party that has managed to implement a flexible structure allowing an engagement that corresponds to the multi-speed membership model introduced by Scarrow (2015).

The LREM's political representation at the local level had not been significant in terms of the number of elected representatives. In addition, the party enthusiasm of the fans and sympathisers who declared their affiliation with LREM in 2017 gradually subsided, and they left the movement's networks. In this respect, a recomposition similar to the national one was expected to happen at regional and local level (Bréchon 2019b). Therefore, we examined whether LREM has the necessary prerequisites to become a major political party at subnational levels of politics. Our paper offers an overview of how LREM is institutionally entrenched in democratically elected representative bodies across all levels of French politics. The objective is to analyse and assess the character of the political recomposition caused by the arrival of LREM on the scene. Does LREM have a firm position to stand compared with traditional parties at levels other than national politics?

3 FRENCH SENATE ELECTIONS IN 2017 AND 2020

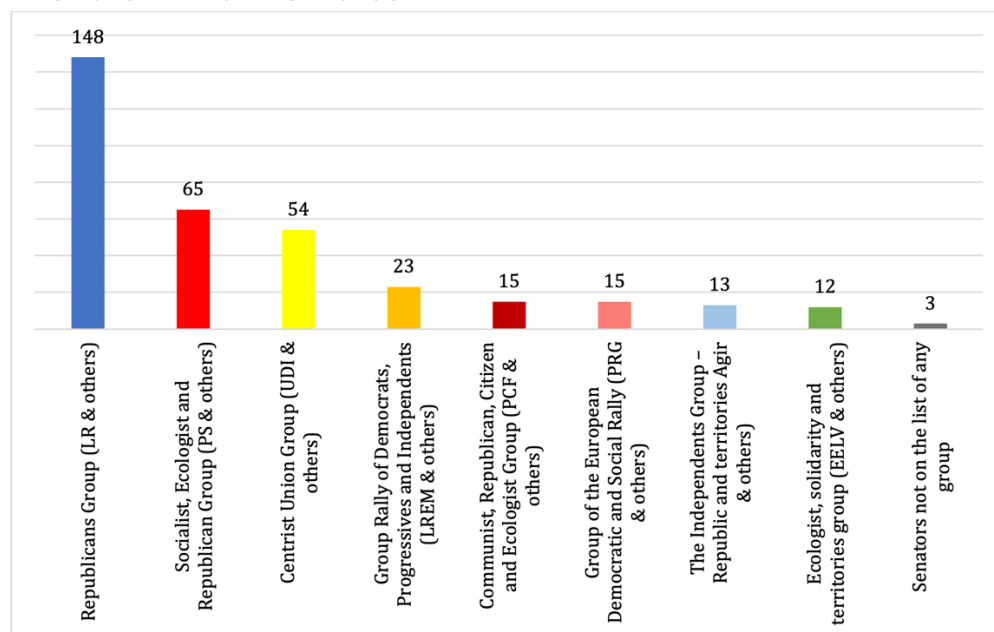
French senators are elected indirectly by the Electoral College, which is 95% made up of delegates from local politicians. A two-round majority vote applies if one or two senators (less populated departments) are elected within a constituency. A proportional representation is in place in the larger departments, where three or more senators are elected.

The Senate elections in the fall of 2017 was the first test for LREM since its unprecedented victory in the legislative elections. About half of the senators (170 seats) were renewed during this election. The existing electoral system in the Senate elections, which reflects the logic of municipal elections, does not favour new political actors considerably, as these Senate elections have revealed (Hugues 2017). It is because voters-delegates are members of local, regional and departmental councils, and during this period, LR and PS were still the main political forces at the subnational level. The problem of the LREM to anchor at the subnational level of politics proved to be a critical factor in the movement in the territorially determined elections. While LR managed to take 145 seats in the Senate and PS 78 seats, LREM had only 21 senators (Sénat: composition finale des groupes politiques... 2017). Therefore, the Senat remained the counterweight to the French legislature's lower house with an unchanged power balance.

The 2020 Senate elections highlighted this principal weakness of the presidential party. The elections confirmed the overwhelming dominance of the LR in the

Senate (148 senators), and LREM remained the fourth political power with 23 senators. However, this result did not significantly deteriorate or enhance its position in the Senate (Mazuir 2020). The Senate elections indicate the close relationship between the central state authority and politicians at the local level. It is also one of the reasons why LREM is at a disadvantage in terms of the party’s institutional rooting. The LREM’s failure lies in reaction to several unpopular measures taken by the government majority to save on local governments and deprive them of part of their revenues, for example, the abolition of the parliamentary reserve, from which some municipalities benefited, the abolition of the housing tax for 80% of households or the reduction of subsidized jobs (Forray 2020). Due to this dynamic, LR and PS continue to represent the main political pillars in the Senate.

FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE SENATE AFTER THE 2020 SENATE ELECTIONS BY A POLITICAL GROUP



Source: Customized compilation according to senatoriales2020.senat.fr.

4 FRENCH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN 2020

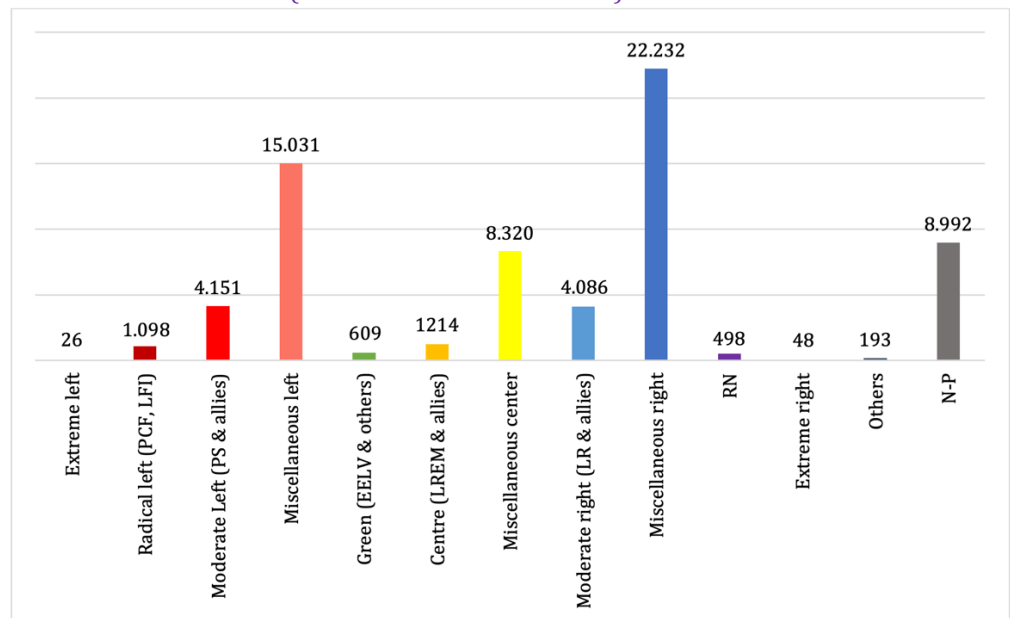
Municipal elections in France take place in two rounds. In communes with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, two-round majority-at-large voting with panachage is used. A candidate is elected if he/she obtains an absolute majority of votes and at least one-quarter of the number of individuals registered on the electoral rolls. The remaining seats are filled in the second round. There is required a simple majority for the candidate to be elected. In municipalities with more than 1,000 inhabitants, elections occur based on a two-round proportional representation system with a majority bonus. The electoral list, which obtains an absolute majority of votes in the first round, automatically wins half of the seats. The remaining seats are redistributed on a proportional logic among all the lists, which have obtained more than 5% of the votes. The second round is organised if any list did not obtain an absolute majority of votes.

The municipal elections represented a fundamental step in preparing for the upcoming senatorial race because the mayors and municipal councillors constitute the bulk of the Electoral College. The 2020 municipal elections created a completely different picture of the political map of France compared to the

widespread impression after the elections in 2017. Therefore, they also aroused discussions about whether the party system is heading back “into the old world”, signalling the end of the political recomposition that emerged after the election of Emmanuel Macron in 2017. The elections brought small gains for LREM and historical losses for RN in larger cities. On the other hand, they proved great support for the traditional right (LR) and relatively large strength of the traditional left (PS) and the Greens in the large cities, in which Macron and LREM scored above expectations in 2017. Compared to PS and LR, LREM achieved more satisfactory gains in cities with less than 30,000 inhabitants.

Nevertheless, Martial Foucault points out that the results of municipal elections are a very unreliable variable to predict the winner of a future presidential election (Caro and Le Borgne 2020). According to several opinion polls at that time, Macron and Le Pen were far ahead of other potential candidates at the national level (Le climat électoral 2020). Moreover, in terms of party identification, the three parties that failed in the municipal elections (LREM, RN and LFI) would win more than 60% of the vote in the first round of the presidential election. It has also been demonstrated that traditional political parties (LR and PS), which have operated alongside strong regional and local structures, still hold viable local candidates around which voters gather. As a result, a certain asymmetry is constructed, where, at different levels of politics, citizens support various political forces and thus create distinct structures of party influence in parallel. In other words, considerable independence between national and political life manifested in these elections.

FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN MUNICIPAL COUNCILS ACCORDING TO THE POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF THEIR MEMBERS GIVEN THE PARTY LABELS IN THE 2020 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS (WITHOUT NON-DECLARED)



Source: Customized compilation according to france-politique.fr.

LREM, a new movement that has been formed as a one-man project and it has not been built from the bottom upon the principle of strong local and regional structures, lags far behind other major political parties. Its ambition not to remain a solely national party but to establish itself in the regions and locally, as close as possible to the electorate, has not been fulfilled, despite the impressive results that Macron has been able to achieve in large cities in 2017. The achievements of the mainstream centre-left in the major cities, and the resilience

of the old mainstream parties, suggest that LREM has failed to encapsulate the urban electorate in a firm coalition (Margulies 2020).

Curiously, given the dynamics of municipal elections and the tendency to keep chances before the second round, it was not uncommon to see LR and LREM joint alliances in Bordeaux, Strasbourg, Lyon or Tours. At the same time, the Socialists and left-wing candidates formed partnerships with the Greens. Coalitions between the LREM and the left in the first and second rounds were rare and occurred in smaller cities (Bréchon 2020). RN still holds its influence over their traditional bastions, especially in Northern and Southern France.

Above all, the political dimension of municipal elections, especially in smaller cities, should not be overestimated since partisan logic in municipal elections is suppressed, while the reputation and individuality of specific candidates are the primary concern. Candidates affiliated with *Divers gauche* (Miscellaneous left), *Divers droite* (Miscellaneous right), or *Divers centre* (Miscellaneous centre) received an immense number of seats, indicating the weakening of partisan link and reluctance of candidates to identify with the party structures of major political parties (Caro and Le Borgne 2020).

5 REGIONAL AND DEPARTMENTAL ELECTIONS

The regional elections, initially scheduled for March 2021, were postponed by three months due to the Covid-19 pandemic and held simultaneously with the departmental elections. They took place for the second time following the adjustments resulting from the law of 2015. According to the law, the number of metropolitan regions has been reduced from 22 to 13. Seats in regional councils are occupied using proportional representation lists with a majority bonus in two rounds. The electoral list that obtains an absolute majority of votes in the first round automatically receives 25% of the regional council seats. The remaining seats are redistributed following the proportional system among all electoral lists that exceeded the quorum of 5% of the votes. If this condition is not met, a second round is organized, for each electoral list that received at least 10% of the votes in the first round (lists can be merged between the first and second round). The distribution of seats is carried out in the identical method as in the first round, whereas the simple majority is sufficient to receive the majority bonus.

The 2021 regional and departmental elections, the last ones before the upcoming struggle for the Elysée Palace, should reveal how the parties' electoral potential and the balance of power in individual regions are distributed. These elections experienced a record level of abstentionism, when roughly one-third of voters came to the polls in the first and second round. These elections were marked by the dynamics of the presidentialisation of the French regions. Xavier Bertrand and Valérie Pécresse tested their chances of being considered as potential presidential candidates. In addition, France's national security issues dominated the election campaign. In the aftermath of the assassination of Samuel Paty, the LR and RN criticized the government for failing to protect its citizens from radical Islamism. Part of the left criticized Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin for police violence against demonstrators in the streets. The government at the time was struggling with the economic and health consequences of the Covid-19 virus. On another front, Macron's administration tried to enforce the "Islamist separatism" bill and the Global Security Law, which gave police forces more autonomy and personal protection. These elections confirmed the hypothesis that voters use the regional elections as a national referendum on the ruling government and

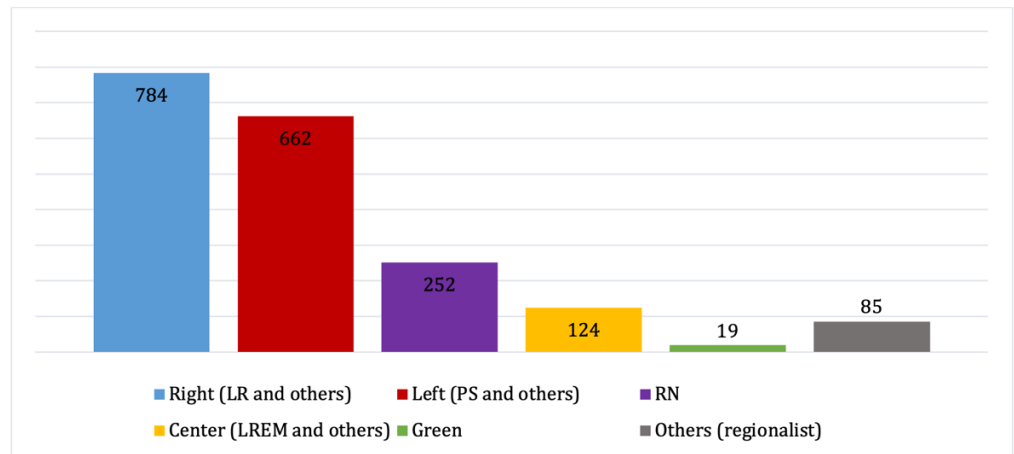
express their opinions regarding government's performance (Fauvelle-Aymar and Lewis-Beck 2011).

At the same time, it was the last test for LREM to demonstrate its successful regional entrenchment over the past four years. A key message of the regional elections is that the political map of the French regions will remain shining in two colours – blue and red. The incumbents have confirmed their positions in the regions. The candidates of the centre-right parties will stand at the head of the seven regional councils, where LR was the central subject of the electoral coalition. In the other five regions, left-wing coalitions led by PS triumphed. In the three overseas regions, the regional leftist forces have won. In Corsica, the ballot was dominated by *Femu a Corsica* as representative of the Corsican autonomist forces. In Guadeloupe, the electoral list of regionalist social-liberal party *Guadeloupe unie, solidaire et responsable* (GUSR) prevailed in the coalition with LREM. This party is very close and connected to LREM emphasizing the fact that Ary Chalus, President of the Guadeloupe's Regional Council, is also a member of LREM executive body. These elections were a major earthquake not only for LREM, but also for RN and Marine Le Pen. Macron's movement and its allies (*majorité présidentielle*) won 7.12% of the vote in the second round (more than 3% less than in the first round), and in three regions, their candidates did not manage to exceed the second-round threshold.

LREM and allies' candidates scored low in the second round compared to the first round. Some voters preferred to cast a "useful" vote for some of the electoral lists having the highest rank following the first-round results. The presence of larger constituencies did not favour LREM, although there were expectations that the presidential party could benefit from more evenly distributed voting preferences like the national level. The same applies to the proportional representation system, which helped LREM, for example, in the European elections in 2019. Naturally, the presidential party is sanctioned by part of its electorate. Disappointment with government policies has led to a massive absenteeism or the voters has returned to its previous political orientation (Bréchon 2021). Data from the *Ifop* survey of the first round of elections clearly document that up to 38% of respondents who supported Emmanuel Macron in the first round of the presidential election, they voted for the left and the greens in the regional elections, and 30% of Macron's former voters supported the right (Régionales 2021 – sondage jour du vote... 2021). In the end, LREM did not win the ballot in any metropolitan region. Moreover, LREM and its allies are the fourth largest political force in terms of the number regional councils' members.

The departmental elections to the ninety-five departmental councils are based on a two-round majority vote. The nomination in the individual constituencies, represented by the cantons, can be submitted in a man-women pair. To be elected in the first round, the couple must obtain an absolute majority of the votes and, at least, the votes of 25% registered voters. Only couples who received at least 12.5% of the votes in the first round can run in the second round, with a simple majority sufficient for election.

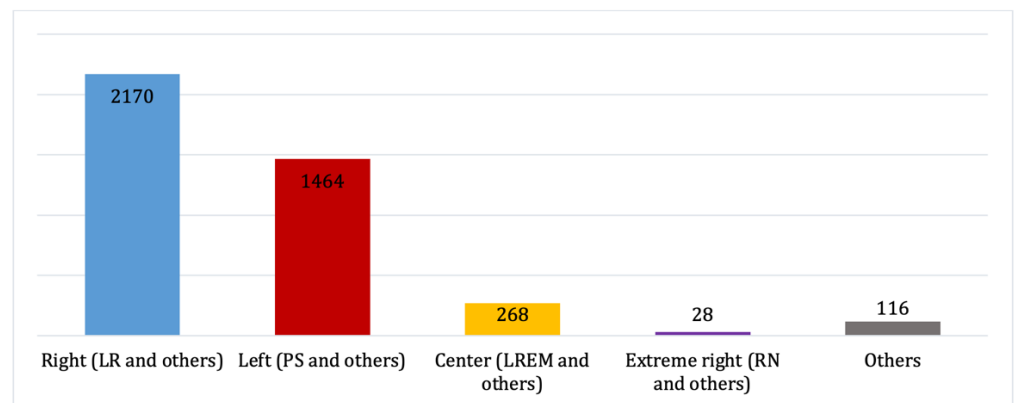
FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS OF REGIONAL COUNCILS ACCORDING TO THE POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF MEMBERS GIVEN THE PARTY LABELS IN THE 2021 REGIONAL ELECTIONS



Source: Customized compilation according to france-politique.fr.

At the departmental level, similarly, traditional political forces have won. LR gained political leadership in 45 departments, other right-wing parties in another 20 departments. PS governs in 21 departments and the other left-wing parties in five other departments. LREM achieved victory in two departments and other allied centrist forces equally in two departments. The total number of departmental councils' members by political affiliation, apart from RN, copies the trend from the regional councils. Similarly, like at the regional level, LR and the centre-right parties became the absolute winners at the departmental level. The power shares in terms of the total seats allocated to LREM and their allies are almost equivalent: in regional councils, their profit is 6.4%, in departmental councils, they occupy 6.6% of all seats.

FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS OF DEPARTMENTAL COUNCILS ACCORDING TO THE POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF MEMBERS GIVEN THE PARTY LABELS IN THE 2021 DEPARTMENTAL ELECTIONS



Source: Customized compilation according to interieur.gouv.fr.

Five years after the presidential election, which indicated a deep party recomposition and a potential break of the right-wing cleavage in Macron's favour, the regional and departmental elections can be interpreted as "old-world revenge". Last senate and municipal elections indicated that the Macronist party had failed to get into the regions in five years and establish itself locally. These elections confirmed the assumption that LREM does not yet have strong enough support in the metropolitan regions of France to stand up to the traditional major parties, which still benefit from the established regional and local structures.

6 CONCLUSION

This article aimed to find an answer to the question of whether the massive political recomposition we witnessed in national politics in 2017 also took place at other levels of politics in France. We sought to analyse the extent of institutional rooting at the subnational level for the presidential party LREM, which, after the electoral victory of Emmanuel Macron, performs as a new political pole in the National Assembly. We examined whether the overall power balance also changed in other representative bodies such as the Senate, municipal, regional, and departmental councils in a series of elections between 2017 and 2021.

An essential feature of the French political system is the scenario occurring after Chirac's electoral calendar reform. In line with this setting, voters in the National Assembly elections will coherently support the victorious presidential party, whose candidate was elected a month earlier in the presidential election: this happened in 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017 (Evans and Ivaldi 2018). Political scientist Matthew Shugart even designates the period between the presidential election and the affirmative legislative elections as "honeymoon" (Shugart 2017). Evans and Ivaldi (2017) claim that the 2017 French legislative elections took place in the broader context of confirmatory legislative elections in France. LREM's victory is also a by-product of the broader institutional logic of "honeymoon" presidential races. However, the 2022 legislative elections confirmed this logic to a very limited extent since voters gave the presidential coalition of parties only a relative majority of seats in the National Assembly.

The sequence of elections that followed the elections to the legislature in 2017 does not yet indicate that large political recomposition is definitive or absolute. In fact, the 2017 legislative elections were the last and only in which LREM achieved a convincing triumph. There has been no chain of electoral victories that would lead to a complete overturning of political reality at other political levels. LREM has failed to change the traditional poles and pivotal forces of the French political spectrum in territorially determined elections in the Senate as well as subnationally. The Senate, municipal, departmental, or regional councils continue to be dominated by representatives of traditional major political parties – LR, PS and their natural right-wing or left-wing allies. We observe certain institutional inertia at the local and regional levels, where citizens prefer incumbent candidates to newcomers. In regional elections, voters have elected incumbents as presidents of regional councils in all 12 metropolitan regions. In municipal elections in 75 municipalities with at least 70,000 inhabitants, incumbent mayors won in 66.6% of cases. After the 2019 Senate elections, incumbent senators occupied more than half of all seats in the Senate. All indicators reveal that the asymmetry between national and subnational policy has increased. While the factor mobilizing voters at the national level is primarily the personality of Macron and Le Pen, at the local and regional level, the French prefer political stability, experience, and continuity. In addition, citizens evaluating the government's performance generally tend to view parties in government more critically in mid-term elections. This has led either to unprecedented electoral abstentionism in municipal and regional polls or to vote for well-established candidates, accompanied by a return to traditional major political parties.

Lefebvre (2022) assumes that it is not a political priority for LREM to build and maintain a membership base that is territorially established. Scarrow (2015) captures the essence of LREM's existence by claiming that party membership is currently a commodity that can be obtained online from a national party, it can no longer be obtained by connecting with a local party branch. *Raison d'être* of LREM is to dominate national political life so that the president has a comfortable majority in the legislature. All that remains to LREM's political novices is to be a committed and obedient component of the presidential majority: they can owe their political success to the president and not to their local anchoring (Lefebvre 2019) or the enormous political effort they would perform at the local level. As a party, LREM intentionally devotes most of its political energy, apart from presidential elections, to recruiting candidates for legislative elections, functioning much more effectively in the role of an "elevator" to the highest political positions than in putting down roots locally. In this way, it is very similar to the national organisations of Republicans and Democrats in the U. S., which are mobilised primarily at the time of jointly held presidential and congressional elections. LREM has served as an excellent career accelerator for its candidates, and many managed to bypass classic party pipelines: LREM deputies elected in 2017 spent an average of 5.7 years in politics before being elected, compared to 19 years for LR deputies and 20 years for deputies of PS (Ollion 2021).

As Evans (2020) and Mongrain (2022) argued, it is too preliminary to conclude that the new political recomposition represents a longer-lived realignment. Moreover, it does not appear to be absolute because it does not take place at all levels of politics in France. LREM as a party has not been built from the bottom on a dense network of party structures at the local level. It has been designed primarily as a formation around the personality of Emmanuel Macron. As a result, LREM has failed in elections that are territorially determined and depend on firm local or regional structures. Institutional entrenchment of LREM at subnational level is apparently a long road with an uncertain outcome.

To conclude, we remain stuck between different poles of normativity. There is a set of expectations largely prevailing in political theory, and LREM is, naturally, confronted with them. For instance, the political parties cannot exist only as a laboratory of ideas or as an elevator to the highest functions at the national level (LREM: "Il y a un problème d'identité..." 2020), or that they are supposed to be built from the bottom up, playing their role by acting at the local level, keeping in touch with citizens and thus having knowledge of the region and the capacity to affect local events. However, it seems the "old-school" partisan model does not belong to the visions that Macronism aspire to follow.

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NEUSPEH SPREMEMBE POLITIČNE KRAJINE: LA RÉPUBLIQUE EN MARCHE V PROCESU INSTITUCIONALNEGA UKORENINJENJA

Izjemna zmaga LREM na francoskih parlamentarnih volitvah leta 2017 je privedla do zgodovinske izločitve tradicionalnih strank, republikancev in socialistov, kar kaže na preobrat polarnosti strankarskega sistema pete francoske republike. Kot vsaka politična stranka se je morala tudi LREM med letoma 2017 in 2021 soočiti z več teritorialno določenimi volilnimi tekmami – z dvema senatnima, občinskimi, regionalnimi in departmajskimi volitvami. Teritorialna zasidranost je predpogoj za vsako stranko, ki se želi trajno uveljaviti v francoskem političnem življenju. Prispevek želi analizirati in oceniti, ali se je razmerje političnih sil spremenilo tudi na subnacionalni ravni politike. Poskuša odgovoriti na vprašanje »Ali je narava strankarske rekonpozicije absolutna?« ali »Ali se je LREM uveljavil v drugih predstavniških telesih na različnih ravneh francoske oblasti?« Glede na splošni razvoj dogodkov trdimo, da LREM trenutno ne uspe spremeniti tradicionalnih polov in osrednjih sil francoskega političnega spektra v senatu in na subnacionalni ravni.

Ključne besede: Emmanuel Macron; La République en marche; Les Républicains; Parti socialiste; volitve v senat; občinske volitve; regionalne volitve.