

Election in France: Implications for US Relations

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France's Parliament consists of 577 members, making 289 seats necessary for an absolute majority. In the recent election, President Emmanuel Macron's party managed just 245 seats — the first time in 20 years that the sitting president does not have an absolute majority in Parliament. Macron has promised to work with other political parties on a case-by-case basis, but it has become clear in recent weeks that the 289 votes needed to pass legislation will be difficult to amass. The leader of Macron's most natural allies, the more conservative Les Républicains, was quoted as saying: "As far as we are concerned, we campaigned as an opposition party, we are in opposition and we will stay in opposition."

Macron's economic agenda no longer has the potential to be quickly and unilaterally passed. This means that significant initiatives — including amending the budget, addressing inflation, curbing energy prices, raising retirement ages, and increasing pension benefits — all face opposition. Parliament is currently negotiating a 20 billion euro inflation-relief package. In a typical political environment, the majority party could unilaterally implement this bill. Currently, it is not certain that the bill will pass, nor the extent to which concessions will be necessary to sway opposition party members.

In the short run, difficulty passing legislation is unlikely to affect international relations or trade. Under the French Constitution, the president is afforded considerable power in diplomacy. Further, each of the ministers for foreign trade and European affairs were re-elected, signaling a continuity in diplomacy and trade. Regarding foreign and security policy, presidential powers remain preeminent to those of Parliament. This comes with a caveat: While policy toward current international defense issues remains consistent, the increased defense budget Macron has called for to support Ukraine may not have sufficient parliamentary support.

Macron and his party have played a large role in Western relations, including trade with the United States and a united front against Russia's war in Ukraine. Macron maintains his role as commander in chief and as the diplomatic face for France. He has signaled continued dedication to NATO and Western trade, continuing a long tradition of U.S.-French economic ties. While the changing political environment in France has implications for domestic French politics, U.S.-French relations will likely remain strong. As early bills come before Parliament, France's allies will be watching closely to see if Macron's government can gather the votes necessary to implement its policy, both domestically and internationally.

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