

《As overseas voters go to polls, can Macron march to parliame》

Emmanuel Macron ' s victory in the French presidential election was remarkable: a 39-year-old centrist with no historic party machine, no electoral experience, seeing off the established parties before comprehensively defeating a far-right challenger.

But although the presidential success was heralded as a strike back against populism, it was just the first electoral step for Macron. The powers of the French presidency are strong, but to have a chance to govern effectively domestically, the new leader also needs solid backing in parliament for his nascent La République en Marche (REM) movement.



Supporters attend a campaign meeting for the 90 La République en Marche party candidates in the Ile-de-France region for the upcoming legislative elections. /VCG Photo

French citizens living in China headed to the Beijing embassy and other polling stations around the country on Sunday to cast their votes in the first round of the French legislative elections -- often dubbed the "third round" of the French election -- choosing from 14 candidates to select a new representative for the 11th French overseas constituency.

Voters will return to the polls on June 18 for a second round, the winner of which will join 577 other representatives in France's National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament.

Without a majority in the National Assembly, the "neither right nor left" Macron is likely to be frustrated in his attempts to reform France, where unemployment stands a little under 10 percent and the growth outlook from the International Monetary Fund is among the weakest in the EU.



Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech during a campaign rally, May 1, 2017, at the Paris Event Center in Paris, days before defeating Marine Le Pen to win the French presidential election. /VCG Photo

Although every president since 1958 has achieved a parliamentary majority after their first election victory, Macron's party is coming from the lowest possible base - zero.

REM is contesting 526 seats: 266 of its candidates are women and more than half have never previously held elected office, with many coming from civil society. How could the election play out?

What do the polls say?

REM could win an absolute majority, the latest opinion polls suggest. An OpinionWay/ORPI poll of just under 2,000 registered voters on June 1 found Macron's party is set to win 29 percent of votes in the first round, Reuters reported.



Election posters in Marseille, southern France, on May 28, 2017, ahead of the upcoming French legislative elections. /VCG Photo

The conservative Republicans were on 20 percent and the far-right Front National on 18 percent. The far-left France Unbowed party is on 13 percent and the Socialist Party on 9 percent, the poll found.

Macron's party would win a projected 335-355 of the 535 mainland French seats, if those numbers played out. The party would need to win 289 seats to secure an absolute majority in the National Assembly, which has 577 seats altogether, including representatives from overseas territories and French living abroad.

Why is the election so significant?

Macron defeated the right-wing Republican party in the presidential election, but it views the legislative election as an opportunity to regain influence by blocking reforms and frustrating the new president's domestic agenda. The French president has leeway in foreign affairs and defense, but pushing through economic and social policy -- including spending cuts of 60 billion euros, a stimulus package worth 50 billion euros, and cutting 120,000 jobs from the civil service -- is dependent on parliamentary support.

For the Socialist party, the largest in the outgoing National Assembly, the election is a survival exercise. It is expected to lose 80 percent of its deputies, after its presidential candidate Benoit Hamon garnered just 6.3 percent of the vote in the presidential election.



French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Edouard Philippe with the new Cabinet -- featuring leading figures from several parties - at the Elysee Palace in Paris on May 18, 2017. /VCG Photo

By naming a cabinet filled with figures from both the Republicans and Socialist parties, and maintaining a high profile on the domestic and international stage, Macron is hoping the French people will stick with tradition and elect a parliament that gives him the opportunity to carry out his agenda.

How does the National Assembly election work?

Elections for the National Assembly's 577 seats -- 539 in mainland France, 27 in overseas departments and territories and 11 for French citizens living abroad -- take place over two rounds. If a candidate wins an absolute majority and support from at least a quarter of registered voters in the first round (June 11 in mainland France), that candidate is elected. If not, candidates attracting at least 12.5 percent of the vote progress to a second round. Whoever wins the most votes in the second round, wins the seat.

Nearly 1.3 million French citizens living abroad go to the polls this weekend, a week ahead of their compatriots at home, to elect 11 members of the National Assembly. Around 115,000 people voted in the 11th overseas district -- which includes China and 48 other countries -- in 2012.



Election posters for French political Party "La Republique en Marche" and far-right "Front National" candidates ahead of the upcoming French legislative elections. /VCG Photo

Can REM leap from a standing start to 289 seats, giving its youthful leader the chance to push through reform? As French citizens overseas enter polling booths in Beijing to vote in the 2017 National Assembly elections, the enduring appeal of the Macron phenomenon faces its latest test.