

France votes in parliamentary elections



A campaign poster of French European Affairs Minister Clement Beaune. Polling stations opened at 8am on Sunday [Rali Benallou /Reuters]

Paris, June 12 (RHC)-- French voters are casting their ballot in the first round of parliamentary elections, as President Emmanuel Macron seeks to secure his majority amid a resurgent left-wing coalition.

Polling stations opened at 8am (06:00 GMT) on Sunday, after voters in overseas territories cast ballots earlier in the weekend. About 48 million citizens are eligible to vote.

Elections for the 577 seats in the lower house National Assembly are a two-round process. More than 6,000 candidates, ranging in age from 18 to 92, are running to win seats in the National Assembly in the first round of the election. Those who receive the most votes will advance to the decisive second round on June 19.

Following Macron's reelection in May, his centrist coalition is seeking an absolute majority that would enable it to implement his campaign promises, which include tax cuts and raising the retirement age from 62 to 65.

The latest opinion polls suggest Macron and his allies may have trouble winning over half of the parliamentary seats. A government with a large, but not absolute majority would still be able to rule, but only by bargaining with legislators.

The main opposition force appears to be a newly-created coalition made up of leftists, greens and communists led by hard-left figure Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Mélenchon urged voters to give his coalition a majority and thereby force Macron to name him as prime minister, which would prompt a situation called "cohabitation."

The leftists' platform includes a significant minimum wage increase, lowering the retirement age to 60 and locking in energy prices. Though Mélenchon's coalition could win more than 200 seats, current projections give the left little chance of winning a majority. Macron and his allies are expected to win between 260 and 320 seats, according to the latest polls.

The French far-right, led by Marine Le Pen, is expected to win at least 15 seats, allowing it to form a parliamentary group and gain greater powers at the assembly. Le Pen's National Rally hopes to do better than five years ago, when it won eight seats.

Results may also be impacted by an expected record-low voter turnout. Pollsters say less than half of France's 48.7 million electorate is expected to cast ballots.

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