

The centre cannot hold. The question is, what comes next...

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The [far-right has been held at bay](#) in France.

Having been given due warning of an impending disaster, centre and left-wing parties cooperated to ensure that the far right did not win the majority of seats in the French Parliament. Instead, the far right came third, with the centre grouping around the ideas of President Macron coming second and the left-wing grouping around Greens, socialists, communists, and others forming the largest group in the Parliament.

The final result is not in as I write. What is clear is that none of these groups will have the ability to form a majority government in France, and even the left-wing group, as the largest in Parliament, will be around one hundred seats short of that target.

I am not sufficiently expert in French politics to predict how these groups might work together now. That the centre and left need to do so is, however, obvious if they are to fulfil their combined ambition of holding the right wing at bay. Whether that is possible is another matter altogether. Macron's group is neoliberal to its core. The left-wing groups are inherently deeply opposed to precisely what that centre group wishes to promote. The consequence will be a profoundly uncomfortable relationship.

It has been suggested that Macron might appoint a technocratic Prime Minister to former government that can last for at least a year until further elections can be held to resolve this situation. There is, however, already doubt about whether such a government could survive.

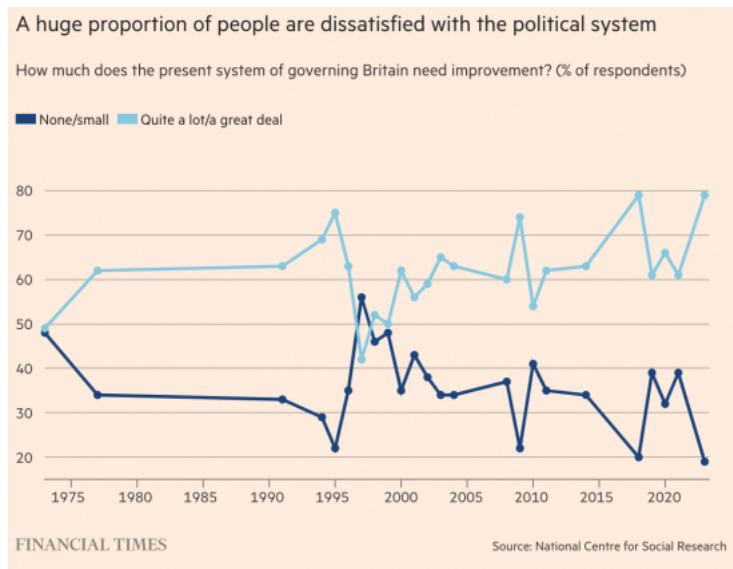
At the heart of all this there would seem to be a rejection by the French of the entire political system that has delivered to them successive Macron presidencies.

I doubt if everyone voting far right in France is as racist or out of touch with reality as the party to whom they have lent their support. Instead, they are fed up with a system that has failed them, particularly in rural France.

I strongly suspect that many of those who have voted for the centrists have done so to preserve a status quo that has served them well. They are declining in number.

Those who have voted for the left will not all be driven by shared conviction. Some, too, will want to change a failing system, but this time, they will approach the issue from the perspective of the city dweller (to possibly overly simplify things).

Whichever way it is looked at, the French now share the massive disquiet that the British do in their electoral system and democracy. This chart comes from [an article by Martin Wolf](#) in the FT, published yesterday:



Sentiment in the UK is, of course, tainted by the corruption and failure of the Tories. The same might also be said of the SNP.

At the same time, it is more deep-seated than that. Labour has not, in any way, won hearts and minds for its policies, as is going to become apparent very soon. The rise of Reform makes that clear. The fact that the Greens could win in both rural and city seats is also indicative of this trend.

Although Labour will be in as much denial of the fact as Macron and his associates will be in France, the entire political infrastructure of countries like France in the UK is now at risk of collapse, with the obviously rotten status quo being rejected, but with the required new direction of travel being unclear to many in the electorate.

The reason is probably obvious to everyone but those in these centre parties, which have existed to serve the interests of a powerful elite.

After decades of observing actual behaviour, nobody believes that growth is going to deliver outcomes favourable to everyone in the UK, and most probably in France.

Almost everyone believes there is a fundamental failure in the societies of these countries. Wealth and power are too concentrated amongst a few. With this wealth and power being aggregated in the largest cities, almost everyone outside them feels left

behind, because they are.

In addition, what is obvious is that these societies are being split between those who have, and those who have not, with the number who have not rising inexorably, whilst those who have would appear to be ever better off. Inequality is growing, in other words, and none of the parties of the centre are willing to do anything about it, as Labour has already made very clear in comments [made by Wes Streeting yesterday](#).

The demand in France is not for compromise. I am not sure it is in the UK either. And in neither case is there a desire for the status quo. The demand is for radical change. What is clear in that case is that the centre cannot hold because it has failed. The question is, what comes next?