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Evans, J orcid.org/0000-0001-8335-9630 (2017) *Macron e il movimento En Marche!* In: Brizzi, M and Lazar, M, (eds.) *La Francia di Macron*. Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto Carlo Cattaneo . Il Mulino , Bologna, Italy . ISBN 978-88-15-27302-4

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La candidatura di Macron e il movimento En Marche!

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Introduction

In a political system increasingly defined by entrenched presidential parties and bipolar blocs, the candidacy and victory of Emmanuel Macron was exceptional. Little more than a year prior to his election, Macron had neither an elective mandate nor a political party. That he was able to garner 24 per cent support in the first round of the presidential election, and thereby progress to the *ballotage*, was perhaps an even greater shock than that of the success of his opponent, *Front national* (Fn) candidate Marine Le Pen, given she at least had led a 40-year old party for the previous six years. Yet, his victory in the second round was equally as close to a foreseeable outcome as any election victory under the Fifth Republic, with the exception of Jacques Chirac's victory over Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002. The legislative majority won by his party, *La République en Marche!* (Lrem) was equally a foregone conclusion, given the disproportional 'confirmatory' nature of French legislative elections coat-tailing on a new incumbent president.

Macron's presidential success posed a fundamental challenge to institutional and party systemic analyses of French elections in that positioning himself in the centre of political space ostensibly negated the rules of the two-round majoritarian system, as well as the received wisdom about the array of French political space in social and attitudinal terms. The unique political circumstances of 2017, with two weak candidates for the governing *Parti Socialiste* (Ps) and opposition *Les Républicains* (Lr) occupying extreme positions within their moderate blocs, and the only potential centrist candidate, François Bayrou of the *Mouvement Démocrate* (Modem), ceding to Lrem's leader, left a broad corridor of political space for Macron, and thence for his party.

Whilst camped across the centre of French political space, Macron's victory in the presidential race evidently owed far more to the conquering of the centre-left Socialist electorate than to any appeal to the right. In the first round, Macron won three times the proportion of 2012 Hollande voters than Ps candidate Benoît Hamon, and almost twice as many Ps sympathisers as the *de jure* Socialist candidate.¹ Conversely, the relatively greater success of Lr in stemming the breach of its own voters, as well as of its legislative candidates, flooding to Macron sealed a potentially leaky Right-bloc. Furthermore, in the eventual hemicycle from the 18 June result, Lrem clearly leaned further to the left, not least because of the small numbers of Ps, Communist (Pcf) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise* (Lfi) occupying the left wing. Overall, from a nascent movement in 2016, Lrem had become a presidential majority party *par excellence*, effectively as dominant in the Assembly as any established party of government under the Fifth Republic.

In that regard, Lrem as a new party conformed very closely to a classic, but much-criticised definition, of political parties – '[A] political party is a coalition of men [sic] seeking to control the governing apparatus by legal means. By *coalition*, we mean a group of individuals who have certain ends in common and cooperate with each other to achieve them. By *governing apparatus*, we mean the physical, legal, and institutional equipment which the government uses to carry out its specialized role in the division of labour. By *legal means*, we mean either duly constituted or legitimate influence' (Downs 1957, 24-25). Downs saw political parties as instruments for attaining power. Many have pointed out that political influence of parties can manifest itself in ways other

¹ http://www.ipsos.fr/sites/default/files/doc_associe/ipsos-sopra-steria_sociologie-des-electorats_23-avril-2

than simply striving for executive power. In recent history, the formation of new political movements with radical ideology has tended to follow an early trajectory away from power – the Greens, who split over the approach to political influence and power (Boy 2003) and an Fn whose own internal divisions were also based largely upon divergent attitudes to cooperation with the party on the other side of the *cordon sanitaire* (Perrineau 2014). But the definition matches Lrem's existence very closely. Lrem's only role in the entire four-round campaign was to provide a support base, first to underpin the credibility of Emmanuel Macron as a presidential candidate, and second to provide a legislative foundation to enable the implementation of the presidential programme.

In this paper, we look at how Lrem came to occupy the centre ground of the legislative elections as a pure party of power, and why this represents a challenge to the traditional models of French political space. We look at how the party's rapid formation and formulation into a presidential support movement presented both symbolic and strategic challenges to competing parties, offering a renewal of the representative corps as well as an exploitation of the political opportunities in play at this election. We finish by considering the challenges that remain for Lrem as it seeks to establish itself as a party system actor, rather than simply a presidential vehicle, and the obstacles which may stand in its way in that task.

The challenge to French political space

Macron's decision to run for president in 2017, announced on 16 November 2016, was broached immediately in terms of bypassing the traditional blocs of left and right, to rally the French people no matter what their political colour. The resonance with De Gaulle's third way was clear and deliberate not only in its echoes of redefining a *politique franco-française* to clear away the ineffective and corrupt elements of the previous regime, but also in the presidential primacy above the party political domain of the legislature. Lrem as a party was designed to incarnate and endorse the presidential programme. While presented as the basis for a democratic revolution, the basic tenets of Macron's programme are far from revolutionary, building as they do upon the same ideological foundations as Blair's Third Way, or Schroeder's 'Agenda 2010' and the Hartz reforms of the early 2000s on employment law and unemployment benefit – parallels that were not lost on the former UK and German premiers in their support for Macron during the presidential campaign.

However one characterises the ideological positioning of the programmatic content, in party system terms, defining oneself outside the Left / Right dimension is not new, but the extent to which it is possible for a party of government, let alone a party *in* government, is limited. The Greens positioned themselves off the spectrum ('L'écologie n'est pas à marier', *d'après* Antoine Waechter) during the 1980s (Villalba 1997, 95) – a tenable position, given their focus on environmental issues was not one which had been taken up by other parties, and therefore could reasonably be described as outside normal politics. However, their descent onto the spectrum through cooperation with the Ps, and the gradual absorption of new left / post-material politics into the mainstream designated them as Left. The Fn has also made a claim of specificity outside Left/Right terms² but debate over the divisions of French political space aside (Grunberg and Schweisguth 1997; Andersen and Evans 2003), the Fn is generally parsed within the system as of the radical right.

A party such as Lrem, spatially centrist, is probably better understood as a centre pole with competitors to the left and right. Of course, this characterises more a polarised pluralist system,

² http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2016/02/18/marine-le-pen-s-accroche-au-ni-droite-ni-gauche_4867670_823448.html

reminiscent historically of the French Fourth Republic or the Italian Dc. A number of characteristics of this type of party system (Sartori 1976) are also visible in the contemporary French case. Centrifugal competitive dynamics are visible on both wings in the presidential race – between Hamon and Mélenchon on the left, with the latter faring much more successfully among *les frondeurs* than the party's own candidate; and increasingly between Lr and the Fn on the right, where the decline of the *front républicain* has made the boundary between the two parties more porous (Gougou and Labouret 2013). Second, the party system looks increasingly prone to fragmentation, post-presidential, with at least two political movements already splitting from a moribund Ps - *Dès Demain* and Hamon's *Mouvement du 1er juillet* – and the strains between centrist and social conservative right *courants* in Lr likely to result in similar splits.

Of course, party system dynamics rely upon trend analysis, and Lrem is currently cross-sectional, having contested a single election. What remains to be seen is if the institutional pressures of a presidentialised two-round majoritarian system, which had gradually pulled the system closer to *bipartisme* (Grunberg and Haegel, 2007) allow Lrem to retain a centrist position flanked by renewed parties of the mainstream left and right, or whether Lrem must de facto redesignate its position, or itself split into two or more parties. A relatively inexperienced personnel, and a lack of first-order elections for five years gives the party and its leader time to respond to these challenges.

The *En Marche!* start-up

Throughout his campaign, as well as in his writings and his previous actions as Economic Minister, Macron underlined the need for France to divest itself of the deadweight of employment legislation, bureaucracy and the too-often introspective closed approach to business and finance. From the beginnings of the *En Marche!* movement to the battle for a governing majority in the National Assembly, what Macron prescribed for France characterised his own behaviour on the political stage. Through his ideology, ambition, and the ideas of those surrounding him, Macron's political campaign for both presidential and legislative elections encapsulated the lean, flexible processes that he wished to apply more broadly to French society.

Critics of Macron's campaign pointed to a sense of *une dimension christique* to his candidacy, focusing on a populist appeal to all sections of French society, and lacking a programmatic coherence to his political offer. Members signing up to *En marche!* and, in due course, those submitting applications to stand as candidates under the Lrem ticket in the legislatures, were endorsing the man as much as the message – political disciples as much as traditional party adherents. In 2016, politicians of the left and right mocked Macron as a political neophyte lacking both political vision and substance – Modem's François Bayrou, previously a presidential also-ran in the political centre, who would later formally back Macron's candidacy, referred to him as a hologram³; Arnaud Montebourg opined, 'I don't know who he is or what he wants.'⁴ Alain Juppé characterised him as 'neither trustworthy nor competent'.⁵ Manuel Valls, another politician who would try to align himself with the *En Marche!* movement (unsuccessfully, when the organisation's rules about number of former mandates prevented him from standing for them in the legislatures)

³ http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/02/22/quand-bayrou-critiquait-macron-et-l-appelait-le-candidat-des-forces-de-l-argent_5083865_4854003.html

⁴ <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/en-direct/a-chaud/30864-presidentielle2017-montebourg-macron-dangereux-france.html>

⁵ http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/juppe-ne-veut-pas-d-un-macron-ni-competent-ni-loyal-comme-premier-ministre_1836620.html

stated somewhat patronisingly that ‘one cannot busk a presidential campaign’.⁶ Even Edouard Philippe, Macron’s eventual nominee for Prime Minister, described his movement as based upon ‘a casual populism which takes no responsibility but promises the world’.⁷

As a new movement free from the path determinism of a founding ideology enshrined in party history, Macron enjoyed much greater room for manoeuvre in setting out his programme, albeit within the parameters of a social liberal ethos. Nonetheless, Macron himself indicated he was less concerned with policy details, and more with presenting a broad presidential vision to drive his campaign.⁸ The beginnings of the movement, launched in Macron’s home town of Amiens in April 2016, five months before his resignation from the Bercy Ministry, were more akin to a start-up company than a political movement. Initial contributions were sought from close friends, and a frenetic series of social events organised by *En Marche’s!* fundraiser, former banker Christian Dargnat, and its treasurer Cédric O, brought in further investors domestically, while, internationally, French ex-pats working in the financial centres of London and New York were targeted – as individuals, given the ban on corporate funding of candidates. This strategy succeeded in raising some 15 millions euros.⁹ Organisationally, the dynamism contrasted with the traditional parties of government, which in economic terms were more akin to large, bureaucratic blue-chip companies.¹⁰

Ostensibly, membership of the party grew very quickly in its first six months. It claimed to have had 13,000 sign-ups within the first four days, and by the end of the year, it was claiming a membership of 119,000, with well over 2000 local committees. As critics noted, however, the definition of membership was fuzzy, with members only having to supply an e-mail address,¹¹ and there being no membership fee. Also, Macron had made it clear from the outset that members of *En Marche!* did not need to renounce membership of other political parties or movements. Even for eventual candidates for election, there would be no requirement for members of other parties to ‘rip up their membership cards’. The same, could not be said of the other parties’ view of their members aligning with *En Marche!*.¹²

As part of a strategy facilitated by the Liegey Muller Pons electoral start-up, the so-called *marcheurs* ostensibly played a role in defining the party programme, canvassing from door to door not just to rally support for an outsider candidate, but also to canvass ideas that would be included in the candidate and party’s future programme.¹³ Such grassroots mobilisation gave the movement a sense, albeit artificial, of a bottom-up mobilisation for the presidential candidate, with a mission to incorporate into the programme the concerns and desires of the French public. The strategy group employed machine-learning algorithms to analyse the ‘diagnostic’ provided by the carefully selected

⁶ http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2016/08/31/valls-reagit-au-depart-de-macron-on-ne-s-improvise-pas-candidat-a-la-presidentielle_4990675_823448.html

⁷ http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/05/15/ce-qu-edouard-philippe-ecrivait-sur-macron_5128029_823448.html

⁸ <http://www.la-croix.com/France/Politique/Presidentielle-programme-dEmmanuel-Macron-2017-04-13-1200839256>

⁹ http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2017/05/11/comment-en-marche-a-resolu-sa-question-de-fonds_1568975

¹⁰ http://www.liberation.fr/elections-presidentielle-legislatives-2017/2017/05/11/comment-en-marche-a-resolu-sa-question-de-fonds_1568975

¹¹ http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/10/07/emmanuel-macron-la-grande-marche-et-ses-chiffres-flous_5009682_4355770.html

¹² http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/05/09/legislatives-queles-sont-les-regles-pour-les-candidats-tentes-par-l-etiquette-la-republique-en-marche_5125119_5076653.html

¹³ http://www.lemonde.fr/m-perso/article/2017/05/22/avec-macron-j-ai-vecu-l-election-impossible_5131848_4497916.html?xtmc=temoignages_en_marche_campagne_programme&xtcr=3

sample of the electorate interviewed, to identify key issues and buzzwords. The extent to which this process influenced the programme is debatable. In reality, the broad themes of Macron's governing programme were already defined, or being parsed by a large group of expert advisers – the popular consultation was as much a gesture designed to generate coverage and discussion, and thereby indirectly rally greater numbers to support his candidacy, as to shape the programme.

En Marche! as a political movement

Perhaps most illustrative of Macron's commitment to embodying renewal in the political system is the conversion of *En Marche!* from a political club focused on Macron as a leader, to *La République en Marche!*, a political movement able to contest legislative elections. As we have noted, a number of strands in the 'neophyte' meta-criticism of Macron can be identified. As a viable presidential candidate within the logic of the *quinquennat's* aligned electoral calendar, the need for a parliamentary majority, or more accurately the need to be perceived to have a potential parliamentary majority, to support the presidential programme, was paramount for convincing voters to support him in the presidential ballot. We should remind ourselves here the relatively low levels of conviction of many self-declared Macron supporters in pre-election polls – less than half of his declared support certain to vote for him in February, rising only to just over two-thirds in April.¹⁴

In line with his promise to renew and 'moralise' French political life, Macron insisted that LREM's candidate selection process would impose certain quotas and benchmarks. First, no candidate could have held office for three consecutive terms. The most high-profile victim of this ruling was former Socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who had initially declared his candidature under the LREM ticket until this was rejected by the head of the LREM selection committee, Jean-Pierre Delevoye. However, no LREM candidate was fielded against Valls in the first constituency of l'Essonne – a gesture which undoubtedly saved the ex-premier, who won the second round by only 139 votes against his Fi opponent. This decision not to field candidates against 'supportive' high-profile candidates also included former Socialist Ministers Marisol Touraine, Myriam El-Khomri and Stéphane Le Foll who had notably refrained from backing Benoît Hamon in the first round of the presidentials, and conversely very vocally supported Macron in the *ballottage*. Strategically, it also prevented the party in some cases from wasting resources on unwinnable battles against locally embedded popular *notables*.

Second, there needed to be gender parity, an objective enshrined in French electoral law but variably regarded by traditional parties as an opportunity cost (Murray 2008). In the eventual roster of LREM candidates, the number of female candidates slightly exceeded males (Rouban 2017a, 2). Similarly, to enshrine the notion of renewal, half of the candidates needed to be from civil society rather than political careerists. However, whilst around half of the candidates indeed had not held elective office at any level, only around one third had never stood for election, or had not worked in political roles as special advisors or the like.¹⁵ The social profile of candidates could make no claims to being a cross-section of French society, with middle-class, educated professionals making up the vast majority of candidates, and one-third owning their own business. Perhaps most notably, a large

¹⁴ <http://harris-interactive.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/04/Rapport-Harris-Intentions-vote-election-presidentielle-LCP.pdf>

¹⁵ http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/06/07/legislatives-un-tiers-des-candidats-de-la-republique-en-marche-sont-de-vrais-novices-en-politique_5139798_4355770.html

number of candidates also came from one of the *grandes écoles*.¹⁶ Whilst Lrem was criticised for favouring an elite composition to its candidates, it nonetheless mirrored the ideological leanings of Macron and the model he wished to impose on French society and the economy. Through a principle-agent notion of representation, Macron required a set of candidates with relevant expertise across the socio-economic piece, hired for their skillset, rather than promoted through dues paid in a party political apparatus. In the same way that he exploited the roles of technical ministers in populating the Philippe government, for example placing a doctor in charge of Health and a University director in charge of Higher Education, so those who would examine and debate legislation (no doubt constructively) were also chosen for their technical and political knowledge.

Third, of increasing importance throughout a campaign marked as much by judicial press releases as party ones, no candidate could have any history of judicial investigations. Indeed, the vetting process of the candidates was extensive, to verify jobs, memberships, and criminal records – even whether the applicant had ever employed a member of their family.¹⁷ Finally, the original intention – and one which was deviated from more substantially – was that all constituencies needed to be contested, excluding any possibility of mutual desistment pacts or common candidacies with other parties. These parameters were further cross-cut by an implicit need to ensure that the ideological distribution of the candidates sufficiently covered the centre-left, centre and centre-right camps.

Led by former Raffarin Minister, Jean-Paul Delevoye, the nine-member *commission d'investiture* included three former Socialist Parliamentarians, as well as civil society members such as Catherine Barbaroux, the former president of the French association for micro-finance, and the eventual first president of Lrem. In looking to draw upon political experience for half of their candidates, clearly Lrem would be appealing to defections from the traditional political camps. But by drawing upon *ralliements* by members of these very same camps, inevitable conflicts of interest arose. Most obviously, loyalties to former party comrades could not stand in the way of inevitable political competition between Socialists and Republicans, as the majority seat-holders / challengers, and Lrem candidates. Those overlooked by their own party in candidate selection often threw in their lot with Lrem to challenge for the seat nonetheless. The number of Socialists not seeking re-election in 2017 – 71 – eased this to some degree. Furthermore, a Green party reliant upon electoral pacts with the Socialists found themselves in competition with former supporters of the very party standing down to allow them to retain their seats – a situation far from assured (Evans and Ivaldi, 2016) until Yannick Jadot's withdrawal in favour of Benoît Hamon in late February.

The only electoral alliance which would colour Lrem's pursuit of its own absolute majority stemmed from the declaration of support for Macron by Modem's François Bayrou on 22 February. While undeniably providing Macron with a boost in the opinion polls which was critical to his victory in the first round, assessments of the party reward for Modem as a result clearly varied considerably, with François Bayrou highly dissatisfied with the 35 candidates ceded to by Lrem in the initial candidate list in May, when he claimed to have negotiated well over 100 in his agreement in February.¹⁸ In the end, around 80 constituencies were reserved for Modem.

Lrem's electoral success

¹⁶ http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/06/06/qui-sont-les-candidats-de-la-republique-en-marche-l-enquete-du-monde_5139646_4355770.html [accessed 27 J

¹⁷ <http://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/presidentielles/2017/05/10/35003-20170510ARTFIG00334-macron-lance-la-bataille-des-legislatives.php>

¹⁸ http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2017/05/12/legislatives-bayrou-et-le-modem-en-mode-colere_1569254

Lrem's success in polls immediately subsequent to the presidential run-off exemplified the characterisation of the legislative elections as rounds three and four of the presidential race (Dupoirier and Sauger, 2010). All polls placed the Lrem-Modem alliance in first place, with scores fluctuating initially between 22 and 26 per cent, and rising to around 30 per cent in the closing stages of the legislative campaign. The self-declared voters for Lrem were more certain on average of their choice than other parties, with the exception of the Fn – 7 in 10 for the former, 8 in 10 for the latter.¹⁹ Nevertheless, this showed some continuity with the certainty of vote for Macron and Le Pen two weeks prior to the first round of the presidential race – 67 per cent for Macron and 81 per cent for Le Pen.²⁰

As polls had indicated, Lrem dominated the traditional parties both the first and second rounds of the legislative elections. As Table 1 shows, a lead in the first round for Lrem was converted by the logic of the two-round system into close to an absolute majority of votes. In turn, the disproportionality of the two-round majoritarian system (Blais and Loewen 2009, 350) gave Lrem an absolute majority of seats, even without their Modem partners. However, the results also indicate quite clearly that Macron's presidential victory was not followed by a rallying of broader sections of the electorate to the presidential party. The turnout figure by itself, and the disparity between vote and *valid* votes shows the minimal party mobilisation that occurred. Inevitably, many supporters of traditional parties regarded the outcome as a foregone conclusion. For parties of the left, in particular, only their traditional strongholds were able to bring out sufficient support in both rounds to protect their Assembly seats. However, Macron managed 8.7 million votes in the first round of the presidential election. His party only managed 7.8 million votes in the second round of the legislatives, 8.9 million if one include the votes for Modem. Compared with 2012, a similar dynamic affected both François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, with around a million fewer votes for their presidential parties at the second round than their own second-round presidential scores. However, their second-round party shares won some million votes more than Lrem.

While the scale of the victory may have belied much of the accompanying rhetoric, a number of strategic successes demonstrated Lrem's capacity to maximise its success. First, tactically the party had shown none of its magnanimity to possible supporters in Paris constituencies. Having given Macron almost 9 out of 10 of its votes in the second round of the presidentials, the City of Light was clearly ripe for providing a cluster of Lrem deputies as a first step to challenging Anne Hidalgo – a vocal Left-wing opponent of Macron, and a founder of the *Dès Demain* movement with Martine Aubry and Christiane Taubira – for the Hôtel de Ville in 2020. Centre-facing Lr candidates, such as Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet and Jean-François Legaret, were shown no mercy in competition by Lrem candidates. Even Myriam El-Khomri, despite not being challenged by Lrem, was faced with an Lr candidate, Pierre-Yves Bournazel, endorsed by Edouard Philippe.²¹

Second, the rules imposed on candidate selection were to some extent reflected in the profile of Lrem candidates elected. A majority of Lrem deputies were political novices, on average younger than other parties' representatives – and particularly first-time female deputies at just over 38, compared with their male counterparts at 53 (Rouban 2017b, 2). Nonetheless, in terms of their demographic profile, only the mainstream Right and, perhaps surprisingly, regionalists surpassed

¹⁹ http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/06/02/elections-legislatives-la-republique-en-marche-en-tete-des-intentions-de-vote-au-premier-tour_5137632_823448.html [accessed 2 June 2017]

²⁰ <http://www.ouest-france.fr/elections/sondages/presidentielle-sondage-macron-stable-melenchon-et-fillon-tallonnent-le-pen-4929172> [accessed 2 June 2017]

²¹ http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-legislatives-2017/article/2017/06/13/legislatives-des-soutiens-a-geometrie-tres-variable-pour-le-second-tour_5143808_5076653.html

Lrem deputies in the proportion of *classes supérieures* making up their number (Rouban 2017b, 7). An elitist choice of candidates was mirrored in the eventual parliamentary group.

Third, there is some evidence that Lrem tactically placed candidates according to their former political alignment, where this existed (Evans and Ivaldi, 2017). The effects were asymmetric by bloc and by round of the election. In the first round, former Left-party candidates did no better or worse in the constituencies they contested, but former Right-party candidates did well in Right-wing constituencies, but worse-than-average in former Left constituencies. Conversely, in the second round, parties of the Right ‘colluded’ more effectively in blocking former Left Lrem candidates, the collusion being a willingness of Lr voters to transfer to an Fn candidate in *ballottage*. Far from perfect, the placing of Lrem candidates did follow the logic of the Philippe government formation, namely to appeal to Lr voters and thereby disrupt the principal challenger to Lrem’s hegemony, having won over as many former Socialists as it could in the presidential race itself. Fourth, Modem’s success in the legislative election, winning 42 seats from 80 candidates, and thereby surpassing either of its previous, single-digit legislative performances, demonstrated a clear understanding of where the partner centrist party could reap maximum reward, particularly in the South-West and more broadly the West of the country. Equally, without the backing of the presidential party, it is clear that only a fraction of these successes could have been envisaged.

Conclusion

Emmanuel Macron and Lrem encountered a very unusual set of political circumstances which allowed the movement to embed itself very rapidly within the French party system, and achieve an almost unparalleled level of success in legislative elections in a constitutional framework designed to limit the power of political parties over the executive. And, of course, the very success of Lrem in 2017 is testament to precisely that weakness – the weighting of importance of first-order elections in France, the primacy of the presidential race led as before to a supportive majority (Brouard and Kerrouche 2013). In that sense, the presidential and legislative races are indeed four rounds of the presidential, not two and two.

Macron’s capacity to act ‘just in time’, from the formation of Lrem, through the declaration of his candidacy, the courting of François Bayrou, to the inclusion of key centre-right ministerial appointments, including Edouard Philippe and Bruno Le Maire, to counterbalance a centre-left electorate and legislature, and the exploitation of propitious political competitive circumstances provided by polarised mainstream opponents with declining credibility, paved his way to a dominant executive-legislative position. His victory in the first round of the presidential election, however, merits the greater focus, in being both a very close race – only five points separating the top four candidates – at the first electoral test of the centrist and his political movement, and the far from crushing victory in the second round. Issues in the legislative election would have been noteworthy – electoral success was the likely outcome. Of course, a disorganised, incoherent movement would have jeopardised electoral success, but the extent to which individual candidates were in any position to express positions out of kilter with the presidential programme was very limited. The Parliamentary Congress convened at Versailles on 3 July by Macron made it clear that the *majorité présidentielle* was expected to act in that capacity, and that alone – a reduction of their number by a third, the threat of referenda in case of legislative stalling on institutional reforms, and a more general reform of *le navette* to speed up legislation, all indicated a disempowered legislature, with rubber-stamping rather than executive powers.

Indeed, the major challenge for Lrem now is to transform itself into a party of government. Unlike previous governments, the number of ministers belonging to the party is relatively low – after the post-legislative reshuffle, only three ministers were formally from the party, as compared with six from Lr and its allies, and seven from the Ps. As the former parties of government regroup, metaphorically and literally, in the months following the election, the party affiliations of those ministers may well change. Below the executive level, however, the 308 Lrem deputies find themselves in a clear majority in the National Assembly. Yet, for the first time under the Fifth Republic, this majority straddles the centre of the hemicycle, between the former parties of government. The Socialist rout and relatively modest performance of Lfi and the Pcf means that the axis of alignment for the Lrem group falls firmly to the left. This also reflects the former political makeup of the group – 85 of the deputies come from parties broadly of the left, 31 from the right.²² The political alignment of the civil society members is unclear at this stage. However, it seems likely that there will be a variety of political tendencies among the group.

Inevitably, during the legislative campaign, Lrem as with any party had a strong incentive to show coherence and consistency in its candidates' messages. With only one month after the focus shifted from the presidential race to the legislatives, there was very little time for any broad sense of candidates' own positions, the majority of whom were unknown to the French public outside their *circonscription*, to become apparent nationally. In a very inexperienced Assembly, with 424 deputies taking up their first mandate,²³ traditional partisan pressures may be much lower than before. Partisan electoral pressures will also be limited - after September's Senate elections, the next election will be for the European Parliament in 2019, followed by the municipals the following year. The main challenge to Parliamentary group cohesion, then, will come through voting government legislation and, in the case of the use of *ordonnances*, agreeing not to vote the detail of legislation.

The grassroots of the party will also require significant attention over the first years of Lrem's existence. While the movement's capacity to mobilise in the lead-up to the presidential and legislative races was impressive, it lacks an established, rooted infrastructure in local communities to ensure that this support is sustainable in the long term. As 'new' parties such as the Fn have discovered to their cost, the lack of significant grassroots networks makes success at the regional and local level very difficult to achieve, and this has ramifications in a system where the local level still provides a foundation for national support. What happens to Lrem's local networks in the future will have a bearing on the party's capacity to replicate its 2017 success.

As protests after Macron's election as president made clear, the ascension of the former Minister of the Economy and his party to the Elysée and Bourbon Palaces was far from a popular landslide. As the initial policies of his 'democratic revolution' are debated and voted in the National Assembly, it is unlikely that there will be no repeat of protest actions by social movements and unions that greeted legislation put forward by Hollande, and by his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy. After a period of political learning, the coherence of the Lrem majority in the face of legislative and popular opposition remains to be seen.

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²² http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/06/27/dans-la-nouvelle-assemblee-nationale-la-valse-des-etiquettes-politiques_5151913_4355770.html

²³ http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/06/19/l-assemblee-s-offre-un-nouveau-visage-rajeuni-renouvele-feminise_1577907

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Table 1 First and second round vote and seat shares in the 2017 French legislative elections (11 / 18 June)

	First-round	Seats won	Second-round	Seats won
Extreme left	0.77			
PCF	2.72		1.20	10
<i>La France insoumise</i>	11.03		4.86	17
PS	7.44		5.68	30
PRG	0.47		0.36	3
Other left	1.60	1	1.45	11
Ecologist	4.30		0.13	1
Other	2.21		0.55	3
Regionalist	0.90		0.76	5
Lrem	28.21	2	43.06	306
Modem	4.12		6.06	42
UDI	3.03	1	3.04	17
LR	15.77		22.23	112
Other right	2.76		1.68	6
Debout la France	1.17		0.10	1
Front national	13.20		8.75	8
Extreme right	0.30		0.10	1
Turnout / valid vote	48.70 / 47.62		42.64 / 38.43	

Source: French Ministry of the Interior (<https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections>)