Surprising Election Results in France as a Left-Wing Coalition Wins the Most Seats in Parliament

While the U.S. election trails on until November, the much-anticipated decisive final round of the French election took place this past weekend, and the results shocked and surprised many. Under the watchful eye of observers around the world, the election results not only reflected the current sentiments of the French populace, but also signaled potential shifts in the broader European political climate. The far-right in France had made serious gains during the first round of elections which took place in late June, and was therefore anticipated to win the most seats in parliament in Sunday's final run-off round. Instead, a loose coalition of leftist parties won the most seats, although no single party or alliance of parties was able to secure the at least 289 of the French National Assembly's 577 seats needed to attain an outright parliamentary majority. Since no bloc was able to do so, France now has a hung parliament, and a coalition government will need to be formed between alliances or political parties in order to break the deadlock.

In France, the parliament is made up of two parts. The first is the National Assembly (Assemblée Nationale) which is the lower house, and members of that legislative body serve five-year terms. The second part is the Senate (Sénat) which is the upper house, and senators are elected for six-year terms through an indirect electoral system. The responsibilities of the parliament are very similar to what the U.S. Congress is in charge of overseeing. They debate and pass laws, approve the national budget, amend laws, and provide oversight for other government functions. Last month in June, French President Emmanuel Macron made what was regarded at that time as a historic and potentially risky move in dissolving the parliament and moving to a snap election: one which takes place earlier than the normally scheduled election. Typically, this occurs so that the political body can decide on a divisive issue, or to take advantage of a potential electoral opportunity for that entity to gain an upper hand.

However, a president cannot just call a snap election without following a few guidelines. First, before they dissolve the National Assembly, the president must consult with the prime minister and the leaders of both houses of parliament, and all must agree with it. Additionally, the election following the announcement must be held within 20-40 days of it being called for. Before this latest occurrence, the most recent call for a snap election in France was back in 1997 during President Jacques Chirac's reign, one year before the election was scheduled to take place. This decision was partially a plot to catch his opposing party off guard and also aided by the population's supposed dislike of the prime minister at the time, Alain Juppé. However, this backfired completely on Chirac and resulted in the first time in French history that a French President lost an election that was called on his own accord since the establishment of the snap election rules in 1958.

Leading up to the election, news outlets from all over the world were reporting it as one that would divide the country. Earlier in June, President Emmanuel Macron's party, Renaissance, was beaten out in the polls for France's seat in the European Parliament. The National Rally party, headed by Marine Le Pen, won around 32% of the votes, beating Macron's party by nearly 17 points. These results worried many in France and abroad, as it appeared that it was following in the footsteps of other European countries and witnessing a surge in more conservative and right-winged governments. With the latest election results however, it appears that the French population was not willing to turn the country over to right-wing ideals so fast and as NPR reported, "There's a saying: in the first round you vote with your heart, in the second, with your head. That means second-round choices are often

"tactical" – not in favor of a particular candidate per se, but to make sure another one doesn't win." Thus, this past Sunday, July 7th, a record-breaking number of French people came out to the polls to ensure that their voice was heard and to advocate for their desires from the government.

All of this resulted in a defeat not only to the far-right National Rally Party, but also to President Macron's party as well. After the numbers were finally counted and verified, the New Popular Front walked away with the most seats, winning 182. Following Macron's attempt at joining two factions of the government, the Ensemble Alliance won 163 seats. Finally, the initial projected winners, the National Rally Party, only earned 143 seats. In total, France's parliament has 577 seats, meaning that to ensure a party has a majority, it needs 289 of those seats. No party or alliance was able to secure that feat, but many are taking the defeat of the far-right party as a hopeful sign for the future.

As partisan politics continue to polarize much of the world, the outcome of the French election serves as a reminder that the will of the people can still prevail. The surprising results underscore the importance of active civic participation, and the power of collective action in shaping the future of a nation. As Americans prepare for the upcoming November election, many are hoping that this will serve as an inspiration to stay informed, engaged, and ready to make their voices heard.