

FRANCE

Date of Elections: 16 March 1986

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats in the National Assembly on the normal expiry of the members' term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of France is made up of the Senate and the National Assembly.

Senate

The Senate comprises 318 members*; they are indirectly elected for 9 years, one-third of the seats being renewed every 3 years. The Senate cannot be dissolved.

Of this total, 296 Senators represent the 95 departments of metropolitan France, being elected in each case by an electoral college composed of the members of the National Assembly, general councillors, and delegates of the municipal councils; 8 Senators, elected likewise, represent the five overseas departments; 3 Senators, elected likewise, represent the five overseas territories; 2 Senators represent the 2 "collectivites territoriales"; and 8 Senators, co-opted by the Senate on submission of candidatures by the *Conseil superieur des Francois de l'etranger*, represent French citizens living outside France.

National Assembly

The National Assembly has 577 members (555 for metropolitan France, 15 for overseas departments, 2 for overseas "collectivites territoriales" and 5 for overseas territories)**. All Deputies are directly elected for 5 years.

Electoral System***

All French citizens who are at least 18 years of age, in full possession of their civil rights and registered as electors are entitled to vote for Deputies (the Senate electorate is mentioned

* The number of seats is, theoretically, still 318 but the actual total is 317 since the seat of the former French territory of the Afars and the Issas remained unfilled after the territory became independent as Djibouti.

•*See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments XIX* (1984-1985), p.10.

*** Subsequent to the general elections, the former two-ballot majority system for the election of National Assembly members was reintroduced by the new Government on 9 April 1986. The present account nevertheless reflects the situation as it was for the March poll, when proportional representation was in force.

above). Disqualified are persons convicted of criminal or other offences, undischarged bankrupts and the mentally deficient.

As regards elections for the National Assembly, electoral lists are compiled on the municipal level and revised annually. Voting for Deputies, unlike for Senators, is not compulsory. Special registration and proxy voting procedures apply to citizens living abroad, career military personnel and persons having itinerant professions.

Qualified electors who are at least 23 years of age and who have satisfied their military obligation are eligible for election to the National Assembly (the age requirement is 35 for the Senate). Naturalized citizens and women who have acquired French nationality by marriage are only eligible upon expiry of a period of 10 years from the date of their becoming French. Ineligible are persons under guardianship and those deprived of their eligibility by court decree.

Career members of the armed forces, the Economic and Social Council and department committees; judges; holders of certain functions bestowed by foreign States and officials of international organizations; executives of State enterprises, State-assisted companies, savings and credit organizations, companies holding government contracts and real-estate companies, and members of the Constitutional Council are all deemed to hold offices or positions which are incompatible with the parliamentary mandate. No Deputy may simultaneously hold more than one of certain other elected posts or elective functions.

Candidatures to the National Assembly must be submitted at least 21 days prior to election day, along with a deposit of 1,000 francs, reimbursable if the party list concerned obtains at least 5% of the votes cast.

Depending on the constituency, candidates for the Senate may run either individually or as part of a list candidates. These candidatures must be accompanied by a deposit of 200 francs. This deposit is reimbursable to an individual candidate if he obtains 10% of the votes cast in the particular constituency in either of the two ballots, or to the several candidates composing a list if they together obtain 5% of the votes cast.

According to the July 1985 Electoral Law, the two-ballot majority system used for the election of Deputies was replaced in virtually all constituencies by the proportional representation system featuring lists of candidates fielded by parties in each administrative department and based on the rule of highest average, without vote-splitting or preferential voting. Distribution of seats is excluded for all lists with less than 5% of the popular vote. Population determines the number of Deputies from each department, with the minimum being two.

In departments represented by four Senators or less, the latter are elected on a majority basis in two ballots. Departments entitled to five or more Senators elect the latter according to the proportional representation system of highest average, without preferential vote or vote-splitting; within each list, seats are allotted to candidates on the basis of their order of appearance within that list. In the overseas territories. Senators are elected by absolute majority.

National Assembly vacancies arising between general elections are filled by the "next-in-line" candidates of the same party list, who had to number two for each list at the March 1986 polling.

In absolute-majority constituencies, substitutes elected at the same time as titular members of Parliament fill vacancies which arise when these titular members accept government office or appointment to the Constitutional Council, become members of a government mission lasting more than six months, or have died. When vacancies arise for any other reason - such as resignation - by-elections are resorted to within three months, except in the last year prior to the end of the legislature's term.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The general elections were the first to be held under the proportional representation system introduced by the 1985 Electoral Law, whose consequence was also to raise the number of Deputies from 491 to 577.

The campaign officially opened on 24 February 1986, and publication of opinion polls was allowed until 8 March. Nearly 7,000 candidates were contesting the 555 parliamentary seats of metropolitan France. Main contenders were the ruling Socialist Party (PS) and the two centre-right parties: the neo-Gaullist Rally for the Republic (*Rassemblement pour la République - RPR*) and the centrist Union for French Democracy (*Union pour la démocratie française - UDF*).

Economic issues (especially unemployment) and the prospect of post-election "cohabitation" between a right-wing majority in Parliament and a left-wing President of the Republic (Mr. Francois Mitterrand of the PS) were in the forefront of the campaign debate. The Socialists defended the major achievements of their outgoing Government and advocated greater social protection as well as a guaranteed minimum income for all workers, while the RPR-UDF platform called for, *inter alia*, denationalization of various sectors of the economy which the PS had made public in 1982, abolition of the proportional representation electoral system, and increased spending on both conventional and nuclear defence.

On polling day, the conservative alliance of RPR and UDF, with the support of various small right-wing groups, gained an apparent narrow overall majority of Assembly seats (which was later reduced). The PS, while losing its absolute majority, remained the largest single party. The far-right National Front of Mr. Jean-Marie Le Pen, which had campaigned on an anti-immigration platform and was not previously represented in Parliament, captured 35 seats.

On 18 March, President Mitterrand named Mr. Jacques Chirac, the RPR leader, as Prime Minister and "cohabitation" became a reality. Mr. Chirac, who had held the same post from 1974 to 1976, announced the formation of his Cabinet on 20 March on the basis of the RPR-UDF alliance.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the National Assembly

Number of registered electors.	37,541,124	
Voters.	29,317,729	(78.1%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	1,280,549	
Valid votes.	28,037,180	

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats
Extreme Left.	427,753	1.53	—
Communist Party (PC)	2,740,972	9.78	35
Socialist Party (PS)	8,705,163	31.04	207
<i>Union de la gauche.</i>	56,044	0.20	2
Left Radicals (MRG)	107,754	0.38	2
Various Left	290,059	1.03	5
Ecologists.	340,138	1.21	—
Regionalists.	28,045	0.10	—
<i>Rassemblement pour la Repu- blique (R?R).</i>	3,145,171	11.21	77
<i>Union pour la democratic fran- caise (UDF).</i>	2,330,072	8.31	53
UDF-RPR joint	6,017,207	21.46	147
Various Right	1,096,511	3.90	14
National Front	2,705,336	9.65	35
Extreme Right	57,334	0.20	—

In light of the above results, the numerical strength of the various National Assembly groups, including attached and associated members, became the following:

Political Group	Total Number of Seats
PS	212
RPR	155
UDF	131
National Front	35
PC	35
Unattached	9
	577

*2. Distribution of Deputies according
to Professional Category*

Teachers.	150
Civil servants and public officials (active or retired).	115
Salaried employees.	109
Various professional staff.	53
Journalists.	17
Manual workers.	15
Engineers.	12
Salaried clerks.	3
Others.	9
Legal and liberal professions.	73
Lawyers.	31
Literacy, artistic and scientific professions	14
Judges.	3
Ministry officials, notaries.	3
Other liberal professions.	19
Other independent workers.	3
Medical professions.	69
Doctors, surgeons.	50
Pharmacists.	5
Dentists.	5
Veterinarians.	5
Other social or health professions.	4
Commercial and industrial professions	35
Agricultural professions.	18
Without professions and others.	X
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3. Distribution of Deputies according to Sex

Men.	540
Women.	37

4. *Distribution of Deputies according to Age Group*

30 years and under.	4
31-35 years.	17
36-40 ».	49
41-45 ».	111
46-50 ».	108
51-55 ».	82
56-60 ».	80
61-65 ».	78
66-70 ».	30
Over 70 years.	US
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