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# French Voters' Verdict: Prioritise Public Services

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## Overview

French voters want public services to be a bigger priority for policymakers, and two in three favour government collaboration with the private sector to deliver cost reductions for taxpayers and improvements in the quality of services. With key parliamentary elections approaching in June and the subsequent possibility of 'cohabitation', President Macron should focus on maintaining the high quality of public services, a matter which enjoys majority support among voters of all political stripes.

This short paper outlines a series of nationally representative polls by the Serco Institute which explore what French voters want when it comes to public services.



## Methodology

The online survey was conducted on 19 April 2022, with 1,013 residents of France aged 18 and over polled and the data weighted to be nationally representative. It was conducted in association with Survation.

Not all figures will sum to 100% due to rounding.





## Discussion

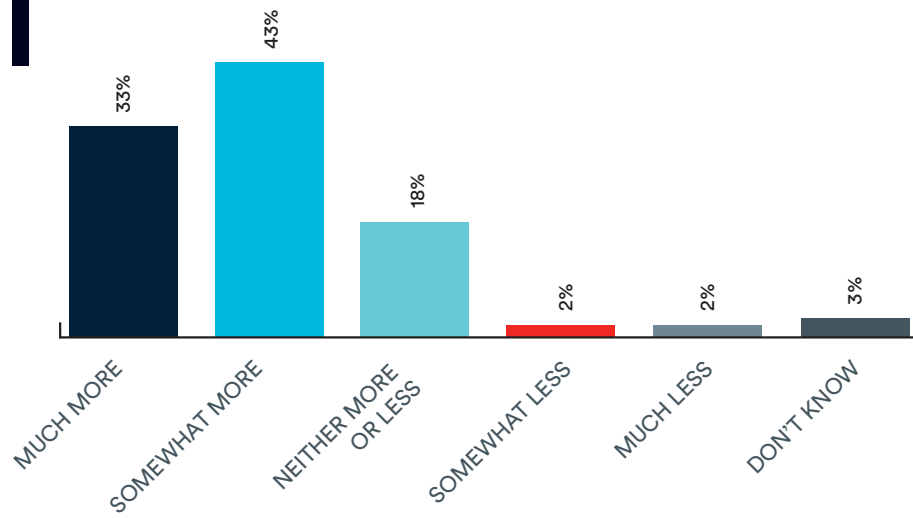
The people have spoken: French voters have, by a convincing margin of 17 percentage points, re-elected incumbent President Emmanuel Macron to serve a second five-year term. But President Macron cannot yet afford to rest easy: in order to enact his agenda, he must secure a majority for his newly renamed Renaissance party (formerly La République en Marche) in parliamentary elections in June. His defeated presidential rivals, Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, have turned their attentions to what Mr. Mélenchon calls the election's 'third round'. Mr. Macron has acknowledged his need to listen to and act upon the policy priorities of the French people: his interim government, more left-of-centre than the previous Cabinet under Prime Minister Jean Castex, will enact measures to ease the cost of living, including tax cuts and top-up 'cheques' for lower-income households<sup>1</sup>, and government spokesman Gabriel Attal has promised a new approach to consult the French people more extensively on matters such as health and education<sup>2</sup>.

This focus on public services would likely find a warm reception among the electorate, according to new polling research by the leading public services think tank the Serco Institute. Less than one week before the run-off vote on 24 April, the Serco Institute, working with independent polling experts Survation, conducted a nationally representative survey to examine French voters' attitudes towards public services.

In one of the poll's key findings, an overwhelming majority of respondents (76%) indicated they wanted public services to be treated more of a priority by policymakers in future. In fact, one in three (33%) wanted public services to be 'much more' of a priority, indicating the depth of feeling among voters about this issue. By contrast, just 3% felt public services should be 'less' of a priority. This illustrates the broad popular consensus around the need for greater prioritisation of public services among the French political class.

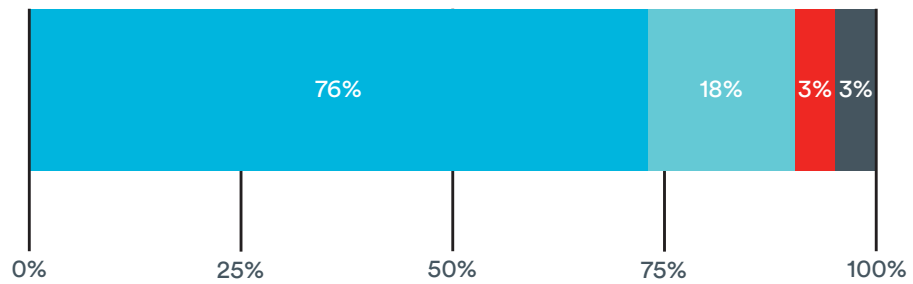
That public services are seen by a large majority of French citizens as a policy issue which deserves greater importance is evidenced by the cross-party sentiment evident in our poll. Similar proportions of voters who backed Mr. Macron, Ms. Le Pen and Mr. Mélenchon in the first round (80%, 79% and 78% respectively) felt public services ought to be given greater priority by French policymakers, as did similarly large majorities of supporters of other presidential candidates: a whopping 92% of voters for Yannick Jadot, the Green candidate, agreed public services needed to be made a higher priority. Only among supporters of Éric Zemmour did this sentiment dip in popularity. Still, however, a convincing majority of nearly two-thirds (64%) of Zemmour voters felt public services should be accorded greater importance, illustrating that the desire to maintain high-quality services cut across political divisions.

- Should improving the quality of public services be more or less of a priority for French policymakers in the future?



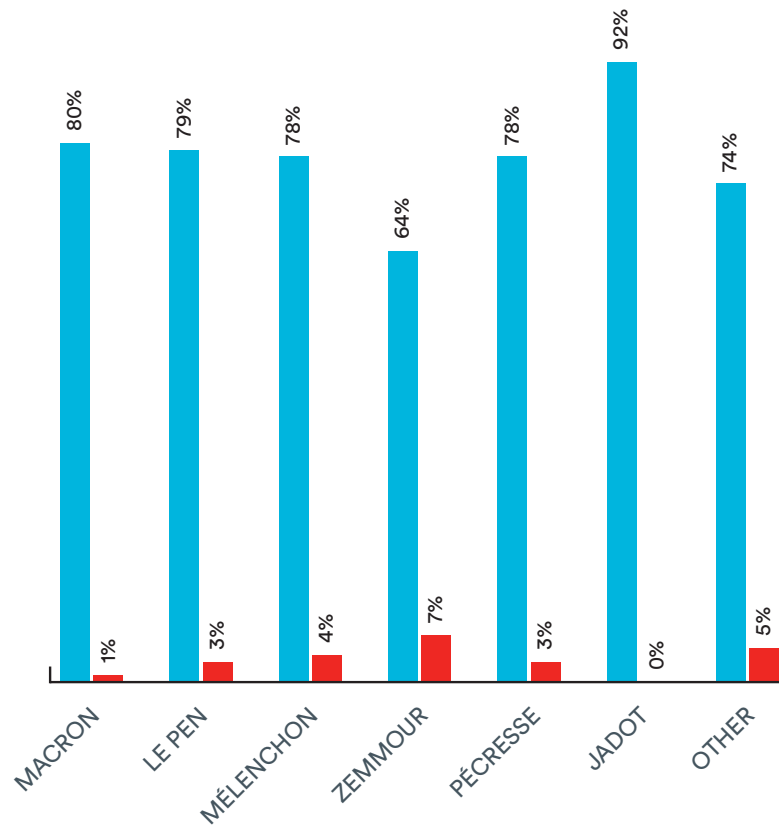
- Should improving the quality of public services be more or less of a priority for French policymakers in the future?

More Neither more or less Less Don't know




- Should improving the quality of public services be more or less of a priority for French policymakers in the future? – First-Round Vote

More Less







Respondents also made clear their desire for policymakers to focus on the quality of services, with 62% of respondents identifying ‘quality’ as the element of public services which mattered most to them, while 23% felt that the cost to taxpayers was the most important part of public service delivery. In a result that some may find surprising, considering the public furore over the McKinseygate controversy surrounding the French Government’s use of consulting companies earlier this year<sup>3</sup>, just 8% reported caring most about who delivered public services, whether that be the Government, the private sector or the third sector.

Once again, voters of different political stripes seemed to largely be in agreement, although to varying degrees: 65% of supporters of Mr. Macron and Mr. Mélenchon identified the quality of services as mattering most to them in public service delivery, but this proportion fell to 50% among Le Pen voters. Nevertheless, these results signalled clearly that what matters most about public services to French voters is the quality of the services themselves, and that this sentiment was shared by most of the French electorate as a whole but also by majorities of voters in each of the leading candidates’ camps.

This wish for the quality of public services to be a focus is furthermore illustrated in a question examining how the French public rate their satisfaction with 17 areas of public services: respondents were more dissatisfied than they were satisfied across seven polled categories. Notably, this included Public Services as a Whole, with which 32% of respondents reported being either ‘very’ or ‘quite’ satisfied and 35% were ‘very’ or ‘quite’ dissatisfied. When comparing these results to twin reports released by the Serco Institute in March 2022, this suggests that French citizens are less satisfied and more dissatisfied with the general condition of public services in their country than their counterparts in the [UK](#) (43% satisfied; 21% dissatisfied)<sup>4</sup> and in [Australia](#) (47% satisfied; 16% dissatisfied)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>140</sup>‘I’m ready to listen to the people’, says Emmanuel Macron after election victory’ – The Times.

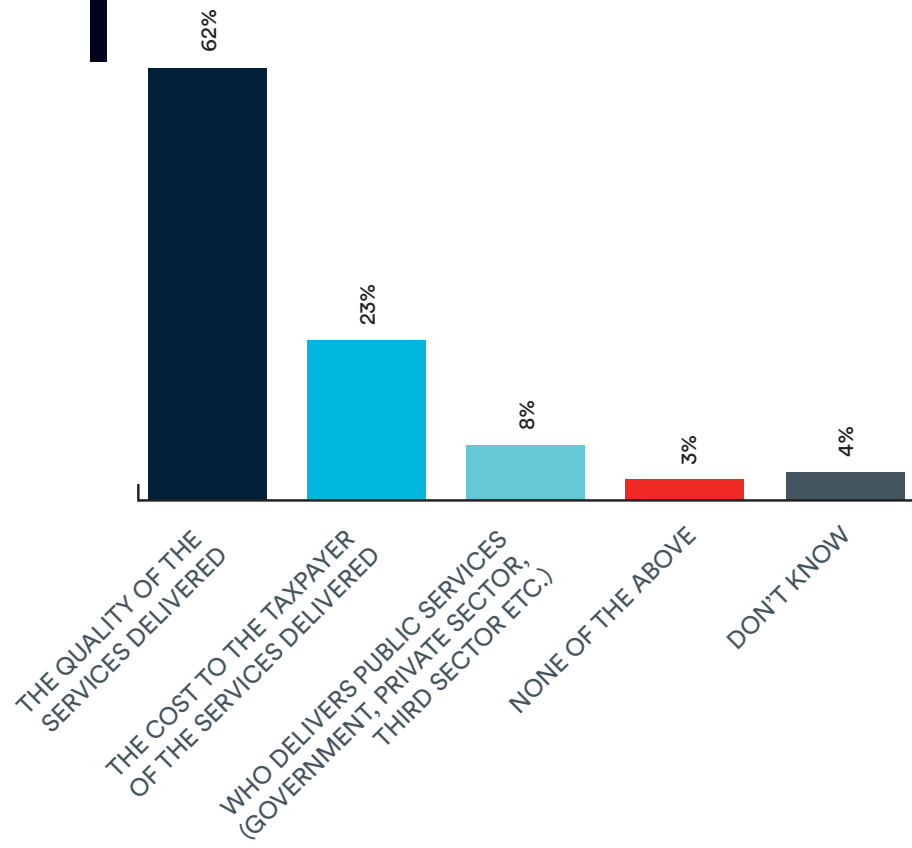
<sup>24</sup>‘No respite for Team Macron in French elections as parliamentary race looms’ – The Times.

<sup>34</sup>‘McKinseygate’ dogs Macron’s re-election campaign’ – Politico.

<sup>4</sup>‘People Powered Public Services: Monitoring UK Opinion – March 2022’ – Serco Institute.

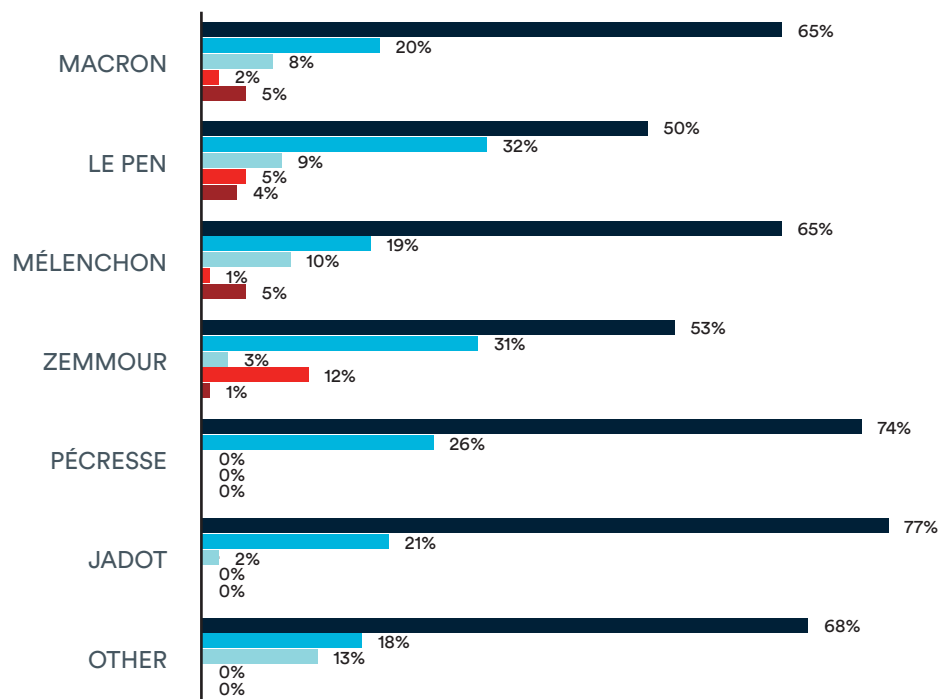
<sup>5</sup>‘People Powered Public Services: Monitoring Australian Opinion – March 2022’ – Serco Institute.

- With regard to the delivery of public services, which of the following matters most to you? (Select one)

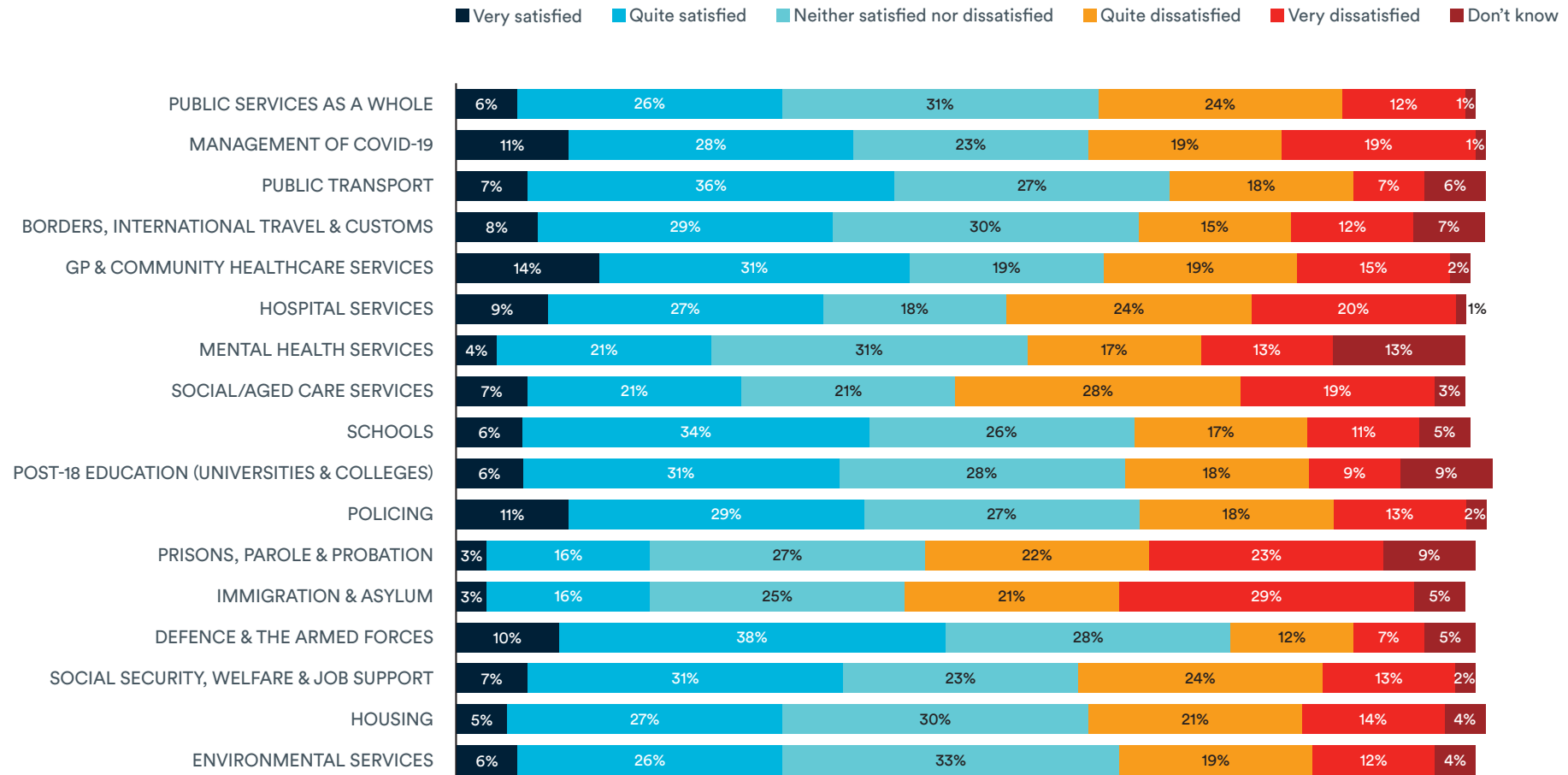


• With regard to the delivery of public services, which of the following matters most to you? – By First-Round Vote

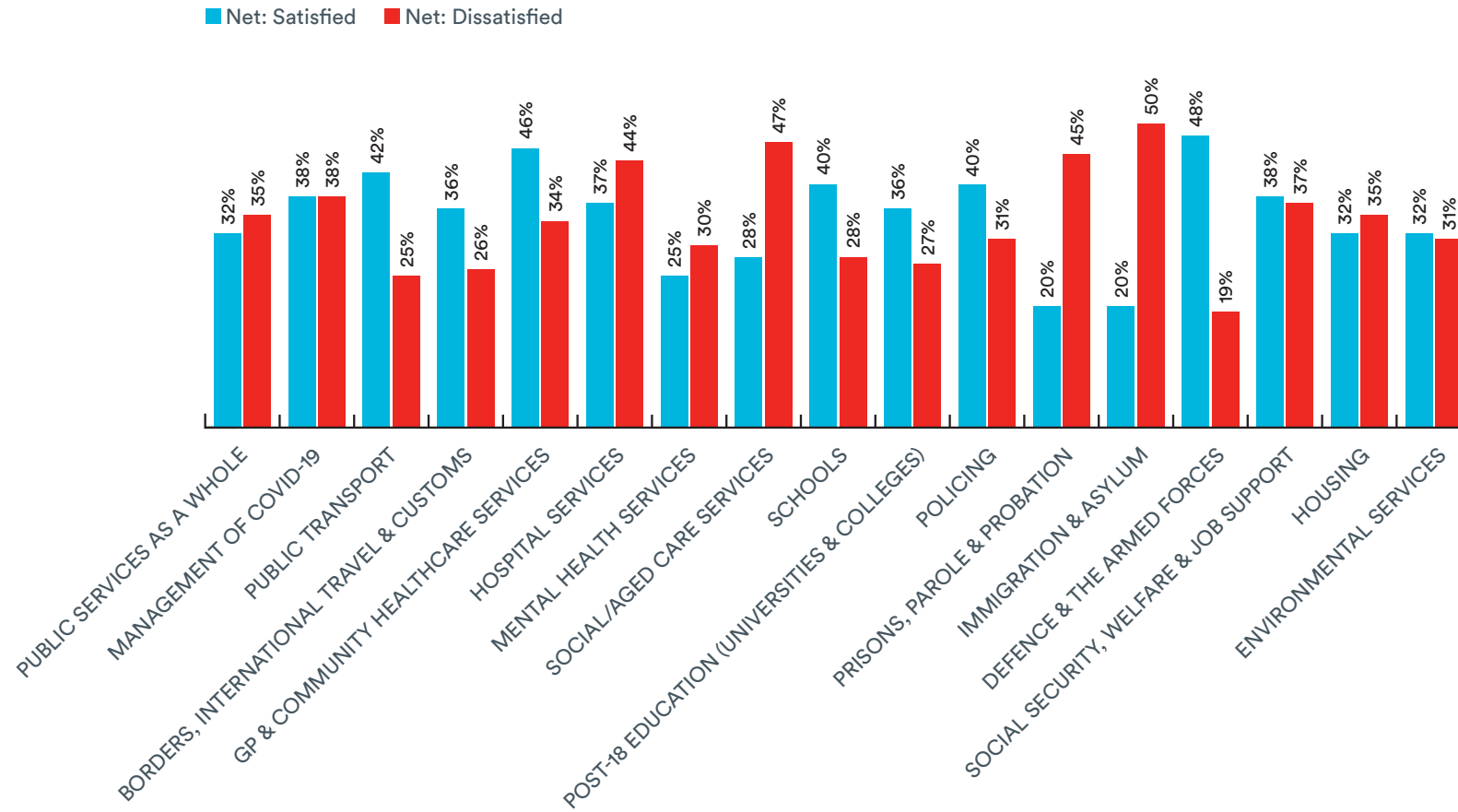
- The quality of the services delivered
- The cost to the taxpayer of the services delivered
- Who delivers public services (government, private sector, third sector etc.)
- None of the above
- Don't know



• How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with public services in each of the following areas?



- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with public services in each of the following areas?





## What role should the private sector have in delivering services?

When asked for their preferences as to how best to resolve these issues in public service delivery, over two-thirds (68%) of respondents indicated they felt the Government should work with private sector organisations if this meant reducing service costs and improving the quality of services. 22% believed the Government should not work with private sector organisations, while 10% were unsure.

This large majority in support of collaboration between the public and private sectors also enjoyed cross-party support. 75% of first-round Macron voters and 70% of Le Pen voters were in favour of public-private sector collaboration to deliver government services – while this percentage dipped among voters for Mr. Mélenchon, a clear majority (61%) of the left-wing candidate's supporters nevertheless favoured state cooperation with private sector partners to bring down costs to taxpayers and raise the quality of public services. Large majorities of voters for Mr. Zemmour and Valérie Pécresse, of Les Républicains, were also in favour of public-private sector collaboration (82% and 89% respectively).

Further examination of results from other questions in the poll sheds some light as to why the level of support for public-private sector collaboration is so high. When presented with five important aspects of public service delivery – 'efficiency'; 'customer service'; 'creating innovation'; 'flexibility'; and 'productivity' – respondents identified the private sector as being more adept at delivering each of the five aspects. The private sector's perceived performance in each of the aspects varied, with 63% of respondents declaring the private sector better at delivering 'productivity', but just 49% feeling this way about 'flexibility'. Nevertheless, in all five instances the private sector was seen by survey takers to be better at delivering these qualities than the public sector, by margins of at least 14 percentage points.

With the private sector perceived to be better able to deliver conditions conducive to good quality of public services, and with 62% of citizens identifying service quality as their foremost concern when considering government services, it is perhaps unsurprising that a large majority of the French electorate favour state collaboration with private sector partners. These survey results make clear it is the quality of public services that matters most to the people of France, and a renewed focus from Mr. Macron's government on delivering on service quality would likely go a long way towards shoring up his party's support ahead of June's elections.



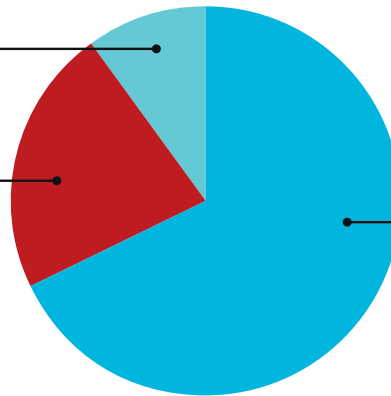
• Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

10%

Don't know

22%

The Government should not work with organisations in the private sector, even if that would improve the quality of services and reduce costs



68%

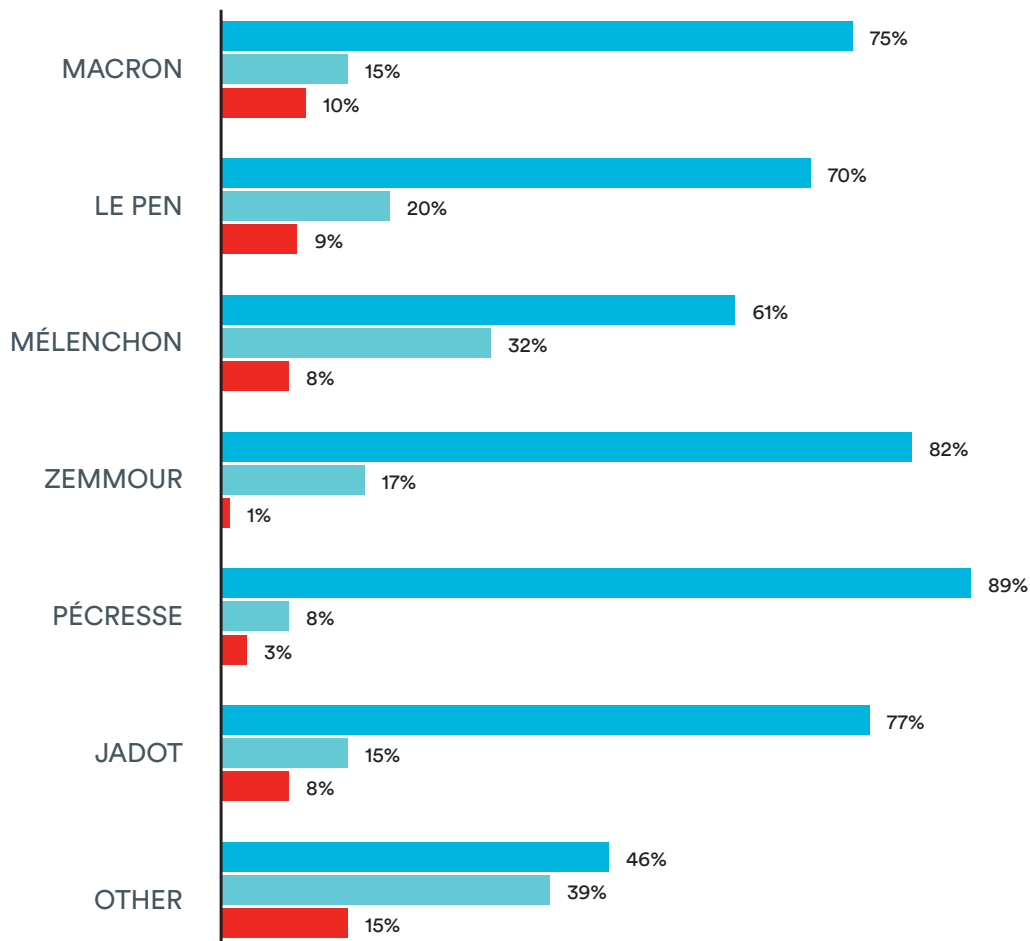
The Government should work with organisations in the private sector if that would improve the quality of services and reduce costs

• Should the Government work with organisations in the private sector to deliver government services?

■ The Government should work with organisations in the private sector if that would improve the quality of services and reduce costs

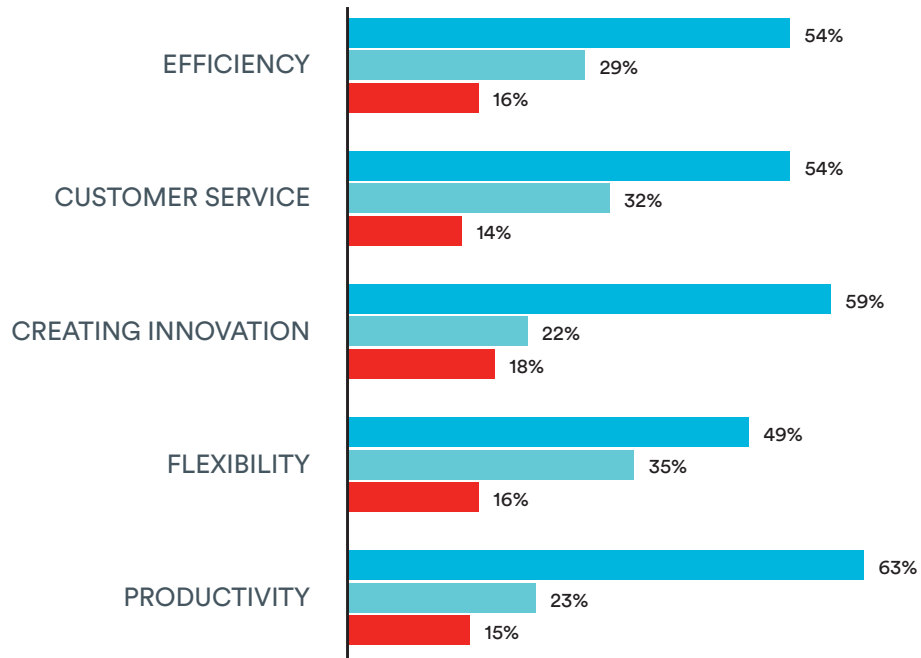
■ The Government should not work with organisations in the private sector, even if that would improve the quality of services and reduce costs

■ Don't know



- Do you think the private sector or the public sector is better at delivering each of the following:

■ Private sector   ■ Public sector   ■ Don't know





## The way forward

*In a divided country, this research shows that two principles attract a broad church of supporters of all political persuasions: the need for policymakers to make public services an even higher priority; and the principle of public-private sector collaboration in the interest of delivering cost reductions for taxpayers and better-quality services. It will be important for French politicians to work to find common ground and, in the interests of French citizens, continue to deliver high-quality public services as the citizens want them.*

President Macron has an important policy agenda ahead of him in his second term, with pension reform and big investments in renewable energy among his more immediate plans<sup>6</sup>. However, opposition parties have formed alliances against him, with Mr. Mélenchon's France Unbowed party (La France Insoumise) striking a pact with the Socialists, the French Greens and the Communists to run as a left-wing united front, the New Popular, Environmental and Social Union (NUPES), in the parliamentary elections<sup>7</sup>. Given that control of the National Assembly is anything but certain, Mr. Macron may have to build bridges in support of policy items favoured by a clear majority of the French people.

Based on the results of this poll, it is clear that acting to shore up public services would enjoy broad support from voters across the political spectrum, as would working with private sector organisations to achieve this. Indeed, cooperation with private sector partners who are well-equipped to deliver services may help maintain or improve living standards in France without being accompanied by an increase in the tax burden during a cost of living crisis.

<sup>6</sup>French May Day marches raise heat on Emmanuel Macron after election' – Financial Times.

<sup>7</sup>A new alliance boosts the left ahead of France's parliamentary elections' – The Economist.

