

## FRANCE VOTES 2022: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

April 26, 2022

### I. Executive Summary

In the most closely watched French election in living memory, at least on the international level, centrist President Emmanuel Macron was reelected to a five-year term on April 24 with approximately 58.5% of the vote, again beating his 2017 rival, Marine Le Pen of the far right wing Rassemblement National party (“National Rally,” the renamed and rebranded Front National founded by her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen), who received 41.5%. The June legislative elections will decide whether Macron’s self-made political party, La République en Marche (“the Republic on the Move”), will retain its majority in the 577-seat Assemblée Nationale.

### II. Results

Macron’s 58.5% - 41.5% win was closer than his 2017 drubbing of Le Pen, but still more decisive than many anticipated and some feared. In the first round of the election on April 10, in which the two leading candidates advance to the second round, Macron led with 27.85%, Le Pen followed with 23.15% and candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the far left La France Insoumise (“Rebellious France”) party followed closely with 21.95%. Far right candidate Éric Zemmour, a first-time entrant on the political stage, who basked in overtly anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric, and who in some respects helped Le Pen moderate her image by outflanking her to the right, received 7%. Valérie Pécresse of the centre-right Républicains won just 4.78%, not enough to clear the 5% threshold to have campaign expenditures reimbursed by the national election fund. Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris since 2014 and candidate of the Socialistes, came in at 1.75%, (not a typo), less than some fringe candidates, and fortunately did not give up her day job. Pending the legislative election results, both the Républicains and Socialistes, which within the last 20 years had both the presidency (Nicolas Sarkozy for the Républicains, François Hollande for the Socialistes) and working majorities in the Assemblée, but which suffered huge losses at both levels in 2017, were wiped out, and face existential questions as to their future viability as independent political parties. Macron becomes the first French president to be reelected in 20 years, and the first in the 64 years of the Fifth Republic to be reelected at all without the moderating and excuse-furnishing influence of an opposing party in the Assemblée, called “cohabitation” in France and a state of affairs that the Fifth Republic was famously not set up to handle well.

### III. Takeaways

- a. Obviously, Macron's reelection is a victory for the French mainstream, the European Union (where he now becomes the senior large EU member state leader in the wake of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's retirement and the UK's Brexit from the EU) and NATO, at the very moment when the EU and NATO are newly united, cohesive and relevant. Le Pen is a long time Euro-skeptic, anti-NATO militant and anti-immigration, "France for the French" activist. Her attempts to soften her historical edges for the election were not entirely convincing.
- b. The election is also repudiation – to some extent – of the far right in France, and affirmation in others. In early post-first round polling, Macron's lead was as little as 2 points, 51% - 49%, and widened during the ensuing 2 weeks. To some extent, because Le Pen scored far better than her 2017 66% - 34% loss to Macron and her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen's, 2002 82% - 18% loss to Jacques Chirac. Le Pen also crossed an arbitrary 40% threshold, which many French analysts consider significant. In 2017, we suggested that the French had given Macron the car keys, and that if he didn't deliver, and if Le Pen succeeded in moderating the Front National's image, she might be back in 2022. Well, most French, according to polls, do not think Macron delivered and many more than in 2017 thought that Le Pen had become an "acceptable" candidate, so: the same prediction for 2027; Macron will not be running again because of term limits and there will be an open presidential race, Le Pen will probably be back on the strength of this showing, having had another 5 years to refine her image and soften her edges, and the *Républicains* and *Socialistes* may not be functionally viable competitors.
- c. We'll never know, but Vladimir Putin and Russia's invasion of Ukraine two months before the election may have saved Macron's presidency and cost Le Pen hers. Certainly, there's reason to think that the election would have been closer without the Ukraine war. Le Pen had often praised and met with Putin and the *Rassemblement National* had taken out a still-unpaid loan from a Russian bank, a fact Macron used to devastating effect in their one debate, pouncing when Le Pen incautiously told him that he spoke to Putin too, responding "the difference, Mme. Le Pen, is that when I talk to Putin, I'm talking to another head of state. When you talk to Putin, you're talking to your banker."
- d. The continued significance of voters' rejection of the former two leading centre-left and centre-right parties cannot be overstated. In particular, the near wipe-out of the *Socialistes*, which until May 2012 held both the presidency and a working majority in the *Assemblée*, but which scored less than 2% in the April 10 first round, poses real questions about its future viability as a governing party, a "leader of the opposition," and even its survival; absorption into another party

looks possible. The problem may be that the party is such damaged goods that nobody may want them. In particular, the Socialistes don't have much to trade with Mélanchon's La France Insoumise, which has clearly inherited the leftist mantle without Socialiste help and which despises the Socialistes as "limousine liberal"-style sellouts. Except for Macron himself, who may be a one-off, the French electorate continues to slide to the extreme right and the extreme left, with centrists facing a growing existential dilemma of relevance.

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