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## Issue Brief

# French Election: Honour is saved!

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So far, the dark political forces, whose racist and authoritarian roots lie in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, are neutralized by the results of first round of elections in France on April 23, 2017. Centrist Emmanuel Macron and



far-right leader Marine Le Pen will go head to head in the French presidential runoff on May 7, 2017. In these most extraordinary elections with almost as many firsts as candidates, Macron won the first round. He secured 24.01 per cent votes in the most unpredictable elections of France on April 23, 2017. Front National leader Le Pen got 21.3%. Conservative Francois Fillon collected 20.01% of votes, and far-left maverick Jean-Luc Melenchon 19.56%.

When Pollsters Ifop asked voters who they would opt for in the second round from amongst Macron and Le Pen, using the actual first-round votes cast, this would imply a second-round result as Macron 60.93 %, Le Pen 39.07%. Macron is likely to inherit 43% of Fillon's voters, 70% of Hamon's voters and 50% of Mélenchon's voters. On the other hand, Le Pen is expected to inherit 31% of Fillon's voters, 3% of Hamon's voter's and 12% of Mélenchon's voters.<sup>1</sup>

The first-round result is truly historic since it marked the rejection of the ruling socialist political class. Both the traditional centre- left and centre-right ruling parties were ejected for the first time ever since the World War II. The backdrop of the elections was stuttering economy, high unemployment rate, the uncertainty caused by Brexit and Trump, and a continuing terror

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<sup>1</sup> "French Presidential Elections: first round results in charts and maps", *the guardian*, April 24, 2017.

threat that has caused the death of more than 230 people in France. It even struck again on the eve of the elections.

The results are an initial break away from the surge of populist movements, which have largely enwrapped Europe. It is also a sequel of rejection of Donald Trump and Nigel Farage's preferred candidates. Earlier, Geert Wilders also lost in Dutch elections. The Austrian far-right could not win too.

Wary of Brussels, Le Pen proposed the removal of euro currency from France. She is a profoundly anti-immigrant protectionist who spoke assertively of clash of civilizations throughout her election campaign. "French people should seize this historic opportunity because what's at stake is wild globalization that endangers our civilization."<sup>2</sup> She even denied French involvement in the wartime rounding-up of Jews to be murdered in the camps. Her policies are by her own interpretations of national preferences which include leaving the Schengen area; firming up its borders and reducing immigration to 10,000 people per year (down from 200,000); greatly restrict the conditions for asylum applications; ensure no illegal immigrants can seek legalization; expel all "foreign criminals and delinquents" and immediately impose a two-year delay on free medical care for foreign nationals.

Emmanuel Macron, on the other hand, while promising the platform of inclusiveness and strengthening the project of EU in his victory speech assured his voters that he would "be the president of patriots in the face of a threat from nationalists." He is the strongest liberal, reformist and pro-EU voice.

The results are certainly a defining moment for both the French and the European politics. They have non-traditionally but significantly increased the numbers in stake holders. For instance, there had been unconventional response from Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the EU commission since it had rallied against the forces who wanted "destruction". The economic affairs minister for the commission, Pierre Moscovici, a Socialist party politician defended Juncker's intervention and described elections in Europe as a "referendum on Europe".

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<sup>2</sup> "For Le Pen Supporters, Qualification is a bittersweet", *The Wall street Journal*, April 23, 2017.

Similarly, Angela Merkel's chief of staff, Peter Altmaier, tweeted: "The result for Emmanuel Macron shows: France and Europe can win together! The middle is stronger than the populists believe!" Alfonso Dastis, foreign minister of Spain also hoped that the victory for Macron in the second round would mark a break in the rise of extremist populist parties in Europe. Though, Britain retained its policy of non-interference, yet all the other mainstream political parties in Britain backed Macron. Russia, which had been seen as a keen backer of Kremlin-friendly Le Pen and expressed hope for better ties with Paris no matter whoever won the second round, yet the delusions in the elections provide larger space for its role in the times to come.

Le Pen has garnered record 7.6 million votes and is expected to get 35% to 40% votes in its second round. The Front National has nevertheless, become a respectable choice. Secondly, it is notable that the largest demographic for National Front support comes from voters aged between 18 and 24, where Le Pen polls at 40%. The anti-immigrant, anti-EU candidate garnered 21% support from voters aged 18 to 24, and an even more impressive 24% among voters aged 25 to 34.<sup>3</sup>

Young French voters are traditionally drawn to left-wing parties and candidates, and in that respect Mélenchon's overwhelming success among 18- to 24-year-olds is a "classic" scenario. Jean-Luc Mélenchon like Ms. Le Pen, railed against the EU and the globalized economy. What is unusual is the strong, and growing, support for the Le Pen's far-right party among youths. "French people should seize this historic opportunity because what's at stake in this election is wild globalization that endangers our civilization," Ms. Le Pen said.

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<sup>3</sup> "Mélenchon and Le Pen win over youth in French Vote", *France 24*, April 24, 2017, [www.france24.com](http://www.france24.com)



Further, Macron has a background of investment banking and would like to behold to capitalism. His budget plans hinges on saving 60 billion Euros. What plans does he have to address the soaring unemployment rate of 23.6% is still not known.<sup>4</sup> Hence, while Le Pen currently seems likely to be defeated in a second round runoff, if the scale of her support among the youth grows or even remains consistent, future elections will be more difficult to call.

<sup>4</sup> "France Youth Unemployment Rate", *Trading Economics*, [www.tradingeconomics.com](http://www.tradingeconomics.com)