

A hesitating great power

French politics
on the eve of elections



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Liberté, égalité – et fraternité?

Republican and democratic values prevail in a politically divided society.



Eugène Delacroix: La liberté guidant le peuple, 1830.



An elementary school in Paris 7th district.

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Election season amid of EU presidency

- The French presidency of the Council of European Union, January-June 2022
 - Unusual timing:
 1. Presidential election on the 10th (first round) and 24th of April 2022 (second round)
 2. Legislative election on 12th (first round) and 19th (second round) of June
- > An electoral pause of around two weeks in ministerial meetings in April, but the administration works as planned



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Council presidency amid Russia's war on Ukraine

- A new push for France's longtime goal of "strategic autonomy" of Europe (sovereignty agenda in Macron's speech at Sorbonne 2017)
- EU's strategic compass presented at the end of March as planned.
- Not without tensions:
 - The US is widely seen ever more vital for the defence of Europe
 - EU's own defence production (Franco-German axis) still in initial stages (future tank and fighter jet)
 - France has prioritized a (failed) diplomatic solution with Russia, reluctant and slow in direct military aid (of 300 m€?). Hasn't disclosed any of the sent equipment.

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The Gaullist legacy: France

Strong executive – presidential system, strong state

Primacy of French national interest in foreign policy

EU's first military power. The only member state with a nuclear deterrent.

From the Nordic perspective: active policies to regulate digital services and markets, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, establish European legislation on minimum wage, gender equality on the French agenda. Results?

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The Gaullist legacy 2: The European Union

- A vision of a multilateral world. The world is going to reorganize to regional groupings and big countries (US, China, EU)
- Europe should have a strong voice: economy and defence capabilities.
- Macron in an interview with The Economist (2019): "We are currently experiencing the brain death of NATO"-> The US turning its back.
- Macron's vision of **strategic autonomy** is a very Gaullian idea. Internal divisions a problem (Hungary, Poland) + differing strategic concerns.
- **Strategic compass** (3/2022): in addition to defence, space and intelligence capabilities, protection to cyberattacks, information disorders, partnerships in West Balkans, Africa etc. - and Nato!

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Presence of French multinationals in Russia

- Out of 10 biggest multinationals in Russia by revenue, 3 are French (Leroy Merlin, Auchan, Renault)
- TotalEnergies a minority shareholder in Novatek, Yamal LNG, Arctic LNG
- Total moving to "a gradual suspension" of its activity in Russia (LNG + gas shipments, oil refining).
- Activist investor Clearway Capital pressured Total's board. The company "had come under no pressure from the French government to go beyond the existing sanctions."
- The remains of an imperial mindset?



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Emmanuel Macron's first term 2017-2022

- A contested presidency, approval rating dipped from 48 % to 25 % in 2018. Macron dubbed as « président des très riches » by François Hollande, former president (and Macron's boss)
- Lower company taxes and a bid to raise fuel taxes and retirement age sparked the yellow vest movement that turned violent.
- Plans to remove 120 000 public service jobs and raise retirement age to 65 postponed.
- A budget deficit of 13 billions of euros that won't be covered before 2030.
- Consolidation of approval rating during Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine.

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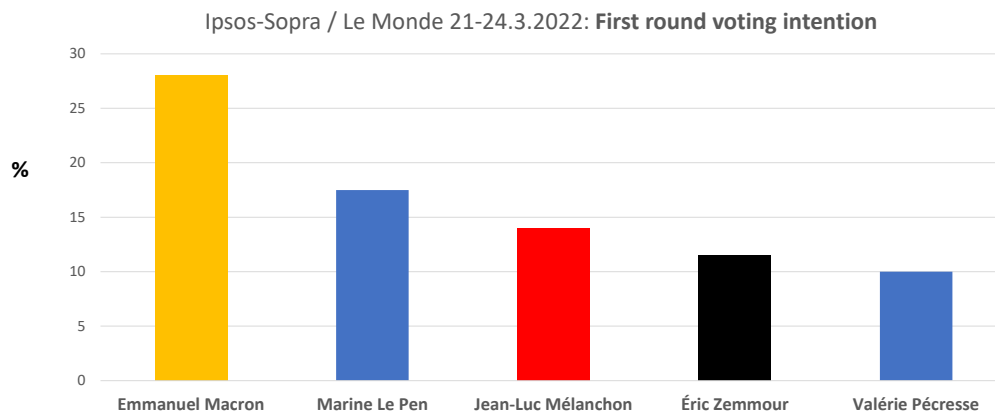
Political debates of the election year

- Macron presses on massive state investment to achieve EU's sovereignty in space launchers, biotech, cloud, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, auto industry and renewable energy.
- Six new big EPR2 nuclear reactors on the table to increase electricity production.
-> Required savings from pensions, social benefits, government jobs.
- Macron's competitors have campaigned on tax cuts and purchasing power (Le Pen, Pécresse), "Europe of sovereign nations" (Le Pen), immigration and internal security (Zemmour), the "abolishment of presidential monarchy", parliamentarism, "6th republic" (Mélenchon)

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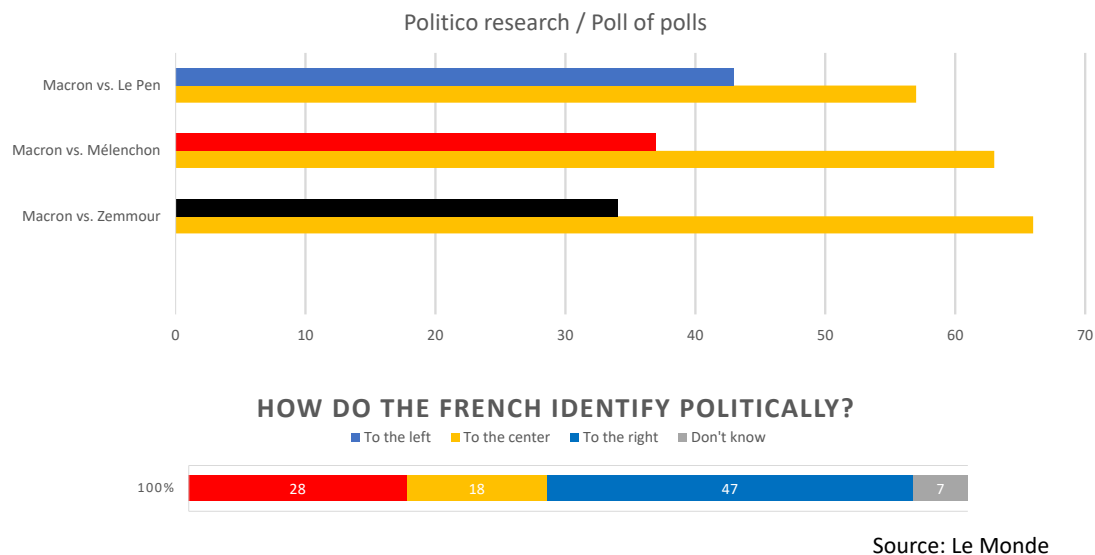
What does the latest poll say?

Russia's war on Ukraine has overshadowed campaigning.



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The second round: voting intention



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Beyond the presidential election

- Legislative election in June a challenge for Macron's LRM party: only a part of his voters support the agenda, the rest vote against other candidates.
- Political fragmentation possible although the electoral system with single-member constituencies (two rounds) favors the biggest party.
 - > Protest and tactical vote to curb Macron's power?

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Thank you!

Joonas Pörsti

Joonas.porsti@helsinki.fi

+358 40 3533 621

Doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki:

"Anti-Islamic rhetoric of the radical right
in France, Sweden and Finland, 1972-2019"