

French Elections

Why in news?

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Emmanuel Macron beat Marine Le Pen of the Front National (FN) by a margin of more than 30 percentage points to win the French Presidential elections.

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What is the issue?

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- **By choosing an open vision amid the rise of extremism**, France has saved itself from the National Front Leader.

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- Mr. Macron now stands at the threshold of an opportunity to bring change and greater unity to a country that is perceived by its people as having a stagnant economy, an ineffective political class and growing social divisions.

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- Outgoing president Francois Hollande having promised to heal a divided country and changed Europe faced scandals, terrorist attacks and hence a betrayal of his Socialist base.

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- Mr. Macron's share was only about 44% while **Ms. Le Pen represented an extreme right ideology won the approval of nearly 11 million people** an alarming development for any liberal democracy, more so for France.

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- The last time the Front National made it to the final round was in 2002.

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- Ms. Le Pen has been more successful, partly because she has ostensibly distanced herself from the xenophobic, anti-Semitic and homophobic views of Mr. Le Pen, her father and founder of Front National.

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- Not only did she expel her father from the party, she brought her openly gay adviser to its centre and also progressively softened her tone on the European Union (EU).

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- Some French voters endorse the viewpoint and hence support FN because of

the bundling of its ideology with promises to protect voters from globalisation, Europeanisation and a loss of a distinct French identity.

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What are the lingering issues?

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- Much of Mr. Macron's work will involve himself to do **three things**: kick start the French economy; effect a reorganisation of the European Union and the Euro zone; and promote a strong and inclusive vision of what it means to be French.

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- The French economy is growing at about 1.2% annually, significantly slower than either Germany or the single-currency euro zone as a whole.

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- **Unemployment is high**, just under 10%, and concentrated among the young — a quarter of those in the age group of 15-24 years are unemployed.

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- Mr. Macron plans to invest €50 billion over five years in various sectors to create employment; and save €60 billion by not filling 1,20,000 public sector vacancies as civil servants retire.

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- He also plans to make the labour market more fluid by making it easier to hire and fire people, reform the tax and pension systems and invest in training.

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- Addressing issues with the domestic economy goes hand in hand with Euro zone issues, as the EU is itself in an existential crisis.

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- Euro zone will have to start moving towards greater monetary and (ultimately) fiscal union or it will have to be disbanded.

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- Mr. Macron seems to understand this and has proposed a type of European federalism. His plans include a **Euro zone budget and parliament**.

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- Failure to either re-launch the domestic economy or take the Euro zone out of its current stasis could mean Mr. Macron not winning a second term.

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- However, prior to any of this, Mr. Macron will need to get a majority in the National Assembly which goes to the polls in June.

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- This can happen either by his party winning a majority alone or with others,

through a post-poll coalition.

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- Else, he will have to enter into a situation called ‘cohabitation’ with a Prime Minister from a different party, one that could potentially derail his programme.

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- While critics have called Mr. Macron “a little bit left and a little bit right” (in terms of his economic policies and social policies) but this is perhaps exactly what the country needs — something for everyone to heal deep divisions.

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- Although France has flirted with a dangerous extreme, it has finally chosen an inclusive, hopeful, generous and open vision for itself.

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Source: The Hindu & Indian Express

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