

Before the first round - The presidential elections: an indicator of the French political crisis

Monday 11 April 2022, by [RIPART Laurent](#) (Date first published: 4 April 2022).

The campaign for the presidential elections on 10th and 24th April is a new revelation of the French political crisis. Going by the polls, neither the Parti socialiste nor Les Républicains, the two major parties that have alternated in power under the Fifth Republic, will get more than 10% of the vote. This situation is the result of a crisis of representation, manifested in a growing mistrust of the political class and the mainstream media. Far from allowing a revival of class consciousness, this situation is characterised by great confusion, which feeds the rightward shift of the political field.



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The prime beneficiary of this is the outgoing president, Emmanuel Macron, who leads the La République En Marche party. A former minister under François Hollande, Macron was elected in 2017 on a social-liberal line, before becoming the French embodiment of a Thatcherite mission. His program is that of a major offensive against the working class: with the age of retirement going from 62 to 65 years, the abolition in national education of the status of civil servant, military rearmament, conditioning of social assistance to the unemployed on compulsory work and so on. Currently located around 27-28% of the vote, Macron is seen as the certain winner in the second round, which led him to refuse to participate in any debate during the campaign, a strategy that has been profitable for the moment.

During the campaign, the far right Rassemblement national, led by Marine Le Pen, has emerged as the major alternative to Macron, while being challenged by Éric Zemmour's candidacy. A columnist for *Le Figaro*, the newspaper of the French bourgeoisie, Zemmour was propelled by a fraction of the big bourgeoisie, in particular the billionaire Vincent Bolloré, owner of a media empire. His candidacy aimed to offer the extreme right a credible, electable candidate, contrasting with the negative attitudes aroused by Marine Le Pen, the historic candidate of the far right. In order to attract Le Pen's electorate, Zemmour waged an openly racist campaign, which met with great resonance in far right circles. Le Pen, however, managed to take advantage of Zemmour's radicalization to give credibility to her own candidacy. Now at 20-22% in the polls, she is ahead of Zemmour by 10 points and should reach the second round against Macron. In this case, she is credited with about 45% of the vote, a level that gives her little chance of being elected, while being enough to mean the

hypothesis of her coming to power cannot be ruled out.

During this election, the left has been reduced to a historically low level, gathering only 25-30% of the votes scattered around a multitude of candidates. It has also struggled to resist the right wing drift, as in the case of the Communist Party, which sought to oppose the candidacy of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, by introducing its secretary general, Fabien Roussel. In order to overwhelm Mélenchon, Roussel has led a very low-level populist campaign, which has met with a small echo while discrediting the CP a little more in activist circles. Putting aside his most divisive sovereignist and populist positions, Mélenchon has, on the other hand, managed to establish himself as the candidate to rally around, then as that of the useful vote on the left, by developing a left-wing program moderate enough to appear credible. Starting with 8%, he is now at around 15% of the vote, which seems insufficient to allow him to reach the second round.

The revolutionary left has never been able to occupy a large place in this election. The candidate for Lutte Ouvrière, Nathalie Arthaud, has led her usual campaign for communism and is credited with 0.5% of the vote. Philippe Poutou, the candidate for the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste, found it very difficult to overcome the anti-democratic obstacle of gaining sponsorship by 500 elected officials. For a long time deprived of access to the media, he has also come up against the rise of the useful vote argument in favour of Mélenchon, which means he is now located at 1-1.5% in the polls. Nevertheless, the Poutou campaign has struck a real chord, as evidenced by the attendance generated by its meetings. This allows the NPA to attract a new activist generation as well as the small echo necessary for the impetus of a coming together of anti-capitalist militants, which can face the attacks the popular classes will suffer in the aftermath of this election.

4 April 2022

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