

Who will face Emmanuel Macron in the second round of the French presidential election?

Nearly 48 million French people are invited to vote on 10 April for the first round of the presidential election. 4 women and 8 men are standing as announced by the president of the [Constitutional Council](#) on 7 March. If none of the 12 candidates wins an absolute majority of the votes on 10 April, a second round of voting between the two leading candidates will be organised on 24 April.

The French presidential election is being held in a context of crisis: international, with the war in Ukraine, and national, with a health situation that is still worrying even though the number of people affected by the coronavirus seems to be decreasing; simultaneously the political landscape is extremely fragmented which worries officials as well as political analysts, many of whom are anticipating a high abstention rate. Moreover, even though the country's economy is doing rather well after two years marked by the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the French remain particularly worried about their purchasing power, which is the main concern of one in two voters (52% according to an opinion poll conducted by the Ipsos institute), far ahead of issues like health, the environment and immigration, which come twenty points behind.

Emmanuel Macron's (La République en marche, LREM) five-year term, which began in 2017, has been marked by a social crisis with the Yellow Vest rebellion in 2018-2019 and by the coronavirus pandemic. Finally, while France has held the presidency of the Council of the European Union since 1 January for a six-month period, the outgoing head of state has held a front row seat to the management of the war in Ukraine.

"The Yellow Vest movement of 2018-2019 illustrates point by point France's problem. Certainly, the protest started from within the depths of the country and demonstrated previously unimaginable effectiveness. Certainly, more than seven in ten French people supported it, including during its first violent demonstrations. It is true that the President of the Republic had to flatly renounce

the tax measures that were at the origin of this protest but has the course of public policy been modified as a result?" wonders Jérôme Sainte-Marie, president of the research and consulting firm PollingVox. Multiple forms of anger that do not correlate with each other have shaken France. And so it is therefore difficult to say which candidate will profit most from the tension.

Incumbent president, Emmanuel Macron is leading in the opinion polls. The question is: who will face him in the second round?

With one month to go before the first round, the outgoing president of the Republic is widely expected to come out ahead in the first round: he was credited with 30.5% of the vote in a poll undertaken by [Ipsos Sopra-Steria](#) between 9-12 March. The head of state is followed by Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement national, RN 'National Rally'), who is estimated to win 16% of the vote, and who would therefore be in a position to challenge Emmanuel Macron in the second round on 24 April. *"Marine Le Pen has regained the role in the expression of the disaffected, invisible France"* analyses Pascal Perrineau, a political scientist, who indicates that the candidate is scoring high among the working classes, among the unemployed, in the villages and towns of the peripheries. *"This is how she is gracefully making her comeback"*, he underlines.

Then come Eric Zemmour (Reconquest!) with 13.5% of the vote, Jean-Luc Mélenchon (La France Insoumise, LFI 'Defiant France') (12%) and Valérie Pécresse (Les Républicains, LR 'the Republicans') (11%), three candidates who are running neck and neck. *"Eric*

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Zemmour is a man of the media who has given great preference to publicity stunts. He may have neglected the campaign on the ground," analyses Pascal Perrineau. Far behind, Yannick Jadot (Europe Ecology-the Greens, EE-LV), is expected to win 6.5% of the vote, Fabien Roussel (Communist Party, PCF) (3%) and Anne Hidalgo (Socialist Party, PS) (2.5%). The other four candidates together are due to garner less than 5% of the vote.

"The election campaign has been a strange one: long marked by a strong disinterest on the part of the French and by the volatility of their choices, paralysed by the health crisis, it has now been turned upside down by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is challenging the usual certainties of pollsters and voters," declared Bernard Sananès, President of the opinion pollster [Elabe](#). Other pollsters are: [IFOP](#), [OpinionWay](#), [Kantar](#), [BVA](#).

The official campaign will begin on 28 March and end on 9 April.

THE 12 CANDIDATES RUNNING

- [Emmanuel Macron](#) (La République en marche, LREM), incumbent President of the Republic;
- [Valérie Pécresse](#) (Les Républicains, LR), President of the Regional Council of Ile-de-France since 2015, former Minister of Higher Education and Research (2007-2011) then of Budget, Public Accounts and State Reform (2011-2012) under President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012);
- [Marine Le Pen](#) (Rassemblement national, RN), MP, unsuccessful presidential candidate in 2012 (17.9% of the vote in the first round) and in 2017 (21.3% in the first round and 33.9% in the second);
- [Éric Zemmour](#) (Reconquête!), journalist and writer;
- [Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#) (La France insoumise), MP, unsuccessful presidential candidate in 2012 (11.1%) and in 2017 (19.58% in the first round);
- [Anne Hidalgo](#) (Parti socialiste, PS), Mayor of Paris;
- [Yannick Jadot](#) (Europe Ecology-Les Verts, EE-LV), MEP;
- [Fabien Roussel](#) (Parti communiste, PCF), MP;
- [Nicolas Dupont-Aignan](#) (Debout la France, DLF), Member of Parliament, unsuccessful candidate in the

2012 (1.79% of the vote) and 2017 (4.71% of the vote) presidential elections;

- [Jean Lassalle](#) (Résistons, RES), MP; unsuccessful candidate in the 2017 presidential election (1.21% of the vote);
- [Philippe Poutou](#) (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, NPA), unsuccessful candidate in the 2012 (1.15% of the vote) and 2017 (1.09% of the vote) presidential elections;
- [Nathalie Arthaud](#) (Lutte ouvrière, LO), unsuccessful candidate in the 2012 (0.56% of the vote) and 2017 (0.64% of the vote) presidential elections.

ADVANTAGE FOR THE INCUMBENT PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC

In the particular context of war in Ukraine, on the European continent, Russian aggression has shocked and worried the French, Emmanuel Macron is benefiting from his position as outgoing president of the Republic and his role as head of the armed forces and diplomacy (at both French and European levels), a phenomenon known as "rallying around the flag" has emerged, which consists of supporting the incumbent leader in times of crisis.

The outgoing head of state can also point to good economic results: GDP growth hit 7% in 2021, the French employment rate is the highest ever recorded since it was first measured, and unemployment lies at 7.4%, its lowest level since 2008. Of course, these figures are the result of the "whatever it takes" policy implemented during the health crisis.

The outgoing president's five-year term can be divided into two parts; in the first he introduced reforms to boost the competitiveness of the economy, liberalising the labour market and reducing taxes for investors. In the second part his mandate was marked by the Yellow Vest protest movement, followed by the health crisis during which Emmanuel Macron did everything in his power to protect the French, "whatever it takes" as he himself put it, notably during the lockdown of the population (17 March-11 May 2020). The state has spent €240 billion to help citizens and businesses since spring 2020. "We have nationalised salaries", the outgoing head of state stressed in 2020. A policy that he does not hesitate to

highlight when he was accused of being the "*president of the rich*".

Emmanuel Macron has also had a very prescriptive five-year term. He has undoubtedly positioned himself more on the right of the political spectrum, out of liberal conviction, but also out of political strategy. He has implemented a policy likely to appeal to right-wing sympathisers. The French left is indeed fragmented and does not constitute a danger for the outgoing President of the Republic. On the other hand, the right, even though it is also divided, could be a threat. According to opinion polls, more French people position themselves on the right of the political spectrum (37% for 20% on the left according to a poll by the Elabe opinion institute). Terrorism, security and fear of immigration are issues that are dealt with more by the forces of the right and with regard to which the left has not been able to offer convincing answers to the electorate.

Since 2017, the President of the Republic has constantly made Marine Le Pen his only potential opponent, a way to divide the right by driving up support for the radical right.

Very active on the diplomatic front, Emmanuel Macron, who did not hide his intention to run again for the presidency, declared himself candidate on the last day of the legal filing of candidacies, on 3 March. He did so in a letter that was published by all the regional daily newspapers. In this text, he announced that he wished to address three major issues: school, health and the institutions of the Republic.

The outgoing president of the Republic promised to introduce government aid on petrol prices, to abolish the audio-visual licence fee and to triple the cap of the purchasing power bonus known as the "Macron bonus", which allows companies to pay up to €1,000 without paying any charges or taxes.

Emmanuel Macron's entry into the campaign was supposed to revive the latter, but the war in Ukraine has changed things. "*I will be president as much as I have to and I will be a candidate as much as I can,*" said the head of state. His opponents fear that the upcoming campaign will be rapid, in short, a non-campaign.

THE RIGHT THREATENED BY A DIVIDED RADICAL RIGHT

Valérie Pécresse

Valérie Pécresse was nominated as the candidate of the main right-wing opposition party, Les Républicains, in a primary election that took place on 4 December 2021. She has several undeniable advantages: she won the primary clearly with 60.95% of the votes ahead of Eric Ciotti (39.05% of the votes), she is the sole candidate of the (non radical) right and her party stands in battle order behind her. Her skills are known and recognized: she proved herself as a minister and since 2015 she has been at the head of the France's most important region, Ile-de-France: she was re-elected in the regional elections of 20 and 27 June 2021.

The woman who describes herself as "*two thirds Angela Merkel and one third Margaret Thatcher*" who discreetly left her party in 2019 - whose right-wing tendencies she denounced - has been able to draw closer to the radical right on issues of security, immigration and identity. She promises a reduction of the debt and a decrease in the number of civil servants.

Valérie Pécresse repeats that neither of the radical right candidates has a chance of winning in the ballot box against Emmanuel Macron in the second round of voting and she positions herself as the only real opposition to the outgoing head of state. "*I am not resigned to a Macron/Zemmour duel, voting for Eric Zemmour or Marine Le Pen is like voting for Emmanuel Macron*"

The war in Ukraine has helped the Republican candidate to consolidate her legitimacy and to position herself at a distance from her right-wing rivals, who were previously rather lenient with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Eric Zemmour

Eric Zemmour took a long time before declaring his candidacy, which he staged quite dramatically. "*It is no longer time to reform France but to save it*", he declared, believing himself to be the only one capable of saving the country. As a journalist and writer, he is an atypical candidate, and he plays a lot on the personalization of power. He does not hesitate to use provocation to take

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centre stage. In December 2021, he created Reconquest! a party to support his candidacy.

Obsessed by the decline of French identity, a theme on which he has written several books, Eric Zemmour is opposed to all immigration. He is calling for an end to social assistance for non-Europeans, an end to family reunification and the reception of foreign students, the limitation of the right to asylum to a few dozen people per year, the abolition of the right to land and social benefits granted to migrants and, finally, the loss of nationality for repeat foreign offenders. He said that if he won, he would organise a referendum on immigration. "*France is in great danger of dying. We are threatened with a great replacement and a great decline*" he repeats.

He is also opposed to Islam, a religion he considers incompatible with French "civilisation"; he accuses Muslims living in France of wanting to "colonise" the country in the name of Allah.

Finally, he does not hesitate to question certain historical facts, declaring that Marshal Pétain, head of the French state (1940-1944) who collaborated with the Nazis, protected French Jews during the Second World War; he has challenged the innocence of Captain Dreyfus, whom he qualifies as a "German"; he was in fact a Jewish officer from Alsace, imprisoned for spying for Germany and sentenced for treason to lifelong deportation in 1894 before being rehabilitated and reinstated in the French army in 1906.

Zemmour was fined €10,000 in January 2022 for saying that unaccompanied migrant minors were "*thieves, murderers and rapists*". He was convicted twice for racial hatred in 2011 and 2017 and was acquitted in three other cases. "*These trials serve to demonise me,*" he says.

On the economic front, he defends a Colbertist, protectionist policy and a strong and redistributive state.

Marine le Pen

Marine Le Pen has worked over the last five years to build up her credibility and make her party respectable. She has abandoned any idea of leaving the euro and she has put forward the need to leave budgetary orthodoxy in certain cases. The candidate holds a right-wing discourse on regalian themes but tends to the left-wing regarding social issues. Overtaken on her right by Eric Zemmour, Marine Le Pen can cultivate an image of a more moderate

candidate. Her discourse seems to be calmer in the face of Eric Zemmour's violent and provocative stances.

She has focused her election campaign on purchasing power: she promises a reduction in VAT on electricity, gas and fuel from 20% to 5.5%, a measure estimated at €12 billion, which she intends to finance by making savings on immigration, fraud and France's contribution to the European Union. She says she wants to give households back about €200 of purchasing power per month. Finally, she still insists on fighting against the ideology of radical Islamism, but not against Muslims.

Her future is at stake in this presidential election, which will be her third attempt to access the Elysée Palace, the official residence of French heads of state. If she fails (and not qualifying for the second round would be an even bigger failure), Marine le Pen would undoubtedly be challenged within her party.

Both Eric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen have recently had to make a near u-turn in their comments regarding Vladimir Putin and Russia. The former first described the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces as a "response to NATO's aggression", making Vladimir Putin a victim before strongly condemning the attack. "*I didn't think Vladimir Putin would cross this red line,*" he said. "*We are all responsible because the Atlantic Alliance has welcomed countries, formerly members of the Soviet bloc,*" he added.

"*Russia has clearly crossed the red line. What Vladimir Putin has done is absolutely condemnable. It changes the vision that one could have of this man,*" said Marine Le Pen. "*Russia is a great power that has been offended by the senseless extension of NATO to members of the former Soviet zone,*" she said.

The two radical right-wing candidates, who take a very firm line on immigration, were forced to agree that it was inconceivable that Ukrainian refugees should not be welcomed into the European Union.

A FRAGMENTED LEFT

Although the left-wing forces can be satisfied with the results they obtained in the last two local elections organised in France (municipal elections on 15 March and 28 June 2020 and the regional elections on 20 and 27 June 2021), they know that they owe their victories

in part to the health situation, which did not allow for a real electoral campaign and often led voters, as is usually the case in times of crisis, to reappoint the incumbents. The left in France is split between different parties that are unable to unite for the second round. "*In the first round, one chooses; in the second round, one eliminates*" is what is usually said about the presidential election in France. In any case, no useful vote is conceivable on the left where no candidate has been able to rally a very heterogeneous electorate to his or her name (ranging from the radical left to the ecologists and then the socialists), which is divided over many important issues (economy, European Union).

Jean-Luc Mélenchon

Jean-Luc Mélenchon is currently the best placed but he remains behind his rivals on the right despite the serious, innovative campaign he is running. The France Insoumise candidate has been steadily progressing in the opinion polls for several weeks. He seems to be the most likely to take advantage of the French population's discontent. However, like Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour, he was forced to make a sharp about-face after the invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin, a leader he has supported (as he supports the Venezuelan leaders). Jean-Luc Mélenchon also said after 24 February that NATO had provoked the Russian leader. Still very critical of the European Union, which he describes as "neoliberal" (a serious mistake according to him), he had to concede to the strengthening of the Twenty-Seven, which is united, standing as one against Russia.

Fabien Roussel

The communist candidate, Fabien Roussel, proposes a "France of happier days" and, on the terrain of his rival from La France Insoumise, promises the reindustrialisation of the country, the re-establishment of the wealth tax, and an increase in the minimum wage to €1,500 per month. Fabien Roussel seems ready to achieve the *sorpasso* (overtaking in Italian), a term used to describe any overtaking of socialist or social-democratic forces by a more radical left (as observed in Greece or the Czech Republic). It should be noted that if the polls are

confirmed, the PCF candidate would score better than the one put forward by the PS!

Anne Hidalgo

Indeed, the socialist candidate, mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, is struggling. She suffers from a lack of public reputation in the provinces and is perceived as a "Parisian", not always ideal for attracting voters from rural areas. However, she is well positioned on issues that concern the French: she is defending the creation of jobs, particularly in green sectors that help combat global warming, and she wants to tackle inequalities and the loss of confidence by the French in the Republic's institutions. However, according to voters, this discourse is inaudible and not very credible.

Yannick Jadot

The Green candidate, Yannick Jadot, is in no better shape than Anne Hidalgo. The issue of purchasing power and the fear of inflation, particularly in energy and raw materials prices, which have been aggravated by the war in Ukraine, have now overtaken environmental issues, which are of prime importance to the French. Yannick Jadot's campaign is struggling to take off.

THE FRENCH POLITICAL SYSTEM

France is a semi-presidential system. Since 1962, the President of the French Republic has been elected by direct universal suffrage in a two-round majority vote. Since 2002, the election is every five years (before it was seven). If none of the candidates wins an absolute majority of the ballot in the first round, a second one is held two weeks later.

All candidates for the supreme office must be at least 23 years old and present at least 500 signatures from elected representatives (members of parliament, regional councillors, general councillors, mayors, councillors of the overseas territories) from at least thirty departments or overseas territories without more than one tenth of them being elected representatives from the same place. Since 2017, the names of elected representatives who have

given their sponsorship to a candidate are made public. In total, 42,000 elected officials can sponsor a candidate.

As head of the army, the President of the French Republic is the holder of executive power. He appoints the Prime Minister and terminates his functions upon the latter's presentation of the government's resignation.

The Head of State promulgates laws; on the proposal of the government or the two chambers of Parliament (National Assembly and Senate), he may submit law or treaty ratification to a referendum. After consulting the Prime Minister and the leaders of the two chambers, the President of the Republic may also dissolve the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament.

Reminder of the results of the French presidential elections of 23 April and 7 May 2017

Turnout: 77.77% (first round) and 75.56% (second round)

Candidates	Number of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	Number of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Emmanuel Macron (La République en marche, LREM)	8 656 346	24,01	20 743 128	66,10
Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National, RN)	7 678 491	21,30	10 638 475	33,90
François Fillon (Les Républicains, LR)	7 212 995	20,01		
Jean-Luc Mélenchon (La France insoumise, LFI)	7 059 951	19,58		
Benoît Hamon (Parti Socialiste, PS)	2 291 288	6,36		
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (Debout la France, DLF)	1 695 000	4,70		
Jean Lassalle (Résistons, RES)	435 301	1,21		
Philippe Poutou (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, NPA)	394 505	1,09		
François Asselineau (Union Populaire Républicaine, UPR)	332 547	0,92		
Nathalie Arthaud (Lutte Ouvrière, LO)	232 384	0,64		
Jacques Cheminade (Solidarité et Progrès SP)	65 586	0,18		

Source: [French Home Ministry](#)

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