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Emmanuel Macron has a difficult task ahead say international experts

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Emmanuel Macron has a difficult task ahead say international experts

Abstract

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Thomas Samson/Reuters

Emmanuel Macron has a difficult task ahead say international experts

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Emmanuel Macron's victory in the May 7 French presidential election was a relief for many in France and around the world who feared the prospect of the far-right National Front candidate Marine Le Pen leading the country.

But Macron's victory is only the first step. The novice politician has no parliamentary support and his plan for reforming the European Union may be out of his reach.

The Conversation Global asked scholars from around the world what they thought of Emmanuel Macron's victory, and what means for their country.

Donatella Della Porta - The end of the "republican monarchy"

France is a semi-presidential system. The "semi" is most important part as it means that the actual powers of the president are strongly affected by the results of the legislative elections which have, at times, given a parliamentary majority to the president. But, at other times, it has imposed what the French call "cohabitation" - when the president and the prime minister belong to opposing parties.

This uncertainty is all the more important now as:

- 1) Macron is a president without a party. It is very unlucky that he can count on a strong and stable majority in parliament.
- 2) Macron is president in a situation in which it will be quite difficult to negotiate a compromise with mainstream parties, which have been the main victims of these elections.
- 3) Macron has been voted, by many, as the lesser evil to the face to the xenophobic radical right.
- 4) Notwithstanding the perceived risk of a victory of the radical right, the abstention rate in this election has been extremely high.
- 5) With his image as a banker and his support for neoliberal reform, Macron is likely to face strong opposition by a radical Left that has found energy in the protests of the citizen-led "Nuit Debout" movement. Its power was demonstrated last year against a far-reaching reform of the labour code in France - as well as in the extremely successful electoral campaign of the far-left firebrand Jean Luc Melenchon.

In a sense, the Macron's presidency is a signal of the end of the "republican monarchy" in France.

Luis Gómez Romero - From fraternity into effective legislation and policy

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Emmanuel Macron's victory with 66.06% of the votes in the second round of the French presidential election has been met with relief across Europe and much of the rest of the world – including Mexico.

French voters have thrown Mexicans a lifeline in their own struggle over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the Trump administration.

President Enrique Peña Nieto tweeted that Mexico is keen to “strengthen its strategic alliance with France, now under President Emmanuel Macron”



Enrique Peña Nieto
@EPN

México continuará fortaleciendo su alianza estratégica con Francia, ahora con el Presidente [@EmmanuelMacron](#).

6:24 AM - May 8, 2017

1,933 1,321 people are talking about this

It will be easier for Mexico to diversify and boost its international trade by renegotiating its free trade agreement with the European Union having Macron – who saluted the nations of the world in the name of “fraternal France” in his victory speech – in the Élysée, rather than Marine Le Pen – who has vowed to reform the Front National into a political force representing French “patriots” against cosmopolitan “globalisers”.

But there are still many reasons for concern. Over 10 million French voters favoured Le Pen. And almost a third chose neither Macron nor Le Pen – 12 million abstained and 4.2 million spoiled their ballot papers.

Voter turnout was the lowest recorded since 1969.

In the last presidential debate, Le Pen labelled Macron the candidate “of globalisation gone wild, of Uberisation, of precariousness” and “social brutality.” These accusations may be exaggerated, but Macron himself acknowledged in his victory speech the legitimacy of the anger and anxiety over the waning of the welfare state that has pushed millions of voters to embrace the Front National.

We are yet to see if Macron – a former investment banker – will actually transform his call to fraternity into effective legislation and policy. There is too much at stake both in France and the rest of the world for him to neglect the outrage of those who have been forgotten by the very globalisation whose continuity he advocates.





French President elect Emmanuel Macron walks towards the stage at the Pyramid du Louvre, in Paris, to give a speech.
Philippe Lopez/Pool

Simon Watmough - What about EU-Turkey relations?

Emmanuel Macron's victory in the May 7 presidential election is unlikely to dramatically shift French–Turkish relations in the immediate future. The vote itself has attracted little media or popular interest in Turkey in the final week of the race, with Turkish news headlines dominated by fractious domestic politics and the Syria conflict.

At the same time, while the Franco–Turkish minority in France is significant, there has been no reporting in French media to suggest that this group has polled any differently to the overwhelming majority of French voters on Sunday: namely, against Le Pen.

Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that in the run-up to the all-important French parliamentary elections in June, Macron will offer some conciliatory gestures towards Turkey.

The new president's new and politically untested *En Marche!* movement faces an uphill climb in the National Assembly. He will be keen to do all he can to win support from France's generally conservative, AKP- and Erdogan-supporting French–Turkish electorate, which, like the French–Muslim electorate more generally, is highly diverse but generally united in opposition to Islamophobia.

The key issue now is how Macron's victory will affect the broader EU–Turkey relationship, which is at a low point in the wake of Turkey's April 16 constitutional referendum. German chancellor Angela Merkel has signalled a renewed Franco–German partnership in the wake of Macron's win in support of an open, tolerant Europe and this may portend a reset in relations with Turkey.

In the end, EU–Turkish relations seem hostage to broader forces – including the ambitions of Turkey's truculent president and concern in Brussels over Turkey's slide into authoritarianism and declining human rights record – that neither Macron nor Merkel are capable of meeting.

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri - French civil society needs to be proactive

Emmanuel Macron's presidential victory does not necessarily imply a defeat of right-wing populist party such as the National Front.

Recent research shows that right-wing populist parties in Europe have increasingly gained parliamentary seats since the 1970s, and the latest elections in France confirm this steady growth.

Right-wing populism is premised on two narratives: economic grievances perpetuated by neo-liberal policies conducive to social insecurity, and cultural anxiety generated by a generational gap, rapid technological transformation, and open borders.

Macron projects himself as a liberal beacon, supporting the European project and free market. Despite his image as a political outsider, Macron's economic position can be interpreted as a “flirt” with the “establishment” which has sought to consolidate its power through sustained economic disparity. Particularly for those identified as the “right”, Macron's stance towards the European Union and open borders can be perceived as a source of threat to French identity and national security.

Accordingly, Macron's electoral victory is unlikely to disrupt these populist narratives. If he would carry out policies as he campaigned, as “timorist centrist” writes the Financial Times, without addressing economic grievances and cultural anxiety France is experiencing, right-wing populist insurgency is potentially strengthened.





Demonstrators hold a banner which reads Emmanuel Foudrot

It will return to haunt French politics in years to come. To turn the tide, French civil society will have to be more proactive than before. It has to pressure Macron and his liberal followers to tap into causes underpinning the increased popularity of rightwing populism. Economic precariousness and fears of change should be discussed publicly. Any alternative to right-wing populism should offer a way out of neo-liberal trap, while assuring the French public of a safe passage through a cultural transformation.

Balveer Arora - France Shining

Emmanuel Macron's convincing victory shines like a beacon of hope for liberals around the world struggling to reinvent social democracy while reeling under the onslaught of nationalist authoritarian regimes.

His achievement is outstanding, but even more than squarely defeating the extreme-right is the promise of a new élan to French democracy, tired after so many reverses and misfortunes of the last decade.



Supporters of Emmanuel Macron celebrate near the Louvre museum after early results. Christian Hartmann/Reuters

His youth gives hope too of a new leadership which will break with the ghosts of the past and provide

direction to a new world order where Europe will assume a more proactive role.

A role all the more essential as the globalisation discourse derails towards isolationism in the Anglo-Saxon world and has therefore to be reinvented elsewhere to survive.

His decisive victory gives Macron the necessary authority to push for a new post-Brexit Europe, in concert with Germany. A Europe more generous with its members struggling to make democracy work, and sterner with those who violate its basic foundation values. A Europe closer to its people, shunning the excesses of neoliberal hyper-globalisation to provide the lead for a new and more equitable world economic order.

Beyond the relief at the outcome of this historic contest is the prospect of competing logics: will the French electorate create a new majority for the president to implement his programme in the legislative elections ? Or will they vote to power an assembly which would act as a check on the many contested features of his agenda ?

The result may well be a combination of both, and in fractured times coalitions are often the only viable solution. What will be tested in June is the founding logic of the Fifth Republic system, based on the postulate that political parties divide while presidents elected by universal suffrage unite and reassemble the people.

"Présidentielle 2017" : Le discours d'Emmanuel Macron en intégr...



In one of his first discourse, Emmanuel Macron has promised to make the extremes irrelevant and to unite all citizens whatever were their choices. May 7 2017.


Governing above the head of political parties was a Gaullist vision that may be difficult to recreate sixty years later. Political parties represent durable social realities and while the current clutch of leaders has lost credibility it would be difficult to ignore the social forces they represent.

Setting the fringes aside, there is a massive agenda of reconstruction that lies ahead for the party system. The significant number of abstention votes - the highest number since 1969 for a second round of presidential elections- and invalid and blank ones is a measure of the alienation from the system.

The extreme right and far left may well be the biggest losers in this election despite the apparent increase in their vote share. Much will depend on how those who gravitated towards them from a sense of alienation and economic discontent are wooed back. Have they lost faith in democracy itself? There is nothing to indicate that they can't be won back.

M. Macron has promised to govern in such a manner that he makes the extremes irrelevant. France may yet set the trend for a revival of the values it proudly proclaimed to the world after the fall of the

Bastille.

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