



NO.
05

Newsletter

THE **FRENCH** DISPATCH

- *The french dispatch before debate*
- *I. Same match, different tone*
- *II. The first and only direct confrontation amid political Uncertainty*



THE FRENCH DISPATCH BEFORE DEBATE

INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday 20th April, Emmanuel Macron will face Marine Le Pen in a debate which will be the acme of the campaign in the run-off of the French Presidential election. The debate will be a defining moment where a sizeable share of the electorate will decide which way to vote in the second and final round.



Each political system lives for its own idiosyncrasies and traditions. In France, the debate for the second round has for a long time been seen as a key moment that determines the fate of the election. The head-to-head debate is not only scrutinized by a vigilant and highly critical electorate but it is also remembered. Punchlines and quips reign and over an argument, a candidate can establish their dominant position, shore up their presidential profile or conversely, lose it all. In 1974, former President Giscard d'Estaing, for example, discarded his socialist opponent, François Mitterrand with a single phrase. He stated that Mitterrand, as a leftist candidate, didn't have a "monopoly on the heart", implying that the left was not the only political camp caring for disfavored classes. A mere seven years later, Mitterrand got his revenge by calling his opponent the "man liable for the failure of the French Economy". In more recent times, amid doubts regarding his charisma, François Hollande succeeded in building his stature, went on to win the debate, and hence receive the blessing of the French Electorate. He hammered home his vision for France as future president, starting each sentence with the now infamous "Me, President, I will..." ("Moi, President...") In the face of such eloquence, the incumbent President at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy ended his presidency.

This year, with the narrow gap between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen, the debate between the two final contenders will be more important than ever.

I. SAME MATCH, DIFFERENT TONE

The 2017 debate was an utter disaster for Marine Le Pen, even by her own account. By attacking Emmanuel Macron with an unprecedented aggression, she felt short in presenting valid arguments in key topics and came across as inconsistent, non-sensical and unfit for office. Trailing in the polls, she felt cornered and chose to attack Macron which gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his composure and strengthen his presidential posture.

This year will be different. Cognisant of her weaknesses, Marine Le Pen spent the last five years preparing for this new milestone. She reinforced her network of high-level experts which enhanced her image and, at least publicly, softened her usual emotive xenophobic rhetoric. More importantly, Marine Le Pen has one new weapon in the armoury; the fact that Emmanuel Macron must now defend his five years legacy. It will provide her with much needed ammunition for the debate. Emmanuel Macron, on the other hand, will need to defend his achievements while making sure not to drive away the left-wing and conservative voters ahead of a tight race next Sunday.

II. THE FIRST AND ONLY DIRECT CONFRONTATION AMID POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

With 27% of the voters still uncertain which way to vote, the debate has the real possibility to change the course of the election.

Emmanuel Macron did not take part in any debate prior to the first round in an attempt to distinguish himself from his numerous contenders. Wednesday's debate will be the first and only direct confrontation between the two candidates.

Emmanuel Macron will need to secure the backing of voters who, in the first round, voted for some of his most critical contenders, particularly the far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon. He will seek to demonstrate that he is the only one able to lead France and Europe amid global disruptions. To garner support from voters across the political spectrum, he must present himself as the last rampart of democracy, as protector of the rule of law and as the only candidate able to safeguard France's economic openness.

Marine Le Pen will need to erase the memory of her poor 2017 debate and demonstrate increased professionalism if she wants to appear credible enough for Presidential office. She will need to showcase her aptitude to run the country, particularly with regard to economic policies. Her main strategy will be to present herself as an empathic candidate, willing to protect the least favoured in society against a President who she will depict as technocratic and dead to the distress of the French population.



FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Voting Intentions 2st Round Macron/Le Pen

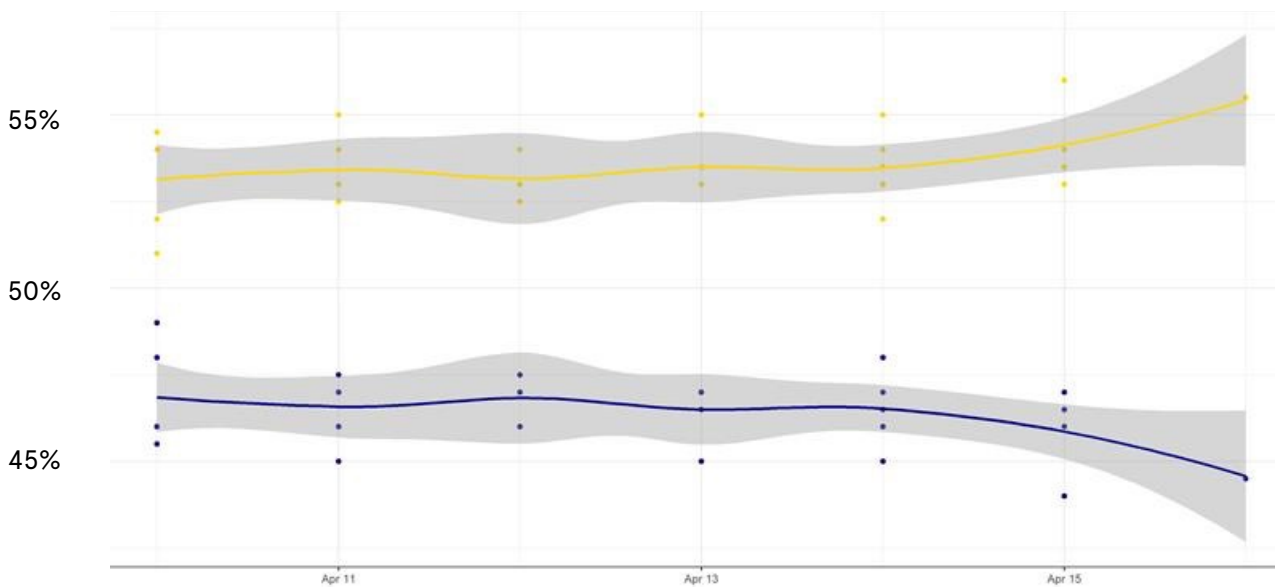
Although Emmanuel Macron keeps the lead in polls, nothing is decided yet. Marine Le Pen remains way higher than she was five years ago. No doubt that the debate will have a key influence over voting intentions.



EMMNAUEL MACRON



MARINE LE PEN



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