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Put away the champagne, Macron!

Emmanuel Macron mustn't let the final round of France's presidential elections slide into a battle between "elites" and "the people"

The table has been set for France's 7 May presidential elections, and there's a choice of two menus. Select from "France first" or "the brotherhood of man"; Frexit or France leading Europe; protectionism or economic openness; the populist Marine Le Pen versus the globalist Emmanuel Macron in the second round of the presidential elections. Whatever happens, Macron must not allow Le Pen's narrative of "the people against the elite" to prevail. Because make no mistake: there's a lot of grumbling on the lower rungs of France's economic ladder. And if Macron doesn't act on the concerns of France's poor, they'll choose Le Pen sooner or later. *C'est impossible?* We know better now. Trump succeeded Obama. Brexit followed Blair. Looking at the first round of France's election, there are already four lessons we can learn.

Lesson 1: All those seen as responsible for the current state of affairs in France are ghastly to the electorate. None of the ex-presidents, ex-prime ministers, or ex-ministers who lacked the courage to start their own movement survived the first round. This is nothing less than the political aftermath of the globalisation-gone-wild that has caused growing uncertainty and inequality. In other words, a sequence of crises (in banking, the euro, asylum policy and terror) is now taking its democratic toll. Perhaps Germany will prove the exception this autumn, but even there, the "outsider" Martin Schulz - a social democrat – is playing catch up with Angela Merkel.

Lesson 2: the infamous Third Way, often called the undertaker of European social democracy, is not dead. On the contrary: Macron moulds himself on Tony Blair and Barack Obama: promoting change you can believe in, campaigning on values instead of policies, calling for unity instead of division. It's just that social democrats are no longer winning. Others have taken their place. Their traditional vote is split between left-liberal and radical left (as we saw with Jean-Luc Mélenchon during the first round). They sometimes seem to live on a different planet to their voters. Hamon's attempt to throw ideas like basic income into

the race failed. It's hard to build bridges if you're a notorious critic of the previous government.

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Lesson 3: France has not escaped the political backlash against globalisation we saw after Blair and Obama. More than half the French voters who earn less than 2,000 euros voted for Mélenchon or Le Pen in the first round. Macron, on the other hand, won support from higher income, better educated voters. So the final contest will see a showdown between the populist Le Pen against the globalist Macron on 7 May. And it's precisely that polarisation that could still cost Macron the presidency, despite his excellent poll ratings. That's why he needs to offer meaningful policies that speak to the "losers of globalisation". He must convince those who would naturally side with Le Pen or Mélenchon that his changes will bring social progress in the north and east of Paris. He must show them it is his patriotism that will anchor France's prosperity through the EU, while Le Pen's nationalism will cause only division and poverty within France. He must overcome their resistance to the European Union by showing that this same union can change its ways. At least Macron, unlike the European elite, is not being held responsible for the current malaise.

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Lesson 4: If Macron doesn't provide much needed change in Europe, he will fail in France. He needs to avoid a situation where European neoliberals and conservatives take credit for his success. Because it is precisely that neoliberal EU that has pushed for the kind of globalisation that leaves working class Europeans less well off, throwing voters into the arms of anti-European parties. It is that same EU that shifts the brunt of the banking crisis onto the citizens, shutting down jobs, cutting investment, crushing wages and brushing the refugee crisis under the carpet. Since Brexit, the pro-European

camp has been winning election after election, but they need to do something positive with their new mandate. The success of anti-populism in the Netherlands and France should not be interpreted as a call for more of the status quo in Europe. Without social reform in the EU, the successor to Macron will be called Le Pen.

Macron is the last-chance candidate for the EU and the Eurozone. And he's right: France needs to get out of the red and create more jobs. This will enable France to look Germany right in the eye and to push for progressive reform of the EU. The Macron team have already laid the groundwork for that reform. Hopefully, once in power, Macron will be faithful to his intellectual roots, find the political courage to put Europe back on track, and push the populists back to the margins of political debate.

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