

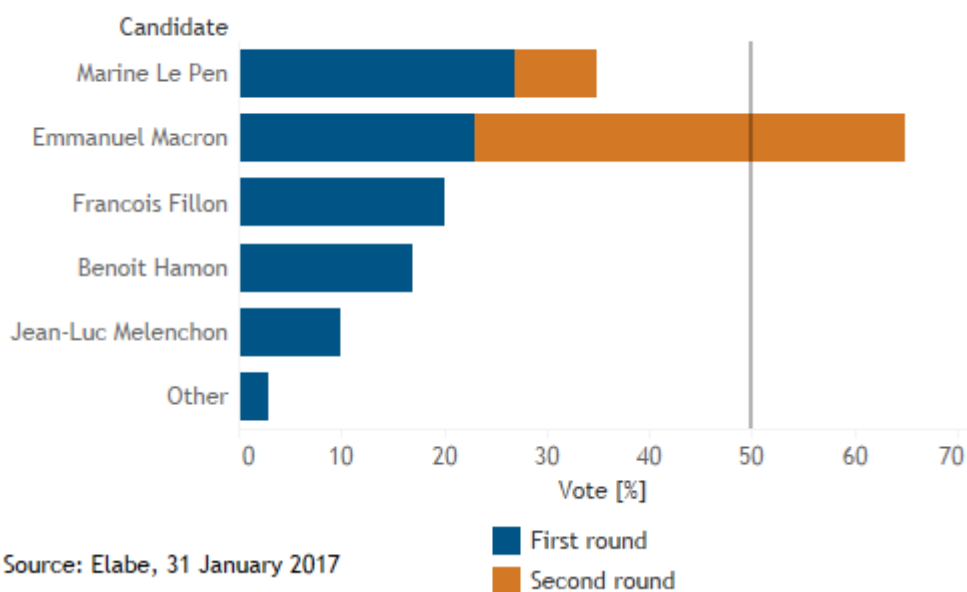
Could Macron's 'Marche' get stuck despite winning?

Blog post by Associate Adviser Roberto Robles, 03 February 2017

A poll this week shows French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron for the first time making it to the second round of the elections. It also suggested he would easily defeat Front National leader Marine Le Pen. Previously dismissed, the former investment banker and minister under François Hollande has now become the unexpected frontrunner in France's most open election in decades.

Macron has been assisted by outside events. The Socialists' nomination of leftist Benoît Hamon, and the emerging scandal with his right-wing rival François Fillon - over alleged payments to his wife for non-existent parliamentary work - have both let Macron carve out a large enough group of mainstream voters to potentially carry him to a run-off he would almost certainly win.

Voting intention in French presidential elections



However, the scope of action for a Macron presidency will be highly dependent on the make-up of the National Assembly to be elected a few weeks later. Under the French system of semi-presidentialism, the prime minister and the cabinet only require the confidence of parliament, and not necessarily the president. A president without the control of Parliament - such as Jacques Chirac during the 'cohabitation' with Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in 1997 to 2002 - has very limited powers beyond foreign policy. The worst-case scenario for Macron is that the centre-right wins a majority, electing their own prime minister and locking Macron out of domestic policy making.

To be sure, a Macron victory in May would give him momentum for the legislative elections in June, but this may not be enough to win a majority. Despite pledging to stand candidates in all 577 constituencies, with no

previous election results to judge potential target seats and no pre-election alliances with any other political party, the hopes for Macron's 'En Marche' movement of winning a stand-alone parliamentary majority are slim at best.

A Macron presidency would probably be faced with a hung parliament - unprecedented in the last half century - and seek to reach out to MPs of both the centre-left and centre-right to build a cross-party coalition in parliament. But this is likely to prove extremely challenging. He will find it easier to work with his former Socialist colleagues, but the Republicans - who would be the stronger party in parliament, and see the former Hollande minister with suspicion - may have little incentive to cooperate. Party discipline is traditionally strong in France, and Macron will struggle to build a majority by scooping individual MPs from either side of the political spectrum. Macron may be able to galvanise enough mainstream popular support to get elected, but this will not necessarily allow him to implement his reformist agenda.