

Low turnout in French elections does little to boost Macron and Le Pen

President Macron's party struggled in the first round of voting in France's regional elections. But a marked lack of participation did little favours either to his right-wing opponent, Marine Le Pen. It's still too early to draw conclusions for next year's presidential vote



French president, Emmanuel Macron, at a voting booth in northern France on Sunday

Huge abstention rate

With a record abstention rate of over 66%, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from the result of Sunday's first round of regional elections in France. Clearly, there was a lack of passion among the French electorate in a year that's been dominated by Covid-19 and its related restrictions in the media as well as in people's homes.

Regional rather than national issues appeared to dominate the poll

While taking every precaution in interpreting the results of this first round, we can nevertheless

note that the regional presidents in place during the previous legislature did well in the election. In particular, the strong victory of Xavier Bertrand, the outgoing president of the Hauts-de-France region in Northern France, and a candidate in the 2022 presidential election, stands out. It was a particular target of Marine Le Pen's right-wing Rassemblement National party but they did worse than the polls had predicted.

Remember that in the previous regional election, President Macron's party didn't exist. He faltered badly in this election and will surely struggle in the second round later this month. That said, this isn't necessarily a complete repudiation of Macron given that a survey conducted by Ipsos indicated that the majority of people said they voted according to regional rather than national issues.

Left-right debate is not dead

You might say this election looked like one of those football matches played in recent months between teams competing in a completely empty stadium. Even if these are the last polls before the presidential election of 2022, extrapolating the trends observed here could then be misleading given that so many people stayed at home. At most, it can be stressed that the traditional left-right divide is not dead. The second round on Sunday is not expected to provide much additional information.

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