

'NEITHER MACRON NOR LE PEN INTEREST ME'

Parisians explain how they will vote in Sunday's presidential election, and why.

In today's vote, after a bitter campaign, centrist Emmanuel Macron will go head-to-head with the far-right candidate, Marine Le Pen. Al Jazeera spoke to people on the streets of Paris on how they planned to vote, and why. Here is what they had to say:

Audrey Montseny, works in social centre

I voted for Philippe Poutou in the first round. On Sunday, I am going to vote blank. I'm disappointed with politics and I don't think that voting for Macron is the way to oppose Le Pen. Of course, Macron is not Le Pen. We have already seen how the current government has damaged the values of the republic, for example, individual freedoms and the rise of racism. I think Macron will lead to the rise of inequality and the people who are destitute will be even more destitute.



Nanya, 35, housewife

I'm voting Macron. He defends immigration. He gives opportunities. Le Pen is hard, especially on immigrants. It upsets me so many people voted for her in the first round. I don't want the government to do more for me, I want them to do more for the world, for undocumented people to get their papers easily.

Kenza, 20, student of history

I voted for Melenchon in the first round. I will vote for Macron in the second because I just can't vote for Le Pen. She doesn't represent my values, she wants to reduce the rights of women which women have fought for centuries for. As a woman, I can't vote for her, it's a paradox. She herself is a woman. She wants to close the borders, stop globalisation, take us back centuries. I'm not counting on Macron to solve everything, but I like his sense of tolerance.



Khier Younes, 30, salesman

I'm voting blank on Sunday. Neither Macron nor Le Pen interest me. I voted for Melenchon in the first round. Le Pen is a troublemaker. She wants to get out of Europe, she wants to do things that are impossible to implement. With Melenchon, I likes his socialism, he listened to the people.

Julian Manirahr, 33, film director

I will abstain on Sunday. I don't believe in politics. It's the same if I choose Le Pen or Macron. I didn't vote in the first round. Politicians make laws for rich people and leave the poor destitute. I may have voted for Melenchon, but I didn't because I think even if he had accessed power, he might not have kept his promises. Politics isn't about casting your ballot every five years. It's through what you consume, for example, environmental issues.



SOURCE: AL JAZEERA ONLINE

FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SHOWDOWN



Emmanuel Macron
On the Move

"I am the candidate of a strong France in a protective, Europe"



Macron 62%
Le Pen 38%

How people intend to vote in the 2nd round

1st-round score
24.01%
21.3%

Marine Le Pen
National Front



"It is time to bring order back to France and to choose France"

This former banker and economy minister, who has never stood for election before, would be France's youngest ever president

A member of the National Front since her teens, Le Pen would be France's first extreme-right, first female president

December 21, 1977
Born in Amiens, northern France

2004
Graduates from elite French graduateschool ENA, and enters the civil service

2004
Marries Brigitte Trogneux, his former French teacher, 24 years his senior

2008
Investment banker then executive at Rothschild Bank

2012
Made senior advisor to president Francois Hollande

2014 August
Minister of the Economy, Industry and New Technologies

2016 April
Launches 'En marche' (On the Move) movement

2016 August
Resigns from govt



Nov 16
Announces his candidacy for the presidency

April 23
Macron wins 1st round, will face Marine Le Pen in the 2nd round



August 5 1968
Born in Paris suburb, 1986 Joins National Front (FN), her father's party

1992
Lawyer at a Paris firm

1998
Legal director for the FN

June 2002
Loses national assembly race.

April 2003
Vice president of the FN

2004
Leads FN list for European Parliament in Paris region, wins seat

January 2011
Succeeds her father to lead the FN

2012
Beaten in 1st round of presidential election

August 2015
Jean-Marie Le Pen expelled from party leadership

February 2016
Announces candidacy for 2017 presidential election

April 23
Qualifies for run-off in 1st round of vote

SOURCE: AFP

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

Pro-EU centrist Emmanuel Macron takes on far-right candidate Marine Le Pen in the second-round run-off of France's presidential election today.

Why is it important?

France is the eurozone's second-biggest economy as well as a global military and diplomatic heavyweight, with veto power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The second round has boiled down to a battle between the pro-European, pro-globalisation vision of Macron and Le Pen's hostility to the EU and Nato. If Le Pen wins, it would further shake up the West's postwar order, already rattled by Britain's vote to leave the EU and Donald Trump's election to the White House.

How is the president elected?

The president is elected in a direct popular vote of one or two rounds. Today's run-off comes after neither candidate obtained an absolute majority in the first round. Every French presidential election since 1965 has gone to a second round.

What happened in the first round

Macron won 24 percent of the vote and Le Pen finished second with 21.3 percent as France's traditional left and right parties were eliminated in the first round for the first time since the start of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

How does the election work?

A total of 47.58 million people are registered to vote. The country's 66,546 polling stations will open at 8:00am (0600 GMT) and most will close at 7:00pm, while those in Paris and other big cities will remain open an hour longer. The first estimated results could come as early as 7:45 pm (1745 GMT).

What happens next?

The new president will take over from Socialist Francois Hollande and is expected to be sworn in by May 14.

SOURCE: AFP

Trump to work with 'whoever' elected

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump will work with "whoever the people of France decide to elect" as their leader, his spokeswoman said Friday.

The comment offered no support to either Emmanuel Macron, who polls favor to be France's next president after elections today, or his far-right rival Marine Le Pen, whom Trump has hinted should benefit from attack-related security fears.

"The president is committed to working with leaders across the globe to combat a whole host of issues and certainly would do that with whoever the people elect," Trump's spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters.

She said, however, that "I have not had a conversation about whether he supports any particular candidate."

The non-commitment contrasted with the position of Trump's predecessor Barack Obama, who this week released a video statement backing Macron, a centrist who he said "appeals to people's hopes and not their fears."



Displaced Iraqis from the al-Haramat neighbourhood, north of Mosul, react after leaving their home as Iraqi forces advance towards the area during the ongoing offensive to retake Mosul from Islamic State (IS) group fighters on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Twin blasts in Philippine capital kill at least two

AFP, Manila

Two explosions in the Philippine capital yesterday night killed two people and injured six others, police said, just over a week after another blast in the same area.

An initial blast occurred around 6:00pm yesterday near a mosque in Quiapo, one of the older parts of Manila where there are big slums, city police chief Oscar Albayalde said.

The explosion killed two and injured four others, he said.

A second blast occurred in the same area around 8:30pm, according to an AFP photographer who was among a group of journalists near the scene.

Two policemen who were inspecting the area after the first blast were injured by the second explosion, Albayalde said in an interview on GMA television.

The blasts occurred along a narrow street crammed with stalls hawking clothes and homeware.

They were just outside an Islamic community centre and about a hundred metres (300 feet) from the Quiapo Golden Mosque.

The Philippines is a mainly Catholic country but it has a significant Muslim minority, some of whom live in Quiapo.

The first blast damaged part of the

Islamic centre and shattered windows in nearby buildings, according to the AFP photographer and witnesses.

"It was very powerful," Omar Yahya, 22, who was at the Islamic centre when the first explosion occurred, told AFP afterwards at a Manila police station.

"Windows were broken and the wooden part of the building collapsed".

Police chief Albayalde said the first blast appeared to have come from a package that was being delivered by a man on a motorcycle.

"The man on the motorcycle who delivered the package was killed. The other killed was the person who received the package," he said in an interview on DZRH radio.

Albayalde said there was no signs that the blasts were terrorist attacks.

The other explosion in Quiapo just over a week ago, which occurred as Southeast Asian leaders were meeting for a summit a few kilometres (miles) away, injured 14 people.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the April 28 explosion, but police insisted it was not a terrorist attack, nor was it related in any way to the gathering of political leaders.

EgyptAir crash an accident

Say French investigators

AFP, Paris

No traces of explosives were found on the remains of French victims from an EgyptAir plane that crashed into the Mediterranean in May 2016, a source close to the French investigation told AFP on Friday.

The revelation, the source said, "closes the door" on a theory advanced by Egypt that the Airbus A320 was blasted out of the sky as it made its way from Paris to Cairo, killing all 66 people on board.

EgyptAir MS804 disappeared from radar over the Mediterranean on May 19, crashing into the water between Crete and the coast of northern Egypt.

"There were no explosive charges" aboard the plane, the source said, because "no traces of powder were found" by police in samples taken from the remains of eight of the 15 French nationals killed.

According to the source, the long-awaited results were "recently" reported to the three investigating judges in charge of the case in Paris.

The findings "only serve to confirm the theory by French investigators since the beginning, that this was an accident and not an act of terror", the source said, adding that "this definitively closes the door on the claim of terrorism".

In December, an official Egyptian investigative committee had said it found traces of explosives on victims' remains, but French officials at the time refused to draw conclusions on the cause of the accident.

No group also came forward to claim responsibility for the crash, which also killed 40 Egyptians.

French investigators have always favoured a mechanical fault as the crash cause, saying a fire broke out in or near the cockpit of the plane before it plunged 22,000 feet and swerved sharply before disappearing from radar screens.



Hamas elects Ismail Haniya as leader

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas elected ex-Gaza Strip chief Ismail Haniya as its new leader yesterday, days after revising its founding charter to ease its stance on Israel.

Haniya, seen as a pragmatist within the movement, is expected to remain in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian enclave run by Hamas since 2007.

His predecessor Khaled Meshal lives in exile in Doha and had completed the maximum two terms in office.

"The Hamas Shura Council on Saturday elected Ismail Haniya as head of the movement's political bureau," the group's official website announced.

He beat Mussa Abu Marzuk and Mohamed Nazzal in a videoconference vote of the ruling council's members in Gaza, the West Bank and outside the Palestinian territories.

The 54-year-old with a salt-and-pepper beard takes charge of Hamas as it seeks to ease its international isolation while not marginalising hardliners within the movement.

On Monday, it unveiled a new policy document easing its stance on Israel after having long called for its destruction.

The document notably accepts the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza, the territories occupied by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967.

It also says its struggle is not against Jews because of their religion but against Israel as an occupier.

CHEMICAL LEAKAGE IN NEW DELHI

200 students hospitalised

AFP, New Delhi

Nearly 200 school students were hospitalised yesterday after complaining of irritation in their eyes and throat following a gas leak in New Delhi, police said.

Classes were underway when gas leaked from a container parked at a depot close to the school and filled with chemical meant for industrial use, police said.

"Around 200 children were admitted to four hospitals for treatment. No one is serious. The situation is normal now," police deputy commissioner Romil Baaniya told reporters.

Police will initiate legal action against the handlers for negligence, Baaniya added.

Images showed scores of disaster response personnel closely inspecting the premises of the government-run girls' school.

Gas leaks are not uncommon in India, with most caused by a failure to comply with safety standards.

In 2014 a poisonous gas leak at one of India's largest steel plants in central Chhattisgarh state killed six people.

And a toxic gas leak in Bhopal city in 1984 killed at least 25,000 people and remains to this day the world's worst industrial disaster.

LOCAL POLLS DEBACLE

Call grows for Corbyn to quit

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A majority of Labour supporters want Jeremy Corbyn to quit immediately if he loses the general election, an exclusive poll for The Independent has revealed.

The survey from ORB sealed a devastating 24 hours for Corbyn after his party was battered in local elections, losing hundreds of seats and the control of stronghold councils defended by Labour for decades.

The leader's allies desperately tried to explain the mauling, but it marks a horrendous opening to a general election campaign which will see voters go to the polls in just over a month.

Violence ravages Venezuela

Looting breaks out in provincial cities as unrest death toll hits 36

AFP, Valencia

A young man died Friday after he was injured in violence as looting broke out in impoverished Venezuelan cities, an official said, bringing the toll from unrest in more than a month of anti-government protests to at least 36.

Mass protests erupted on April 1 by demonstrators demanding elections to remove President Nicolas Maduro. They blame him for an economic crisis that has caused shortages of food, medicine and other basics.

Anger boiled over Friday in the western municipality of Rosario de Perija, where young protesters burned, pulled down and then smashed a statue of former president Hugo Chavez, Maduro's late predecessor and mentor, according to video posted on social media showing the incident in a public square.

Looting broke out this week in cities such as Valencia, which looked like a disaster zone with bars on shop win-



dows bent and windows broken.

"There was a crowd of them. They broke through the walls and took everything. They destroyed everything" before police came and fired tear gas to disperse the looters, said Nuvia Torrealba, 42, who worked in a bakery.

Residents were stockpiling food,

water and fuel. At least 70 stores have been raided since Tuesday, the Valencia chamber of commerce said.

Maduro is resisting opposition demands for elections. He says the economic crisis is a US-backed conspiracy to topple him and install a right-wing government.