

All of France's regional presidents re-elected amid mass abstention

Alex Lantier

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Over 65 percent of voters abstained yesterday in the second round of the French regional elections, as each of the 12 incumbent regional presidents were re-elected. Neither Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) nor President Emmanuel Macron's Republic on the March (LRM) carried a single one of France's 12 regions.

Thanks to this repetition of the massive abstention in the first round (66.5 percent), the traditional Gaullist and social-democratic parties held on to office. The right-wing The Republicans (LR) won six regions, the Socialist Party (PS) or the Greens five; the pro-autonomy *Fà populu insemè* party of Gilles Simeoni won Corsica. Notwithstanding this appearance of stability, mass abstention points to the deep discrediting of the political establishment by its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and violent police repression of strikes and protests.

As of yesterday evening, polling and media projections were giving the following results, with the candidate taking the most votes winning the regional executive and a bonus of one quarter of the seats in the regional council:

* **Auvergne-Rhône-Alps** (regional capital Lyons): Laurent Wauquiez (LR) 55.3 percent; Fabienne Grébert (Greens) 33.4 percent; Andréa Kotarac (RN) 11.3 percent.

* **Brittany** (Rennes): Loïg Chesnais-Girard (PS) 30; Isabelle Le Callennec (LR) 20; Thierry Burlot (LRM) 17; Gilles Pennelle (RN) 12.

* **Burgundy-Franche-Comté** (Dijon): Marie-Guite Dufay (PS) 43; Julien Odoul (RN) 24.95; Gilles Platret (LR) 24.28; Denis Thuriot (LRM) 9.66.

* **Center-Loire Valley** (Orléans): François Bonneau (PS) 38.6; Nicolas Forissier (LR) 22.9; Aleksandar Nikolic (RN) 22.4; Marc Fesneau (LRM) 16.1.

* **Corsica** (Ajaccio): Gilles Simeoni (*Fà populu insemè*) 40.6; Laurent Marcangeli (LR) 32; Jean-Christophe Angelini (Avanzemu Pè a Corsica) 15.07; Paul-Félix Benedetti (regionalists) 12.26.

* **East** (Strasbourg): Jean Röttner (LR) 39; Laurent Jacobelli (RN) 27.1; Eliane Romani (Greens) 21.1; Brigitte Klinkert (LRM) 12.8.

North (Lille): Xavier Bertrand (LR) 53; Sébastien Chenu (RN) 25.6; Karima Delli (Greens) 21.4.

* **Île-de-France** (Paris): Valérie Pécrèsse (LR) 45.5; Julien Bayou (Greens) 32.5; Jordan Bardella (RN) 11.5; Laurent Saint-Martin (LRM) 10.5.

* **Normandy** (Rouen): Hervé Morin (LR) 44.2; Mélanie Boulanger (PS) 25.9; Nicolas Bay (RN) 20.1; Laurent Bonnaterre (LRM) 9.8.

* **New Aquitaine** (Bordeaux): Alain Rousset (PS) 39.3; Edwige Diaz (RN) 18.9; Nicolas Thierry (Greens) and Nicolas Florian (LR) both 14.3; Geneviève Darrieussecq (LRM) 13.2.

* **Occitania** (Toulouse): Carole Delga (PS) 57.8; Jean-Paul Garraud (RN) 23.9; Aurélien Pradié (LR) 18.3.

* **Provence-Alps-Riviera** (Marseilles): Renaud Muselier (LR) 57.3; Thierry Mariani (RN) 42.7.

Amid mass popular disaffection, the ruling class clearly intends to use this election, the last before the April-May 2022 presidential elections, to decide whom to run as president. Macron is deeply unpopular, as is his opponent in the second round of the 2017 elections, neo-fascist Marine Le Pen, who had only a 34 percent approval rating in an April poll. A February poll found that 80 percent of French people would oppose a Macron-Le Pen rematch in 2022, but polls also show that this is what would emerge if elections were held today.

Moreover, with Macron only leading Le Pen 52 to 48 percent in a hypothetical match-up, there is a discernible possibility that a neo-fascist could become president of France next year.

Significant sections of the French ruling class are clearly concerned about finding a more palatable frontman for the reactionary policies advocated by both Macron and the far right. And so, barely two minutes after the first projected were published last night, LR candidate Xavier Bertrand gave a victory speech preparing a presidential bid.

Bertrand, a health and then labor minister under right-wing presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy, is a reactionary candidate of the financial aristocracy. Yet his

motley speech mixed rhetoric of the Gaullist movement, “yellow vest” protests against social inequality, and the law-and-order appeals of Macron in order to demagogically posture as a candidate of the people.

“History will record that twice here, on the soil of northern France, which is faithful to a certain idea of France, the National Rally was stopped,” he said. He addressed “you, the silent ones, the invisible ones, the workers,” pledging to make sure that “labor will live again, that it will be possible to live decently from work. My priorities are the middle classes and popular social layers.”

At the same time, adopting the rhetoric Macron has used to justify violent police repression of protests and measures targeting Muslims’ democratic rights, Bertrand pledged to “re-establish order and respect for authority” and to fight “hatred of France.”

Le Pen said the election reflected “a deep crisis of local democracy” and thanked “electors who went to vote while everything pushed them to abstain.” She proposed to adopt Citizen-Initiated Referendums (RIC), a legislative initiative championed by the “yellow vests,” as “everything must be debated in order to win our fellow citizens back to interest in politics.” She concluded by declaring that her party is “the change in government that France needs.”

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former PS minister and leader of the “left populist” Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, also spoke on the elections—hailing his voters in Marseilles who voted for the reactionary Muselier against the neo-fascist, Mariani.

He noted “the abyss of abstention separating the mass of French people from institutions supposed to represent them,” pointing especially to abstention “among youth and workers who, more than others, are turning their backs on what they see as political theater.” He proposed “recognizing blank votes, the right to citizen-initiated referendums and referendums to recall officials” as legal initiatives that could rekindle popular support for the state machine.

Mélenchon cynically applauded the “extremely painful political effort” of his voters in Marseilles who, faced as in the 2017 presidential elections with a poisoned choice between two reactionary candidates, “nevertheless voted to defeat the National Rally.”

There is nothing more superficial and reactionary than the invocations by capitalist politicians and pundits of a crisis of democracy, followed by calls for legislative tinkering and the type of lesser-evil voting that put Macron in power. Totally absent from official analyses of the elections is any account of the political roots of mass abstention and disillusionment with official politics.

Significantly, an Odoxa poll for *Le Figaro* found that 60

percent of the electorate blamed “political parties and candidates who were unable to interest voters in the elections” for the abstention. Some 37 percent blame Macron, and 20 percent blame “the government, which did not give the French people enough information about the elections.”

In the final analysis, mass abstention flows not from national conditions that can be addressed with one or another legal reform inside France, but by an international crisis of the capitalist system.

The brief regional election campaign was deafeningly silent on the fact that over 110,000 people in France and 1.1 million in Europe have died of COVID-19, due to the ruling elite’s opposition to medical personnel’s calls for a scientific fight against the virus. The European Union (EU) instead gave over €2 trillion in bank and corporate bailouts that raised the net worth of EU billionaires by over €1 trillion. Macron is now debating whether to immediately proceed to further cuts to pensions and unemployment insurance to help finance these massive handouts to the rich.

Objectively, this record reveals an unbridgeable class gulf separating the workers from the financial aristocracy and its state machine. Fearing working class anger driven by decades of EU austerity, moreover, reserve and active-duty officers in both France and Spain have threatened to launch military coups.

The fact that a neo-fascist descendant of France’s Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime currently stands a credible chance of ruling France next year is a warning of the authoritarian course pursued by the bourgeoisie. However, Macron’s presidency is an unanswerable refutation to those who would claim that a lesser-evil vote to halt the far right will preserve French democracy. Macron personally hailed Vichy leader Marshal Philippe Pétain, a war criminal and convicted traitor, as a “great soldier” as he unleashed his riot police on social protests and mass strikes.

Yesterday’s election is yet another warning that the political establishment is impervious to reform and to popular sentiment. Elections will resolve none of the burning questions facing workers. The struggle against the pandemic, war, and social inequality, and for democratic rights can only take the form of the independent and international mobilization of the working class in a struggle for state power and for socialism.



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