French Elections

Why in news?

\n\n

Emmanuel Macron beat Marine Le Pen of the Front National (FN) by a margin of more than 30 percentage points to win the French Presidential elections.

\n\n

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- **By choosing an open vision amid the rise of extremism,** France has saved itself from the National Front Leader.
\n
- Mr. Macron now stands at the threshold of an opportunity to bring change and greater unity to a country that is perceived by its people as having a stagnant economy, an ineffective political class and growing social divisions.
\n
- Outgoing president Francois Hollande having promised to heal a divided country and changed Europe faced scandals, terrorist attacks and hence a betrayal of his Socialist base.
\n
- Mr. Macron's share was only about 44% while **Ms. Le Pen represented an extreme right ideology won the approval of nearly 11 million people** an alarming development for any liberal democracy, more so for France.
\n
- The last time the Front National made it to the final round was in 2002.
\n
- Ms. Le Pen has been more successful, partly because she has ostensibly distanced herself from the xenophobic, anti-Semitic and homophobic views of Mr. Le Pen, her father and founder of Front National.
\n
- Not only did she expel her father from the party, she brought her openly gay adviser to its centre and also progressively softened her tone on the European Union (EU).
\n
- Some French voters endorse the viewpoint and hence support FN because of

the bundling of its ideology with promises to protect voters from globalisation, Europeanisation and a loss of a distinct French identity.
\n

\n\n

What are the lingering issues?

\n\n

\n
- Much of Mr. Macron's work will involve himself to do **three things:** kick start the French economy; effect a reorganisation of the European Union and the Euro zone; and promote a strong and inclusive vision of what it means to be French.
\n
- The French economy is growing at about 1.2% annually, significantly slower than either Germany or the single-currency euro zone as a whole.
\n
- **Unemployment is high,** just under 10%, and concentrated among the young — a quarter of those in the age group of 15-24 years are unemployed.
\n
- Mr. Macron plans to invest €50 billion over five years in various sectors to create employment; and save €60 billion by not filling 1,20,000 public sector vacancies as civil servants retire.
\n
- He also plans to make the labour market more fluid by making it easier to hire and fire people, reform the tax and pension systems and invest in training.
\n
- Addressing issues with the domestic economy goes hand in hand with Euro zone issues, as the EU is itself in an existential crisis.
\n
- Euro zone will have to start moving towards greater monetary and (ultimately) fiscal union or it will have to be disbanded.
\n
- Mr. Macron seems to understand this and has proposed a type of European federalism. His plans include a **Euro zone budget and parliament.**
\n
- Failure to either re-launch the domestic economy or take the Euro zone out of its current stasis could mean Mr. Macron not winning a second term.
\n
- However, prior to any of this, Mr. Macron will need to get a majority in the National Assembly which goes to the polls in June.
\n
- This can happen either by his party winning a majority alone or with others,

through a post-poll coalition.
\n
- Else, he will have to enter into a situation called ‘cohabitation’ with a Prime Minister from a different party, one that could potentially derail his programme.
\n
- While critics have called Mr. Macron “a little bit left and a little bit right” (in terms of his economic policies and social policies) but this is perhaps exactly what the country needs — something for everyone to heal deep divisions.
\n
- Although France has flirted with a dangerous extreme, it has finally chosen an inclusive, hopeful, generous and open vision for itself.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu & Indian Express

\n

