



In brief: Hollande or Sarkozy for President?

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Hollande maintains lead over Sarkozy after the first round

In the run-up to the second and final round of voting in France's presidential elections on Sunday 6 May 2012, the Socialist François Hollande still appears to be the favourite to win. [Opinion polls](#) show Hollande in the lead with around 53% compared with the centre-right incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy's 47%. Only those two candidates remain in the running.

Hollande emerged from the [first round](#) on 22 April with nearly 29% of the vote, narrowly ahead of Sarkozy's 27%. No challenger had previously managed to defeat an incumbent president in the first round. Put together with the votes for other candidates, this was the largest anti-incumbent vote in the history of France's fifth republic.

However, the parties of the right have in total more support than those of the left. Added together, all six candidates of the left, including mainstream, radical, green and extreme, accounted for 44% of the vote in the first round. The total of the three candidates on the right added up to 47%. This has supported Sarkozy's determination that he can still win.

For background see [In brief: French presidential elections 2012](#), Library Standard Note SN6236, 28 February 2012

[French voters in the UK](#) preferred Sarkozy to Hollande.

Do supporters of extremist parties hold the key to the Élysée?

Together the far-right and far-left parties gained nearly a third of the vote in the first round. They had in common a populist anti-euro and anti-globalisation stance, signalling a widespread discontent.

Many commentators have suggested that the unprecedented 18% of voters who supported [Marine le Pen](#), leader of the far-right National Front (NF), in the first round of the elections could be decisive in the second round. [Le Pen gained widespread support](#), particularly amongst blue-collar workers and unemployed people in the industrial north-east of France, to gain the party's best-ever result in a presidential election.

However, not all of le Pen's supporters are likely to transfer their support to Sarkozy. Many of her supporters, or their families, were previously affiliated to the left and will not vote for a free-market liberal. Polls suggest that about half of NF voters nationally will switch to Sarkozy, a third will abstain and the rest will vote for Hollande. That would probably not be enough on its own for Sarkozy to win.

Marine le Pen is [not endorsing either candidate](#). She is likely to concentrate on the National Assembly elections in June in which her party could win several seats (currently it has none) at the expense of Sarkozy's UMP party.

Nicolas Sarkozy has appealed to National Front supporters with [promises of new controls on immigration](#) and legal protection for police who shoot suspects. François Hollande has [also tilted to the right](#), conceding that immigration needs to be limited at a time of economic crisis, and saying that he would uphold a ban on wearing the full Islamic veil despite abstaining in the original vote.

There has been less focus on the far-left candidate [Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#), a former Socialist minister. Contrary to some expectations, he won fewer votes (11%) than le Pen in the first round. The vast majority of his supporters are likely to vote for Hollande in round two.

The centrist candidate [François Bayrou](#), who polled 9% in the first round, has criticised Sarkozy's rightward turn. This could suggest that he will urge his voters to back Hollande.

What would a Hollande win mean for Europe?

François Hollande insists that if he wins he will renegotiate the Eurozone fiscal compact, demanding a greater emphasis on growth. There are however some signs that he could accept an [addition to the compact](#) rather than wholesale renegotiation.

[Financial markets have reacted with unease](#) to the prospect of a Hollande presidency. And while the *Economist* welcomes the challenge to "German-inspired austerity", it considers that Hollande's preference for raising taxes (he has promised a new top rate of 75% for earnings over €1m) rather than cutting spending make him "rather dangerous ... bad for his country and Europe".

Others would [welcome a Hollande presidency](#) for bringing "a much needed shift in the toxic narrative about the eurozone crisis and its resolution".

How Hollande and Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel would work together is not yet clear: they have never met, and they have clear political differences. Some suggest – following on from 'Merkozy' – that their relationship might be known as 'Merde'.

What happens next?

Sarkozy and Hollande will hold a two-hour [televised debate](#) – the only one of the campaign – on Wednesday 2 May. Campaigning ends at midnight on Friday 4 May before the vote on Sunday 6 May.

The winner of the presidential election will be sworn in ten days after the second round, on Wednesday 16 May. He will then appoint the Prime Minister and the government. The new President will have to travel almost immediately, to the G8 meeting at Camp David on 18-19 May, followed on 20-21 May by the NATO summit in Chicago.

Parliamentary elections for the National Assembly follow a month later, on 10 and 17 June. This could give the Socialists a majority, if they can count on the support of the Greens and Communists. The Socialists already have control of all but one of France's 22 regions, all the big cities, and, since 2011, the Senate—an "[unprecedented position of power](#)".

In 2012, for the first time, [French citizens living abroad will elect eleven National Assembly delegates](#). The UK is part of a 'northern Europe' constituency; [elections in the UK](#) will be held on 3 and 17 June.

Whatever the presidential and parliamentary election results, France's high public debt will be at the top of the agenda for France's next President, Prime Minister and government.

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