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Emmanuel Macron:

Domestic Politics with the Emphasis on Labor Reform

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Emmanuel Macron, since the time of Napoléon Ier, is the youngest head of the French government. Winning a decisive victory in May 2017, he defeated the populist far-right candidate Marine Le Pen with a 66 % of the electoral vote. However, the voter turnout was a [mere 74 %, the lowest since 1969](#). Moreover, the president's counterpart won over 11 million votes, which is a considerable amount. The very fact that Le Pen did so well in the presidential elections is a sobering statement about the state of affairs in the country.

Therefore, Macron has a difficult task in front of him to prove that he is the leader which France deserves. In the early stages of his presidency, the leader of France presented the country as a major player in European politics once again. During his first EU summit, he urged serious economic reform and strong diplomatic focus on French – German relationship, thus, France certainly aspires to be a [major agenda setting player in the European Union](#). Moreover, with the G7 and NATO summits, Macron tries diligently to prove himself as a capable leader in the geopolitical arena. Trump's visit during the

celebration of Bastille Day may serve as a prime example of said efforts. This is due to the fact that Macron, during the visit, tried to pose as a peace broker between the US president and his European critics; however, to what extent it was successful is yet to be seen.

Even though Macron's foreign policies tend to "bear fruit", his approval ratings have plummeted starting August 2017 showing [less support from the French](#) and especially from his own supporters. Thus, the question of why Macron's approval ratings are dropping so fast will be the focus of the analyses. Furthermore, the domestic issues and policies may be attributed to the president's rapid fall from favor of the French voters.

Macron's Domestic Issues

Macron's foreign policy has a certain degree of success; however, the domestic policies and reforms have proven to be the biggest problem. Even though Macron's party [La République en Marche] won 308/577 seats during the parliamentary elections, it was criticized for its amateurish approach to legislation, due to most of the elected MPs [being inexperienced in the](#)

[legislative process](#). This caused a rift among the French population, with some people arguing that the young leader may not be ready to bear the burden of leadership. Whilst others feared imminent problems during the implementation of reforms. Following the election a temporary Government was formed from which three members of the cabinet, Defense Minister Sylvie Goulard, Minister of Justice François Bayrou, and Minister of European affairs Marielle de Sarnez resigned amid [allegations of illegal party funding](#).

Furthermore, the resignation of the military Chief Général Pierre de Villiers proved Macron's ambitions to maintain order within his government. The commander departed due to a cut in military spending - 850 million euros – to which Villiers responded with a forced resignation letter. Macron's pro-European views regarding the future of Defence is another reason as De Villiers [focuses more on National Defence](#) and less on the idea of an EU Army.

From the information stated above, one can clearly witness the rift among Macron's success. Foreign policies tend to remain as a strong side of the president's efforts; however, the president stumbled in the domestic issues which proved to be the reason of rapid decline in his approval ratings. The quarrels and poor approach of the MPs of his party, scandals within the cabinet and disputes with the army leaders,

substantiate the president's fall from favor. One might argue it is his inexperience; however, the main issue of dispute most likely be the effort to reform the nation's labor law.

Labour Law Reform (Code du Travail)

Macron's labor reforms tend to be controversial and they are now being drastically altered by the president. Furthermore, it aims to entirely reorganize the labor market, which is traditionally protective of worker's rights, these new reforms move the power into the hands of employers and companies. Macron believes the reforms will stimulate the French economy and lower unemployment as [it was 9,5 % in April](#), whereas in Germany and Great Britain it was below 5 %. Moreover, the reforms were "meant to inject" greater flexibility into the job market and kickstart hiring after decades of high unemployment. The new Labor law consists of a wide array of points, however, there are five which pose as the main issue for labor unions and employees alike.

A firm's global economic health cannot be used to oppose plans to fire workers

In France, if a company wished to lay off multiple employees it needed the approval of the chamber of commerce. Therefore, a judge was able to argue, "[that the company's global operations were profitable and the dismissal of employees](#)

[was unjustified](#),” and could deny the company's action and penalize them for said action. However, with the new reform, the judge is able to refer only the company's operation within France when consulting on layoff hearings.

Topics of negotiation

Topics which were set by the law will now be set by the specific companies. Furthermore, internal negotiations within businesses which employing less than 20 workers [will not automatically get a shop steward](#).

Collective breaking of agreement

The reform creates a [“device for collectively-agreed breaking of contract”](#), which previously was only brokered on the employer – employee basis. Based on the new law, a company's administration will be able to create frame for voluntary redundancies.

Red tape slashed for companies with more than 50 employees

Currently, if a company hires more than 50 employees in France, it must follow multiple requirements, most notable being the creation of health and safety committees to which representatives must be elected. Under the new reform, these committees and other requirements will be merged into one unit, thus, the company will [reduce costs and the workers will not be as well represented](#).

Changes to short-term contracts, but not to long-term ones

Short term contracts (CDD), their length and times they could be renewed (maximum twice) are set by law. The system has been constantly abused by employers and firms, with employees being hired merely on the short-term contracts to reduce the costs of hiring a worker for a long-term contract (CDI). Under the new regulations, companies will have the power to determine the amount of renewable CDD contracts, not the government. Moreover, as stated by Vinocur, [“for example, the newspaper industry could decide the duration of a CDD will be 4 months, and can be renewed six times.”](#) However, the government is reluctant to modify the CDI contracts due to the “inside-out” labor system where a certain number of workers receive good job security, whereas other struggle from one CDD agreement to another. Moreover, all forms of credit, including bank credit, are heavily conditioned on the possession of a CDI contracts.

The public sector of the French labor market is also in turmoil. Like other previous French heads of state, Emmanuel Macron plans to drastically reduce [the number of public sector employees by 120 000](#) in the next five years. One in five workers are employed by the public sector, which is considerable amount of 5.4 million employees. State employees, from nurses to teachers, have voiced their concerns during

massive public demonstrations. The largest labor union, The French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT), stated “[We want our voices to be heard after months and months of attacks against the public sector and its workers.](#)” In September, Paris was embroiled in protest when over 132 000 protesters arrived in the capital to voice their concern alongside the unions. The president [signed an executive order](#), pushing the labor reform into action.

From the information stated above, one can observe a drastic change from pro union based laws to a more capitalist form of labor regulation. Experts claim it would have been profitable to strengthen the position of labor unions instead of circumventing them, and by doing so, the French voters would feel a larger support from the head of state in the matters of labor law reform. By evading the labor unions, which are formed to protect the interests of the employees, it seems Macron’s agenda is aimed to benefit more company executives and his electoral donors. Moreover, the controversial reforms, which have been pushed through by executive order, give his political opponents the desired “bullets” to oppose the president’s move.

Furthermore, current government disunity and public displeasure with Macron’s proposed reforms have allowed his opponents, both on the far-right and far-left, to state that Macron is incompetent for

the office. These opponents claim he is unable to satisfy the needs of all, even though that is usually considered to be impossible. Macron’s intentions are to modernize the labor market, to be competitive on the world stage, and to boost the economy; however, the way he executed the labor reforms is questionable. Moreover, doubts about Macron’s true intentions could cause controversy and widen the lack of interest in traditional political parties. Thus, the political spectrum in France could become even more divided between pro-EU (Macron) and anti-EU (Le Pen) parties. Furthermore, the Far-Left (Mélénchon) and Far-Right (Le Pen) political movements could also elevate their influence among society.

Conclusion

To conclude why Macron’s approval ratings have plummeted, one has to analyse the information provided above. Even though the President has a strong foreign policy towards the European Union, Macron’s point of view is always Franco-German excluding important partners such as Italy, Poland, and even Northern Europe. Also, he lacks the ability to accept the Visegrad countries as a vital component in European affairs. Nevertheless, President Macron’s foreign policy is considered to be successful, on the contrary, his

domestic policy blunders could mark him as an incapable head of state.

From the amateurish conduct of MPs within his political party to the scandals in his cabinet, the issues created a certain image of Macron in the eyes of the French population. However, his labor law reform posed as the main dilemma of the newly elected government. With the intentions to make the labor market competitive, the president's reforms tended to push more pro-employer than union labor laws, despite very loud resistance from the general public. Therefore, it is understandable his approval ratings are falling as French citizens care more about domestic politics rather than about foreign issues. Within his first 100 days in the office, Macron's ratings were at an all-time low, however, one could expect them to rise with respect to the fact that he is at the beginning of his term as President of France.