

Le Pen Takes the Lead — in Russia

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Maria Katasonova, an ultra-patriotic activist known for her vocal support for both Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen, speaks to the press at a pro-Trump party in Moscow. **Matthew Kupfer**

Russians are taking a keen interest in the French elections, state-pollster VTsIOM has revealed, with 55 percent of respondents saying they are following the latest developments and 10 percent saying they are watching the elections closely.

Fifty-seven percent of all Russians polled by VTsIOM said the result of the French elections will have an impact on Russia. Russians' sympathies lay squarely with the underdog candidate, Front National's Marine Le Pen.

Le Pen enjoys greater visibility in Russia than her rivals, with 71 percent of respondents saying they are familiar with her. The candidate is also overwhelmingly the favorite among Russians, which is likely the result of favorable coverage of Le Pen's campaign on Russian state TV.

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Some 61 percent of those polled sided with Le Pen while her candidate, Emmanuel Macron, the most likely winner of the second round, elicits warm feelings with just 8 percent. Just over one-quarter of Russians polled said they didn't sympathize with any candidate.

VTsIOM's phone poll was conducted on April 26 and 27. The second round of the French presidential elections is expected to take place on May 7 with two candidates, Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, vying for the votes.

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