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## ON TREND

# Is Emmanuel Macron Trying to Dress Like Volodymyr Zelensky?

The normally conservatively dressed French head of state was photographed this weekend wearing a jeans-and-hoodie look that some critics compared unfavorably to tech bros and the Ukrainian President



By [Jacob Gallagher](#) [Follow](#)

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French President Emmanuel Macron wearing his usual suit and tie during a TV broadcast on March 14. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

On the morning of March 14, Emmanuel Macron's official photographer uploaded a [series of photos](#) to her Instagram account showing the French president working the previous day from his gilded Parisian office. In the close-ups, a weary-looking President Macron, 44, sports a conspicuous strip of stubble, beefy mutton-chop sideburns, jeans and a hoodie

bearing the logo of “CPA10,” a special forces unit of the French Air Force.

Even though it was a Sunday, this was an atypically dressed-down ensemble for President Macron, a politician who has exhibited a conservative fashion sense over the years. During his nearly five years in office, he has rarely been seen in public wearing anything other than a pearly white shirt with a modest spread collar, a navy suit and a coordinating blue tie. Seeing President Macron in his Sunday worst was jarring for those both in and out of France.

On social media, many accused the French leader of trying to copy the humble wartime look of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Since the Russian invasion last month, President Zelensky (also 44) has stuck to olive-drab jackets, hoodies and T-shirts, along with a slight beard, for his media appearances.

The similarities—particularly the typically shaved President Macron’s abrupt lapse into stubble—were not lost on political pundits and publications ranging from [TMZ](#) to [the Telegraph](#) in London. “A month ago it would have been hard to imagine French President Emmanuel Macron trying to copy President Volodymyr Zelensky. Now it’s the reality we live in,” read one widely shared [Tweet](#) from Oleksiy Sorokin, the political editor and chief operating officer of the Kyiv Independent.

President Macron’s office had declined to comment, but after publication said, “It is not something new that the President is wearing casual clothes on the weekend. The whole team was wearing casual clothes as well. It is neither ‘a decision’ nor a ‘novelty.’”

While a hoodie and jeans does skew toward the extreme laissez-faire end of the fashion spectrum, President Macron was really just employing the well-worn political trick of being conspicuously casual, even slovenly, when deemed necessary.

When leaders deviate into casual wear it is “just to show us and tell us the politicians are human too,” said Lauren Rothman, a Washington, D.C.-based stylist who has worked with businessmen and politicians. *Showing us* is the crucial point. When the cameras start flashing, it turns a standard Sunday into a political moment that could sway the public.

Bill Clinton and Al Gore sporting T-shirts and McDonald's cups during the 1992 presidential race. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

“Dressing like your audience suggests, ‘I am one of you, we are the same, we are in this together,’” said Peter Loge, associate professor of political communication at George Washington University.

In 1992, when they were running for office, future President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore were photographed after a jog clutching [McDonald's](#) cups while wearing skimpy shorts, trucker hats and sweat-soaked T-shirts. In his years in the White House, President Barack Obama was photographed working from the executive wing on the weekends sans tie. On the campaign trail of the 2020 democratic primary, then-30-something former mayor Pete Buttigieg often [forwent a blazer](#) and rolled up his sleeves—a move many political analysts read as playing up his youth in a field of relatively geriatric candidates.

In 2020, when Canadian Prime Minister [Justin Trudeau](#) took a knee during a Black Lives Matter protest in Ottawa, he too abandoned his usual sport coat and tie, perhaps to underline his solidarity with the movement. And while he rarely strays from the suit, English Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) has been accused of intentionally messing up his mop-top hairdo as a way of making the blue-blood politician appear more like a man of the people.

Critics have accused British Prime Minister Boris Johnson of intentionally messing up his hair to appear more like a man of the people. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

It can be difficult to tell when dressing down is organic and when it is strategic. President Zelensky made the switch from conservative suits to military green garb as his country was thrust into war (that said, he was an actor before he became a politician, so he is likely quite conscious of how he appears on television). As for President Macron, the timing of this photoshoot is probably not coincidental: France is less than one month away from its 2022 presidential election. “It strikes me that Macron must be very worried about his

image if he thinks dressing like a '90s tech bro will help,” said Prof. Loge. While President Macron [currently](#) has a lead in polls, his Instagrammed portraits showed a side of him that the public hasn't seen before, something that might have been intended to sway voters.

As the criticism of the Macron photos suggest, going casual can sometimes be a miscalculation. American readers likely still recall the media cyclone President Obama triggered simply by wearing a khaki suit in 2014 (an incident that has its own Wikipedia page.) “The politician needs to seem sincere,” said Prof. Loge, “Dressing down works if it feels natural, voters have to believe the clothes are authentic and not part of an act.”

