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BULLETIN

The National Rally ahead of France's 2027 presidential election

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Marine Le Pen enters the April 2027 presidential election campaign as the favourite to win. Her lead in the polls is nevertheless accompanied by weaknesses that may impede her victory, including her conviction for misappropriating public funds, inconsistencies in her economic programme, and the absence of a clear foreign policy vision. The result will depend on her ability to convince moderate right-wing and centrist voters that the National Rally (RN) can govern without destabilising public finances or weakening France's relations with its allies.

Le Pen's candidacy. The Court of Appeal's ruling in July this year in the case concerning the misappropriation of public funds did not prevent Le Pen from standing, but it has burdened her campaign. Her appeal to the Court of Cassation suspends the custodial sentence being enforced, but a ruling may be handed down shortly before the election. If the judgment is upheld, there is a risk that she will have to conduct the final weeks of her campaign under electronic monitoring, restricting her freedom of movement and keeping the criminal case prominent in public debate. The misappropriation case has not led to existing RN supporters deserting the party, but it matters for attracting undecided and moderate voters, whose support is essential to victory in the second round.

Le Pen's decision to stand required Jordan Bardella's close involvement in the campaign to curb speculation about leadership rivalry. The RN president had previously been poised to take over as the candidate should Le Pen be barred from standing. Bardella's aim is to turn the RN into the leading party of the French right and win over voters from the Republicans, right-leaning Macronists, and centrist parties. He also seeks to overcome the party's difficulties in forming inter-party alliances. The RN is the largest party in the National Assembly (122 seats), but it has limited coalition-building capacity, as the municipal elections in March this year demonstrated. If it wins the presidential

election, the party will most likely have to seek a majority in the Assembly beyond its own political camp.

The electorate. Le Pen has a strong and relatively stable electoral base, giving her a substantial first-round advantage but not guaranteeing success in the second round. According to an Elabe poll for BFMTV and La Tribune Dimanche, conducted on 9-10 July, she would receive 34-35.5% of the vote in the first round, depending on the field of candidates tested. She would win the second round in all the scenarios examined, from 67.5% to 32.5% against the far-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon to 52% to 48% against the centre-right politician Édouard Philippe.

The RN has systematically broadened its electorate, owing to an effective normalisation strategy (presenting itself as a party fit to govern rather than a political extreme) and its skilful adaptation of its economic and social programme to public concerns. In the [2024 National Assembly elections](#), the party won 29% of the vote, expanding its voter base by 5.8 million since 2012. In recent years, the profile of some new supporters has changed: a growing number of RN voters are older, better educated, drawn from middle- and upper-class occupational groups, and previously mainly supported the mainstream right. Such groups will be strategically important to Le Pen's 2027 prospects, partly because of their ideological overlap with the party: around one-third of those who have consistently not voted for the RN nevertheless identify with the right. The municipal elections showed that

the party has some capacity to win over this electorate: it increased its representation in towns in south-eastern France, where it has long competed with the traditional right. Le Pen's stable electoral base consists primarily of manual workers and lower-grade employees who have lower levels of education and live in smaller towns, former industrial regions, and southern France. The main factor linking the different RN voter segments is a sense that living conditions have deteriorated. According to a Fondapol study published in July this year, among newly won-over voters, 89% believe they are worse off than before, while 56% report financial difficulties.

Economic programme. The economy has become a central theme in French political debate and one of the main pillars of the RN's programme. This reflects both the consequences of successive economic crises and the party's need to demonstrate that it is capable of governing. At the same time, this area remains the RN's greatest policy weakness, as the party has not developed a coherent economic policy. Depending on electoral needs, it combines redistributive instruments aimed at less affluent voters, economic nationalism, and liberal measures targeting businesses and centre-right voters. Its programme in this area is constantly evolving. For the 2024 election, it strengthened proposals aimed at businesses and more affluent right-wing voters, such as cuts to production taxes, administrative simplification, and reductions in some public spending. This contrasts with the 2022 programme, which was aimed primarily at households affected by inflation, lower-income pensioners, and young workers, and emphasised proposals including cuts in VAT and fuel prices, higher wages and pensions, tax breaks, and other measures to protect purchasing power. The party presented an alternative budget for 2026 that reinforced this direction of change, advocating spending discipline and a more business-friendly approach. At the same time, the RN wants to retain the support of voters who depend on benefits, public services, and regulated prices, while simultaneously cutting household and business taxes and reducing the deficit. It has yet to adequately explain which commitments would take priority or how they would be financed if savings fell short of projections.

Foreign policy. The RN is attempting to shed its former image as a pro-Russian party seeking far-reaching changes in foreign policy, but its position on many issues remains ill-defined. To reassure the business community and voters who are open to a change of government but fear France's isolation, it decided to drop calls for France to leave the EU and the euro area, alongside Bardella indicating that attempts to withdraw from NATO's integrated command structure would be postponed. However, the party [has not entirely abandoned its confrontational approach to European commitments](#). It advocates the primacy of

national law and seeks to limit the powers of EU institutions. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it has adopted a more nuanced position towards Russia than it held before 2022. It supports Ukraine's sovereignty and condemns the aggression, but supports only limited French operational and military assistance. It opposes supplying weapons capable of striking targets deep inside Russia, sending French troops to Ukraine, Ukrainian membership of the EU, and sanctions against Russia which, according to RN politicians, impose an excessive burden on the French public. It is unclear how the RN sees France's future place in NATO's system of collective defence. The party criticises the risk of France becoming embroiled in conflicts and stresses the need to regain freedom of action, but does not explain how it would reconcile autonomy with its obligations to allies. While the RN criticises European integration, it also challenges Europe's excessive dependence on the United States. Tensions in relations with the new US administration have highlighted the party's willingness to make use of EU instruments: in January, Bardella called for the EU-US tariff agreement to be suspended if US tariff threats were implemented—even though the RN's broader agenda would weaken the EU's capacity for joint action.

Conclusions. The RN will seek to present itself as the leading force of the French right. In doing so, it aims to transform its place in the political system, moving from a protest movement to a party capable of governing. Through its positions on migration, security, identity, and opposition to the left, the RN will try to unite economically diverse groups. A rapprochement with business and more affluent right-wing voters may, however, require it to scale back the costly promises made to its traditional electoral base. Persistent contradictions in its economic proposals make it harder to assess future RN policy and offer a principal line of attack for rival candidates. Voters may also doubt the RN's actual ability to build a majority in the National Assembly, essential for implementing its domestic policy proposals and ending the period of [instability under successive governments](#).

Given the powers of the head of state, a victory in the presidential election could quickly translate into changes in foreign policy. The party's current proposals entail France withdrawing from its [role as an initiator of joint efforts to strengthen economic resilience and European security](#) and do not guarantee continuity in its commitments to allies. France would become a more selective and transactional partner rather than a strategic one, and would no longer be a principal pillar of efforts to deter Russia and reinforce NATO's eastern flank. For Central and Eastern European states, the likely opposition by the RN to European defence support mechanisms – joint financing, procurement, coordination, and industrial integration – would be particularly problematic.