

# Snap elections (France): Corporate France Is Making Peace With Marine Le Pen

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**The manifesto launch for Marine Le Pen’s Rassemblement National showed how far the party has dropped its welfarist promises. The far right is vaunting its pro-business credentials — and part of France’s corporate elite is warming to its message.**

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French finance minister Bruno Le Maire recently delivered a plaintive appeal to the country’s corporate elite: “But really, don’t fall for the far right.” He made the remarks at a June 20 conclave of the Movement of French Enterprises (MEDEF), a leading business lobby, as it brought together representatives of the country’s main political forces. Ahead of snap elections starting this Sunday, Le Maire warned: “Don’t spoil the last seven years of work,” referring to Emmanuel Macron’s spell in office.

History could soon be moving on, however. Projections of seat allocations in the upcoming National Assembly point toward a devastating defeat for the Macronist camp. Marine Le Pen’s Rassemblement National (RN) is leading polls, trailed by the left-wing Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) alliance. Such projections are clearly just speculation — and the RN’s candidate for prime minister, Jordan Bardella, has said that he would reject a nomination unless his party and its allies secure an absolute majority. But it would be bad business for corporate France not to prepare for the possibility of a far-right government.

The RN is still largely greeted with ambivalence, if not guarded hostility, in the business world. The party’s brand evokes old fears of a French exit from the European Union, paralyzing disruptions to supply chains, and electoralist pork-barrel spending. But judging by a recent flurry of negotiations and meet and greets between business leaders and far-right figures, they do have common ground to establish a working arrangement. In recent weeks, business figures have had little choice but to sound out the far right’s economic intentions. This has, in turn, been reciprocated by Le Pen and figures in her entourage, who have also reportedly reached out to build connections and assuage fears.

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As the French press has pored over these negotiations in recent days, it's clear that momentum for developing ties had been building long before Macron's surprise dissolution of parliament just over a fortnight ago. Last fall, far-right leader Le Pen was treated [to lunch by the CEO of Veolia](#), a utilities giant, with the two meeting at a fashionable Parisian restaurant frequented by the corporate world. In response to a Le Pen-signed [op-ed published](#) in February by business daily *Les Échos*, intended as something of an olive branch to corporate leaders, Ross McInnes, board president at the defense contractor Safran, [shot back with a piece](#) denouncing the RN's attempt to buff up its image. But in recent weeks, Safran's director-general, Olivier Andriès, has renewed ties with Le Pen.

French big business is often a family affair. Owners of the leading right-wing daily *Le Figaro* and long a renowned family of the conservative establishment, the Dassaults are said to be split on the question of working toward a rapprochement with Le Pen, according to a report published last week in *Le Canard Enchaîné*. Meanwhile, [Glitz](#) is reporting that LVMH, the luxury goods conglomerate owned by the Arnault dynasty, is rushing to compensate for its lack of contacts around Le Pen and Bardella.

One insider [summarized the situation in boardrooms](#) in comments to *Mediapart*, noting that no such move had been imagined necessary so long before the 2027 presidential elections: "they thought they had three years to prepare the RN on economic questions and the interests of business. It turns out they only have three weeks."

Previously wedded to Macron and the political center, much of corporate France now finds itself playing catchup with counterparts who instead lined up behind the hard right in recent years. During his insurgent run in the 2022 presidential elections, reactionary pundit Éric Zemmour was courted by a faction of the business élite seduced by his idea of a "union" between the old conservative establishment and the far right. The real kingpin in this world is tycoon [Vincent Bolloré](#), who has since the mid-2010s diverted his business holdings away from African logistics and shipping and toward the establishment of a vast far-right media empire. On June 9, figures in the Bolloré ecosystem allegedly received a tip on Macron's imminent dissolution of parliament even before key Macron allies such as incumbent prime minister Gabriel Attal.

## **Budgetary Incompetence**

Little soothes divisions like having a common enemy, however. The NFP, the alliance of left-wing parties, has laid out a [broad plan for government](#) including investment in public services, an immediate repeal of Macron's hike in the retirement age from sixty-two to sixty-four, and a slate of new and restored tax regimes. Unsurprisingly, the NFP's platform has alarmed business circles, faced with the possibility of confiscatory taxes on corporate "superprofits," the return of major wealth taxes, and the alliance's stated pledge to disregard EU deficit rules. "The program of the RN is dangerous for the French economy," MEDEF president Patrick Martin [told \*Le Figaro\*](#). "It's the same case with the Nouveau Front Populaire, if not even more so."

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But it's not only a more pronounced fear of the Left that is laying the groundwork for a détente between big business and the far right. "A vote for LFI [France Insoumise, the leading party in the NFP] is a vote for the IMF [International Monetary Fund]," Bardella warned, claiming that a left-wing alliance would provoke a run on French debt and an epidemic of corporate bankruptcies. Having sealed a pact with a faction of center-right *Républicains* in the days following the dissolution of parliament, at a press conference on June 24 Bardella sought to project the image of a well-healed party of order, as he rolled out the main axes of the RN's governing program.

"If the dissolution [of parliament] has fed fears about the political direction that our country will take from this summer, I refuse that it should become the occasion for disorder or conflict," said Bardella this Monday. "The alliance that I lead today is the only credible and responsible alternative for restoring the country in conformity with its institutions, the protection of individual liberties, and, of course, national unity."

This is not just rhetoric. The RN's economic program has been fine-tuned to meet corporate France on its own terms. Bardella pledged to "unwind the breaks that hold back economic growth," promising to work in concert with business. He promises further reductions in business taxes, measures to incentivize people back into the workforce, and the creation of a sovereign investment fund.

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Moreover, the RN has purged its program of what business circles long viewed as its most threatening positions, most notably its past calls for a French departure from the EU and a restoration of the franc. In another significant olive branch, the RN has made an at least rhetorical concession to the aim of reducing public spending and deficits. This was the tenor of the Le Pen op-ed [published in \*Les Échos\*](#) this February, and it has since been embraced by Bardella in the ongoing campaign. On June 24, he lambasted "the unprecedented budgetary abuses of the outgoing government." The party is calling for a comprehensive "fiscal audit" to review state finances.

While it has made nods to the restoration of a weakened version of the wealth tax repealed by Macron in 2017, the RN's proposed solution for the state deficit is a chimeric plan to crack down on fraud. If this includes tax-dodging and loopholes, it's mainly code for an alleged epidemic of social welfare abuse, namely by non-French nationals. The party is promising to take an across-the-board axe to the welfare programs and aid accessible to foreigners living in France.

The RN's electoral embrace of fiscal restraint comes as it waters down past social and redistributive promises. The party maintains that it will repeal Macron's latest tightening of the unemployment insurance system, yet Bardella has dropped the party's proposition to scale back the retirement age to sixty-two years, instead offering exceptions for those who enter the workforce from the age of

twenty or before. His party's main "emergency" proposal for this summer is a reduction in sales taxes on gasoline and energy, and a withdrawal of the national electricity market from the EU's regionalized pricing scheme. Other past promises, like a reduction on the VAT for daily necessities, or exempting under-thirties from income taxes, have been pushed back. The party wants to move ahead with the full privatization of France's public television and radio networks.

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To be sure, the RN's claim to represent a genuinely democratic economic platform was always tenuous at best. But as the far right finds itself quite possibly on the cusp of its first experience of national power, the force is returning to its origins in French-inflected Reaganism. Each of its policy pronouncements in recent weeks have marked a retreat from the vaguely populist rhetoric embraced by Le Pen after she took over the reins of the party in the early 2010s.

The RN will put "authority at the heart of public action," Bardella said on June 24, promising a "law against Islamist ideology," minimum sentencing statutes, barring the families of recidivist minors from social welfare, and the immediate deportation of non-French nationals convicted of a crime. Pushing back against criticism of police violence, the party wants to pass a law granting a "presumption of self-defense" in cases where officers use their service weapon. As for what Bardella calls a "big bang of authority" in the school system, he supports the generalization of student uniforms and the banning of cell phones.

### **Melonization?**

The prevailing metaphor for an eventual Rassemblement National government is the example of Italian premier Giorgia Meloni. In power since 2022, Meloni — who comes from a party traceable to post-World War II neofascism — has orchestrated her own rapid normalization among the European establishment.

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To judge from the RN's signals in recent weeks, it looks like the far-right force is also willing to establish some form of *modus vivendi*. This could allow for jabs at EU standards on the environment, for example, or attempts to restrict free movement within the Schengen Area, while not going so far as to entirely alienate Brussels and other European capitals. With its allies on the rise across Europe, it's natural that the RN has evolved from its purely oppositional stance: the far right now

wants to control things on the European level.

In the case of “cohabitation” between a president and prime minister of different parties, control over foreign policy is vaguely divided between the two. The RN has said it will support further arms procurements for Kyiv, but it opposed Macron’s plan in early to send air-force instructors to Ukraine. It likewise opposes Kyiv’s admission into the NATO alliance, or authorizing the country’s armed forces to use Western-supplied weaponry to strike targets in Russia. Though it still nods to a postwar rapprochement with Russia, the RN has announced that it will no longer seek a French withdrawal from NATO’s integrated command — at least not “while the war is still ongoing,” as Bardella said in March.

“Normalization” is in the eye of the beholder, of course. Despite rolling back promises to break from Macron’s economic policy, the RN has clung to its historic core as the leading vehicle for political racism in France. As it readies itself for national power, what remains is a party whose mission is the rejection of immigration, the harassment of foreigners or visible minorities, and the defense of an allegedly embattled national identity.

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The heart of the RN’s domestic platform is the demand for so-called national preference. One of the party’s long-term goals is a constitutional reform to codify a firm hierarchy between nationals and nonnationals in everything from employment and housing to public services. The party wants to definitively bury citizenship rights for the children of foreigners born on national soil. While it has walked back from propositions to ban dual nationality, the party has nonetheless proposed to bar French citizens with a second nationality from state jobs. Many of these propositions would run afoul of the current French constitution, to say nothing of European-wide statutes like the European Convention on Human Rights. This lays the grounds for a confrontation between national and European statutes, under a party that will tolerate few constraints on government prerogatives.

Even within the bounds of France’s current constitution, and even without a firm majority in parliament, a far-right government could draw on an arsenal of powers primed to constrain civil society and restrict freedom of expression and the right to protest. France’s judicial system is highly centralized under the justice ministry, which frequently issues policy circulars instructing how prosecutors should deal with potential infractions — especially in periods of political crisis and unrest. Under the central control of the interior ministry, aggressive policing has been another way to ride roughshod over political divisions.

These were already the tried-and-tested tactics of governing protest in the Macron years. We can only wonder whether their flagrant abuse by a far-right government would rouse more international attention.

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**P.S.**

- Jacobin. 06.27.2024:

<https://jacobin.com/2024/06/rassemblement-national-business-elites-elections>

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