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France's Far Right Balances Ties With Trump Agenda

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France's ascendant far-right movement is navigating a careful path as it rises in popularity, weighing the benefits and pitfalls of aligning with U.S. President Donald Trump's policies while positioning itself as a credible alternative to the current establishment.

Marine Le Pen's National Rally, formerly the National Front, has steadily built support by criticizing uncontrolled immigration, European Union overreach, and economic stagnation blamed on technocratic governance. Despite ideological overlap with President Trump's America First platform, Le Pen and her party have chosen a cautious approach, mindful that

too much alignment with Washington could alienate moderate French voters already wary of U.S. influence.

Analysts at the European Council on Foreign Relations note that while National Rally leaders share Trump's skepticism of global institutions, they understand that overt ties to his administration may jeopardize efforts to present a more mainstream image. Camille Lons, deputy head of the ECFR's Paris office, observed, "They're much more careful than a number of other populist leaders in Europe," pointing out that French voters remain protective of their national sovereignty and skeptical of foreign entanglements.

That skepticism is rooted in practical concerns: Trump's threatened tariffs on European imports could directly harm French manufacturing and agriculture sectors central to the National Rally's working-class base. A June survey by the ECFR found that more than half of French respondents viewed Trump's economic policies as harmful to both the United States and France. Even among National Rally voters, fewer than one in five believed those policies would benefit their own country.

Le Pen has spent years softening her image to appeal beyond traditional supporters, courting younger voters, center-right constituents, and communities wary of France's political elite. That strategy helped the party win 31.5% of the vote in the 2024 European Parliament election, the highest for any French party in 40 years, and finish first in the June-July 2024 snap parliamentary vote, securing roughly one-third of seats. Yet the prospect of a Trump endorsement, while potentially energizing the party's nationalist core, could undo years of work to soften its image.

Incidents such as the dispute between party president Jordan Bardella and Trump-aligned strategist Steve Bannon highlight the risks of overt association with the MAGA movement. Bardella canceled a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) after Bannon appeared to make a Nazi salute, an episode that drew rebukes and underscored the volatile nature of transatlantic populist alliances.

Even so, some National Rally supporters see clear benefits in adopting parts of Trump's playbook. At a Paris event, former flight attendant Jacques Le Roy praised Trump-style tariffs, immigration enforcement, and plans to "streamline" government policies, which he argued could benefit France. But younger voters like finance student Noe Marguinal voiced reservations, saying France "should decide more for ourselves than remain under the subordination of the United States."

As the 2027 presidential race approaches, the National Rally is expected to continue borrowing strategies that appeal to disillusioned voters while deliberately stopping short of full alignment with an American administration seen as polarizing in Europe. According to Zsuzsanna Vegh of the German Marshall Fund, “They need to appear moderate enough to draw mainstream support and not risk losing credibility by being too close to Trump.”

How France’s far right navigates this balancing act may determine whether it stays a powerful opposition movement or finally wins the presidency after decades on the political margins. While many in the European Union and Paris’s political class hope the movement stalls, National Rally leaders are betting that a blend of nationalism, economic populism, and careful distancing from Trump will give them their best shot yet at power.

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