

NATIONAL RALLY

(*Rassemblement National*, previously *Front National* or *National Front*)

IMPACT: National Rally, previously known as National Front, is a far-right political party in France with a decades-long history of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and misogyny. National Rally has enjoyed electoral success locally, nationally, and in the European Parliament. Throughout its history, the party has been dominated by the Le Pen family, especially Jean-Marie Le Pen, a Holocaust denier and apologist of French colonialism, and his daughter, Marine Le Pen, who advocates religious discrimination against Muslims, immigrants, and migrants.

- **Based in France, National Rally is one of the leading far-right political parties in Europe.** Established in 1972 as the National Front for French Unity (*Front national pour l'unité française*), the party unified several far-right groups in France, modeling itself on the fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI). **Its first and long-time leader was Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has a record of Holocaust-denial and anti-Semitism.** In June 2018, party members voted to officially change the party's name from National Front to National Rally (*Rassemblement National*).
- **National Rally's first electoral success took place in 1983 when Le Pen was elected to the local city council in Paris. This was followed by successful outcomes in European parliamentary elections, as well as in regional and national elections, throughout the 1980s.** Following a reform of the French electoral system in 1988 which reintroduced the system of two-round majoritarian voting in place of the proportional representation that had been instituted prior to the 1986 national elections, National Rally won only a handful of seats in Parliament. **In 1995, Jean-Marie Le Pen won 15% of the vote in the first round of the presidential elections and National Rally politicians won mayoral elections across France.** In 2002, Le Pen defeated Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin in the first round of the presidential elections, but lost to conservative candidate Jacques Chirac in the second round. In European Parliament (EP) elections, National Rally won 9.8% of the vote in 2004 and 6.3% in 2009.
- **National Rally founder Jean-Marie Le Pen (born 1928) has a long track record of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, as well as pro-colonialism and anti-immigration views. Le Pen referred to the gas chambers used by the Nazis during World War II as "merely a minor detail in the history of the Second World War."** He also praised people like Robert Faurisson, a convicted Holocaust denier who called the Nazi gas chambers "the biggest lie," describing Faurisson as a "symbol" for free speech. These statements are particularly egregious in light of France's complicity in the Holocaust; during World War II, French police collaborated with Nazis to deport approximately 75,000 Jews from France to Nazi death camps.
- **Jean-Marie Le Pen has described French colonialism as having a "positive influence on the development of the populations that were subject to its authority."** France subjected to colonial rule lands and peoples of what is today West, East, and Central Africa, the Caribbean, North America, Southeast Asia, and other regions. **France ruled over Algeria for 132 years. During the war for Algerian independence (1954-1962), 1.5 million Algerians were killed.** In September 2018, France acknowledged for the first time its role in systematic torture during the war.
- In an April 2002 interview, Jean-Marie Le Pen stated that the "Islamic population in France ... operate[s] according to a different logic than most of the population here" and "their values are different from those of the Judaeo-Christian world." He claimed that French Muslims, primarily referring to those of North African heritage, "are **strengthened demographically both by natural reproduction and by immigration, which reinforces their stubborn ethnic segregation, their domineering nature.**" He has also opined, "The most worrisome thing about the new Islam is the demographic data. This means it doesn't have to resort to military means to take over a country." Additionally, **Jean-Marie Le Pen has stated that Muslim headscarves "[protect] us from ugly women."**
- **In January 2011, National Rally leadership transferred to Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter, Marine Le Pen.** In an attempt to rebrand the party, Le Pen sought to distance herself from her father's anti-Semitism and racism, excluding him from the party in August 2015. According to research in the 2015 European Islamophobia Report, National Rally member Louis Aliot instructed party members against anti-Semitic rhetoric, saying, "**One must be clear about this de-demonisation, or dediabolization, "process: this only affects our alleged anti-Semitism. It doesn't affect immigration or Islam, two issues on which it might be a good thing to be demonised [...]."**
- In June 2014, Marine Le Pen declared, "I do not stop repeating it to French Jews. ... Not only is the National Front not your enemy, but it is without a doubt the best shield to protect you. **It stands at your side for the defense of our**

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freedoms of thought and of religion against the only real enemy, Islamist fundamentalism.” When Marine Le Pen proposed to ban “conspicuous religious symbols” in public spaces in October 2016 and again in February 2017, not only did this target the Islamic hijab, but also the Jewish kippah. **In a February 2017 interview on Israeli channel Arutz 2, Le Pen expressed confidence that French Jews would make this “small sacrifice” in the “fight against Islamist fundamentalism.”**

- **Since Marine Le Pen assumed party leadership, National Rally has enjoyed increasing electoral success throughout France as well as in Europe.** In the 2012 presidential elections, Le Pen won 18% of the national vote in the first round of the elections. In the 2017 presidential elections, Le Pen won 21.3% of the national vote in the first round of the elections, and 33.9% in the second round, losing to Emmanuel Macron. In the 2017 National Assembly elections, National Rally won 13.2% of the vote in the first round, securing eight seats. In the 2014 European Parliament election, National Rally won 24.9% of the vote and 24 seats, up 21 seats from the previous election in 2009. In 2019 the party received 23.3% of the vote and 22 seats during EP elections. **National Rally is also a leader of the far-right Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party) in European Parliament.** The ID Party’s platform on “identity” states that **“the right to control and regulate immigration” is a “fundamental principle” in accordance with the “preservation of the identity of the peoples and nations of Europe.”**
- From the beginning of the 21st century, National Rally has pushed anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies during elections and trans-European party coalition-building. In December 2015, Marine Le Pen was acquitted of the charge of “inciting discrimination, violence or hatred toward a group of people based on their religious beliefs” for **comments she made in 2010 at a campaign event that likened Nazi occupation to Muslim congregational street prayers.** **In December 2007, National Rally filed an appeal in the administrative court against the construction of a Grand Mosque in Marseilles, which is home to approximately 250,000 Muslims.**
- **Marine Le Pen works in close relationship with other far-right political parties across Europe.** She is the leading force alongside the Italian far-right Lega Nord among Europe’s far-right parties. In June 2019, following the EP elections, **Le Pen together with Lega Nord and Germany’s Alternative for Germany (AfD), nationalists from Austria, Finland and Denmark, and others, founded the ‘Identity and Democracy’ (ID) alliance** within the European Parliament. According to reporting by *Radio France Internationale*, **the stated goals of ID are to “return power to European member states, curb immigration, and prevent the spread of Islam in Europe.”** Le Pen also has contacts with individuals who are not part of her party family but who are well-known for their anti-Muslim platforms and policies, such as Thierry Baudet of the Dutch political party “Forum for Democracy (FvD),” who became a serious political challenger to Geert Wilders’ Party For Freedom (PVV).
- Marine Le Pen has a history of racist, anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, and misogynistic rhetoric and policy proposals. In March 2012, Mohamed Merah, a French-Algerian Muslim, murdered seven people and critically injured another in Toulouse and Montauban. The victims included three French paratroopers, a Rabbi, and three young children who were gunned down at a Jewish school. **A few days after the killings, Marine Le Pen stated, “How many Mohamed Merahs are there in the boats, the planes, which every day arrive in France filled with immigrants?”**
- During the 2015 French regional elections, in which the typical focus is on issues such as public school systems and transportation, National Rally campaigned on national issues of immigration, law and order, and anti-terrorism, with a particular focus on Islam and Muslims. The election season opened just over a week after the November 2015 attacks in Paris. **The day after the attacks, Le Pen said, “France must forbid Islamist organizations. It must close radical mosques, and expel the foreigners who preach hate on our soil, as well as illegal immigrants, who have no right to be here.”** When National Rally made significant electoral gains after the first round of voting in early December 2015, **Le Pen stated that National Rally was “the only party that can reconquer the lost territories of the republic, of Calais, where we won 50 percent of the votes, or of the suburbs.”** According to reporting by the *New York Times*, the “lost territories” that Le Pen referred to were the “French city of Calais on the English Channel, which now has more than 4,000 migrants on its doorstep hoping to reach Britain, and the suburbs of major French cities, many of which have sizable Muslim populations.”
- According to reporting by *L’Express* in September 2016, former Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who at the time was running as a candidate for the 2016 Les Républicains (LR) presidential primary, pressured mayors from the party to issue burkini bans. **During the summer of 2016, mayors of 29 cities across the French Riviera issued a ban on burkinis.** The majority of these mayors belonged to the LR party, and only one to National Rally. In a September

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2016 interview with *CNN*, **Le Pen described the burkini as a “symptom” of the “rise of fundamentalist Islam in France for many years” and an example of Muslims in France wanting to “impose [their] own rules on the Republic.”** She also described the burkini as **“an extraordinary step back”** and a **“fundamentalist uniform,”** declaring, **“Nobody can tell me this is an act of freedom for women.”**

- For the 2017 presidential elections, the National Rally party platform proposed several policies concerning Muslims. **The platform argued that women’s rights should be defended by “fighting against Islamism that drives back their fundamental liberties.”** The platform dedicated a section to “Eradicating Terrorism and Breaking the Islamist Fundamentalist Networks.” There, it **argued that France should “ban and dissolve organizations of all kinds related to fundamentalist Islamists” and “expel all foreigners linked to Islamist fundamentalism (in particular the S files).”** Established in 1969, the ‘S files’ or ‘*fiche S*’ is a database of individuals designated as national security threats and subject to surveillance by French authorities. **The S files disproportionately target Muslims.** The National Rally platform also stated that the party seeks to “close all extremist mosques identified by the Ministry of the Interior and prohibit foreign funding of places of worship and their staff” as well as to “ban all public funding (State, local authorities...) of places of worship and worship activities.”
- **National Rally has attempted to win over the LGBTQIA+ electorate, pitting Muslim communities against (non-Muslim) LGBTQIA+ communities.** Following the shooting of a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida by an ISIS-sympathizer in June 2016, Le Pen decried “how much homosexuality is attacked in countries that live under the Islamist jackboot.” **According to April 2017 reporting by the AP, Le Pen has “surround[ed] herself with gay advisers, a strategy known as ‘pinkwashing’” in an effort to soften the homophobic reputation of National Rally.** Despite Marine Le Pen’s outreach to LGBTQIA+ communities, National Rally and Le Pen oppose same-sex marriage in France.
- In December 2018, Marine Le Pen argued that the recent decision by the European Council of Human Rights’ (ECHR) in *Molla Sali v. Greece*—a case that dealt with the application of Islamic religious law in an inheritance dispute—**opens the door to “the forceful submission of national law to religious laws.”**
- **Marion Maréchal, niece of Marine Le Pen and granddaughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, has described herself as “the political heir of Jean-Marie Le Pen.”** In October 2012, Maréchal, who dropped the “Le Pen” family name in 2018, became the youngest ever Member of Parliament in France. Maréchal has stated, “I think it’s perfectly possible to be French and Muslim, as long as this legacy [of 16 centuries of Christianity] is accepted and there are no religious claims in the public space — in companies, in school.” In February 2018, Maréchal spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, D.C., where she declared, “Young French...are brainwashed with guilt and shame of their country. The result is the development of an Islamic counter-society in France. **After 40 years of massive immigration, Islamic lobbies and political correctness, France is in the process of passing from the eldest daughter of the Catholic Church to the little niece of Islam.** And the terrorism is only the tip of the iceberg. This is not the France that our grandparents fought for.”
- Through his think tank ‘The Movement,’ former White House Chief Strategist and former Chairman of Breitbart Steve Bannon has attempted to help far-right parties in Europe win elections and to form a “supergroup” in the European Parliament. **In March 2018, Bannon spoke at the National Rally party congress, declaring, “Let them call you racists. Let them call you xenophobes. Let them call you nativists. Wear it as a badge of honor.”** That same day, regarding Bannon and his efforts, Le Pen stated, “It is particularly useful for a great movement like the National Front to be able to learn from those who have somehow implemented this refusal to let things continue as usual in their own country.” **By October 2018, Le Pen had distanced herself and National Rally from Bannon.** Speaking alongside the far-right and then-Interior Minister of Italy Matteo Salvini, Le Pen described Bannon as an American, non-European outsider, stating, “We, and we alone, are the ones who will shape the political force that is born from the European elections. [...] [W]e together...will shape the political forces that aim specifically to save Europe.”