Check for updates

CASE STUDY

EUPopLink Country report - France

[version 1; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]

Parnel LEDAGA [1,2]

[1]Anthropologie et société, Facultés Loyola Paris, Paris, Île-de-France, 75006, France
[2]Philosophie, Universite de Namur Faculte de Philosophie et Lettres, Namur, Walloon Region, Belgium

v1 **First published:** 13 May 2026, **6**:165
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.23605.1
Latest published: 13 May 2026, **6**:165
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.23605.1

Abstract

This country report examines the relationship between populism and Euroscepticism in contemporary France. As a founding member of the European Union (EU) and a central actor in its political and geopolitical architecture, France provides a fascinating case for analysing this link. The study will follow the EUPopLink theoretical framework and guidelines in order to analyse the main populist and Eurosceptic actors in France, their positions on Europe, the forms taken by the populism–Euroscepticism nexus, and the responses of mainstream parties. As a result, it will be argued that although both populism and Euroscepticism are present across the French political spectrum, they do not carry equal weight. Populism has become a structural and enduring feature of French political competition, whereas Euroscepticism has generally remained softer, more selective, and less central to party identity to such an extent that is has not become a defining feature of French politics. The French case therefore highlights a configuration in which populism is strong and durable, while Euroscepticism remains comparatively moderate, flexible, and politically secondary.

Keywords

Populism, Euroscepticism, France

This article is included in the COST Actions gateway.

This article is included in the Linking Euroscepticism and Populism (EUPopLink) collection.

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ? ?

	1	2
version 1 13 May 2026	? view	? view

1. **Alexander Alekseev**, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
2. **Ugo Gaudino**, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

Corresponding author: Parnel LEDAGA (ledagapierreparnel@yahoo.fr)

Author roles: LEDAGA P: Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: This project has received funding from the European Union's Framework Programme for Research & Innovation as part of the COST Action [CA23102] Linking euroscepticism and populism: causes and consequences as supported by the COST Association (European Cooperation in Science and Technology)
The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Copyright: © 2026 LEDAGA P. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

How to cite this article: LEDAGA P. **EUPopLink Country report - France [version 1; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]** Open Research Europe 2026, **6**:165 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.23605.1

First published: 13 May 2026, **6**:165 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.23605.1

1) Introduction

France holds a central and strategic position within the European Union (EU) as one of its founding members and a long-standing supporter of European integration. It has the EU's second-largest economy and second largest population, both behind Germany. Since the UK's departure, France has gained a unique geopolitical role as the only EU country with veto power at the United Nations Security Council and the only one possessing nuclear weapons and deterrence. This point is far from negligible: the war in Ukraine has heightened fears of direct confrontation with Russia whilst Donald Trump's imperialist rhetoric regarding Greenland, and the most recent conflict with Iran have all revived debates on European defence. Hence, since 2025, discussions have even emerged on whether France might extend its nuclear umbrella to all EU member states, a proposal that would significantly reshape prevailing understandings of sovereignty and collective security within the EU.

Yet despite its strong position, France is also home to influential populist parties and Eurosceptic actors. These actors have criticised both national governments and the EU on issues such as sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, economic policy, and migration (Lorimer, 2020; Ivaldi, 2019) and more recently, on agricultural policies. Such concerns have provided fertile ground for Euroscepticism across left and right. However, this paper argues that while both populism and Euroscepticism exist in France, populism is the stronger and more enduring force. Euroscepticism has generally been limited in intensity, duration, and political influence. France thus offers a particularly interesting case for studying their intersection (Bortun, 2022).

The present country report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action (Andreadis & Vasilopoulou, 2026) following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines (Lorimer et al., 2026).

2) Populist political actors

France hosts a variety of populist parties, many adopting Eurosceptic positions to varying degrees (Gauchet et al., 2016; Bortun, 2022). This section focuses on *Rassemblement National* (RN) and *La France Insoumise* (LFI), with brief attention to *Reconquête* (R!), a newer radical right party whose themes mirror broader European trends.

Far from marginal, RN and LFI have become central players. While neither has ever managed to secure the presidency or a parliamentary majority, both exert considerable electoral weight. Issues they promote – sovereignty, social justice, identity, and anti-elitism – have entered the mainstream and forced traditional parties to adapt (Ivaldi, 2019).

2.1) Rassemblement National (RN)

Founded in 1972 under the name *Front National* (FN) by Jean-Marie Le Pen, a former military officer and outspoken supporter of French Algeria, RN has long been categorized as a radical right party (Ivaldi 2019; Rydgren, 2004). The party promotes socially conservative values, strict immigration control, and a national identity centered on cultural homogeneity (Lorimer 2020; Rydgren, 2004). It also makes heavy use of anti-elite rhetoric and draws much of its support from working-class voters (Ivaldi, 2019). While its electorate is mixed, it is particularly strong among low-income and rural populations, especially those impacted by deindustrialization, rising unemployment, and limited economic opportunities. Many of these voters also express a strong feeling of being culturally and economically left behind, often linking these difficulties to immigration and globalization (Ivaldi, 2019).

From the beginning, RN has relied on a sharp "us vs. them" narrative, attacking elites seen as technocratic and out of touch, blaming the EU for weakening national sovereignty (Gauchet et al., 2016), and portraying immigration as a source of social and cultural instability. Its conception of "the people" has often been described as emphasizing national or cultural homogeneity, and led to long-standing accusations of racism, ethnonationalism, or even antisemitism, although the party itself rejects these labels and insists that it merely defends French republican principles.

In 2018, under Marine Le Pen, the party rebranded as *Rassemblement national* (RN) and pursued *dédiabolisation*, a strategy aiming to soften its image without altering its core ideology. It even claims to be pro-European (Lorimer, 2020). Today it presents itself as the voice of the "silent majority." On the European stage, RN has long been involved in transnational cooperation. It is currently a member of the *Patriots for Europe* (PfE) group, a coalition including parties such as Viktor Orban's *Fidesz*, Italy's *Lega* and Austria's *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs.* This shift underscores the RN's strategy of embedding itself in a broader, more institutionally credible alliance of radical-right and nationalist parties in the European Parliament. Critics have also accused it of sympathising with Putin's Russia and Trump's America.

2.2) Reconquête (R!)

Founded in 2021 by Éric Zemmour, Reconquête (R! or REC) quickly impacted French debates. While it addresses cost of living or education, its populism is defined by an obsession with immigration, framed as a struggle between a "silent majority" defending French civilisation, and elites accused of betrayal by allowing large numbers of immigrants into France and the Western world. The party's name references the Spanish "Reconquista," symbolising the recovery of a lost homeland.

R! promotes the "Great Replacement" theory, warning of demographic transformation through Muslim immigration and low native birth rates likely to lead to a fundamental transformation of French society from a white Christian one to a non-white and mostly Muslim society. Zemmour insists that his party's agenda is not concerned about immigrants' race or skin colour but by the cultural values they bring, refuse to abandon, and that might replace those they found in France. Islam is indeed said to be a "political religion" threatening Western liberalism and posing an existential threat to French civilization. Muslim immigrants, therefore, are portrayed as unwilling to integrate into French culture and as holding values incompatible with French republican principles such as secularism, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, religious tolerance and freedom of speech. R! calls for a zero-immigration policy for non-EU countries and wants to radically reform immigration and citizenship laws. It blames both French elites and the EU for national decline.

R! seeks ties with radical-right networks and figures across Europe. Its sole member of the European Parliament Sarah Knafo (elected in 2024 alongside 3 other members who later left Reconquête and joined Rassemblement national), sits with the *Europe of Sovereign Nations* (ENS) group. Zemmour has been criticised for pro-Russian and pro-Trump leanings, especially his claims (before the war in Ukraine) that Russia would not invade Ukraine and his call for security guarantees to Moscow. Electorally, R! attracts affluent conservatives in urban/peri-urban areas, younger identity-focused activists, and disillusioned mainstream right-wing voters.

2.3) La France Insoumise (LFI)

Created in 2016 and led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, La France Insoumise (LFI) is the most important representative of radical left-wing populism in France. Although its values and goals are very different from those of RN and Reconquête, it shares a similar populist logic built around a contrast between "the people" and "the elite" (Ivaldi, 2019). However, unlike the far right, which often defines "the people" in exclusive terms, LFI offers an inclusive vision. It includes the working class, immigrants, and other marginalized groups (Bortun, 2022). This inclusive stance also shapes its foreign policy positions: LFI expresses strong solidarity with Ukraine in its war against Russia, and Palestinians in Gaza, support that has sparked accusations of antisemitism or apologism for Islamism from opponents.

LFI strongly supports multiculturalism, immigrants' rights, minority rights, and social justice. It also promotes progressive policies on gender equality and LGBTQ+ issues. The party is very critical of what it sees as the authoritarian tendencies of the French government, especially its use of Article 49.3 of the Constitution, which allows laws to be passed without a parliamentary vote. It has, in recent years, made itself particularly noticed for various attempts to destitute the president of the Republic.

LFI blames technocrats and economic elites for the growing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, arguing that this comes at the expense of the broader population (Bortun, 2022). Its program includes proposals for major reforms of public institutions, including the police, pensions, and civil service wages. It also condemns what it calls a structural system of privilege that benefits rich, white, urban elites while neglecting working-class people, women, and racialized minorities (Ivaldi, 2019).

Its electorate is mostly young, urban, and well-educated. It also includes a significant number of French citizens from immigrant backgrounds, especially in large cities. At the European level, LFI has worked with other left-wing populist movements, notably through the *Left in the European Parliament* (former European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) group in the European Parliament (which brings together several left-wing parties such as Spain's *Podemos*, Germany's *Die Linke*, or Greece's *Syriza*) and through transnational networks advocating for democratic reform and social justice.

3) Positions on 'Europe' and the populism–Euroscepticism nexus

France offers a particularly interesting case for studying the intersection between populism and Euroscepticism. Its political landscape combines strong populist parties that sometimes adopt Eurosceptic positions – more or less intensely depending on the moment – and a few firmly Eurosceptic actors with little political weight and no populist profile. In practice, the intersection between the two often proves to be more of a liability than a strength, perhaps due to France's central role in EU and world politics. Parties appear compelled to choose whether to emphasise their populist or their

Eurosceptic dimension, or to mix the two unevenly – strong populism with limited Euroscepticism or the reverse – but rarely to place both at the core of their identity. Each seems to have a political DNA, a defining trait that moderates one dimension or the other.

3.1) Rassemblement National (RN)

RN has traditionally framed sovereignty in terms of nationalism, cultural protection, and immigration control. In the 1990s–2010s, as Front National, it embodied "hard" Euroscepticism (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004), even "Europhobia" (Mudde, 2007), rejecting not only EU institutions but the entire project of integration (Hainsworth et al., 2004; Gauchet et al., 2016). It opposed Maastricht and Lisbon, denounced the European Central Bank, called for a referendum on EU membership, campaigned for "Frexit", Schengen exit, and a return to the French franc in place of the euro (Ivaldi, 2019).

This position began to shift following the 2017 presidential election, when Marine Le Pen recalibrated the party's message under the broader strategy of "dédiabolisation". Since then, the RN has abandoned calls for Frexit or a return to the franc, adopting instead what can be described as "soft" Euroscepticism (Ivaldi, 2019). According to Le Pen, the party is now "pro-European" (Lorimer, 2020), but of a Europe that prioritises sovereignty, security, and cultural identity (Gauchet et al., 2016).

Thus, the party seeks to maintain a delicate balance: presenting itself as pro-European while sustaining a strong critique of what it portrays as the EU's failures. This balancing act has been shaped by external crises. Brexit prompted the abandonment of Frexit rhetoric, as the British experience revealed the risks of exit. The COVID-19 pandemic offered grounds to criticise the EU's inability to guarantee medical self-sufficiency, reinforcing calls for greater sovereignty without reopening the withdrawal debate. The war in Ukraine forced Le Pen to recalibrate once more, distancing herself from past sympathy for Russia by condemning the invasion, yet warning against sanctions and EU alignment with NATO, often framed as detrimental to French interests. Taken together, these crises illustrate how the RN adjusts its discourse to keep a Eurosceptic tone without embracing rupture, always returning to the core theme of sovereignty while carefully avoiding positions that would alienate more moderate voters (Ivaldi, 2019).

3.2) La France Insoumise (LFI)

LFI's Euroscepticism stems from egalitarian critiques of neoliberalism. It long targeted the Stability and Growth Pact and the ECB's authority as undemocratic. In the late 2010s it promoted a dual strategy: Plan A (renegotiation of treaties) and Plan B (disobedience to what it perceived as harmful EU rules) if Plan A did not work out. Unlike RN, it never advocated Frexit (although it did threaten its use as a negotiating strategy), instead seeking transformation from within. Over time, this strategy faded into a softer but consistent Euroscepticism, focused on EU fiscal, monetary, agricultural, and competition policies. Its critique reflects radical left populism grounded in redistribution and democracy.

International crises reinforced its critical view of the EU. COVID confirmed its critique of neoliberalism through attacks on vaccine procurement and fiscal rigidity. Gaza sharpened its human rights discourse: LFI accuses the EU of complicity in what it calls Israeli genocide on Palestinians. Donald Trump's return has been invoked to justify calls for a more autonomous and ecological Europe, less dependent on the U.S. and less aligned with what LFI depicts as authoritarian or fascistic tendencies in global politics. These crises illustrate how LFI ties Euroscepticism to broader ideological commitments – rejection of neoliberalism, demand for solidarity, and defence of democratic accountability.

3.3) Reconquête (R!)

Reconquête's Euroscepticism is framed through identity. The EU is denounced as complicit in French decline, due to open borders and multiculturalism. R! has not demanded Frexit but calls for limiting EU competences on migration and sovereignty. Its stance combines hard rejection in rhetoric with softer practice.

The war in Ukraine exposed Zemmour's pro-Russian inclinations: he predicted there would be no invasion, then argued that peace required security guarantees to Moscow, while accusing the EU of prolonging the conflict and turning Ukrainians into "cannon fodder." More recently, the election of Donald Trump has been invoked as part of a broader civilisational shift: for Zemmour, Trump and J.D. Vance symbolise a popular awakening across the Western world, reclaiming identity and sovereignty. This makes him feel less isolated in his crusade against immigration, while at the same time sharpening his criticism of the EU, which he contrasts with what he depicts as Trump's "pragmatism."

Despite their deep ideological differences, which lead them to oppose the EU on different grounds, all the populist parties that are critical of the EU, use a populist narrative that opposes "the people" to "the elite". They all claim to defend ordinary citizens, whether seen as a culturally unified nation or as a diverse and socially disadvantaged collective against

distant and unaccountable elites. Non-populist Eurosceptic actors, on the other hand, oppose the EU on legal, philosophical or technical grounds rather than on the basis of a specific idea of the people against the elite.

3.4) Non-populist Euroscepticism

It is also important to note that not all forms of Euroscepticism in France take a populist form. Beyond RN, Reconquête, and LFI, other political actors have expressed reservations about.

European integration without explicitly mobilising the antagonism between "the people" and "the elites." Segments of the traditional Gaullist right and sovereigntist figures such as Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, or parts of the Socialist left associated with Jean-Pierre Chevènement for instance, have long defended the primacy of national sovereignty on institutional, constitutional, and legal or economic grounds, often in the name of republican independence rather than appeals to popular mobilization against elites.

The most prominent example of non-populist Euroscepticism that comes to mind, however, is probably François Asselineau and his Union Populaire Républicaine (UPR). This party DNA is built around France's immediate withdrawal from the EU, NATO, and the euro, but the rhetoric is largely framed in philosophical, legalistic or constitutional terms, emphasising treaty clauses and questions of state competence rather than populist appeals.

These examples show that while populism and Euroscepticism often intersect in France, they are not synonymous: one can find more technocratic, legalistic, or ideational expressions of Euroscepticism that are detached from what is usually considered to be "populist", especially the traditional "people vs elite" rhetoric.

While Euroscepticism can often been found, in various forms, in the discourse of France's major populist parties, it can, however, hardly be said to be their defining trait. If asked what comes to mind first when hearing the names RN, R! or LFI, most French citizens would likely point to issues such as security, immigration, or radical left social justice rather than opposition to the European Union. RN's brand centres on national identity and immigration; R! is almost entirely defined by the "Great Replacement"; and LFI prioritises redistribution and democratic reform. Each of these parties criticises the EU, often harshly, but none defines itself primarily by Euroscepticism. They cooperate with like-minded parties across Europe, hold seats in the European Parliament, and actively encourage their supporters to participate in European elections. This confirms that the EU is treated more as an arena for political competition than as an object of outright rejection – this dynamic was further illustrated by the 2025 court ruling that sentenced Marine Le Pen to two years of ineligibility as a presidential candidate for the misuse of EU funds and resources in the interests of the RN. While RN rejects all accusations as politically motivated, the case points to the fact that the EU can even be used both as a financial resource and a political stage for domestic battles. This stands in contrast with explicitly sovereigntist actors such as François Asselineau's Union Populaire Républicaine (UPR), for whom leaving the EU – and NATO – is the central project.

4) Responses to Euroscepticism and consequences

Mainstream French parties, including centrist *Renaissance* (RE), the centre-left *Parti Socialiste* (PS), centre-right *Les Républicains* (LR), and green *Europe Écologie Les Verts* (EELV), have generally maintained a strong pro-European stance. They often portray populist Euroscepticism as politically irresponsible or strategically short-sighted, warning that such positions could weaken France's influence within the EU and reduce its ability to act on the global stage (Bortun, 2022). Among them, President Emmanuel Macron has been the most vocal defender of European integration. Since his election, he has consistently presented the EU not as a constraint but as a means of restoring real sovereignty in an increasingly interdependent and unstable world, and he has repeatedly clashed with Marine Le Pen on these questions during presidential debates (Gauchet et al., 2023; Ivaldi, 2019). In Meguid's terms, Renaissance has therefore adopted a largely adversarial strategy, directly contesting populist Eurosceptic narratives and defending the EU as a source of power rather than decline.

By contrast, LR and, to a lesser extent, PS have sometimes displayed more accommodative tendencies. While remaining broadly pro-European, they have occasionally adjusted their discourse on issues such as border management, migration, fiscal flexibility, or national sovereignty in response to the electoral pressure exerted by populist actors. Rather than endorsing Euroscepticism as such, these parties have selectively incorporated some of its themes in order to remain politically competitive. EELV, for its part, has remained more consistently adversarial, defending European cooperation while criticising nationalist and sovereigntist attacks on the EU.

Even though neither Rassemblement National (RN) nor La France Insoumise (LFI) has held executive power, their criticism of the EU and of domestic elites has clearly influenced the national debate. Questions such as migration,

democratic legitimacy, fiscal governance, sovereignty, and the role France and the EU should play in major international crises have moved to the centre of public discussion. Positions once considered marginal have reshaped the way these issues are framed, forcing mainstream parties either to reject them openly or to partially adapt their own language. In that sense, populism and Euroscepticism can no longer be dismissed as fringe phenomena: they have become structural forces in contemporary French politics, even if Euroscepticism remains secondary to other core issues such as immigration, identity, or social justice.

5) Conclusion

France provides a rich landscape for examining the intersection between populism and Euroscepticism. Both have been mobilised in various forms, but they hold unequal weight. Populism has become a structural force, while Euroscepticism is best described as moderate and flexible. Major populist parties are defined above all by national identity, security, immigration, social justice, or international solidarity, not by opposition to Europe. RN abandoned Frexit, LFI dropped disobedience strategies, while UPR – explicitly Eurosceptic – remains marginal. In short, Euroscepticism in France has not yet achieved the intensity of mobilisation that led the UK to Brexit, nor the structural scepticism that prevents Norway or Switzerland from joining the EU. France remains a central and enduring EU member, with populism reshaping domestic politics far more than Euroscepticism has altered its European commitments.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No data associated with this article.

References

Andreadis I, Vasilopoulou S: **The populism-euroscepticism nexus in a contested Europe: The EUPopLink COST Action [version 1; peer review: 3 approved].** *Open Res Europe.* 2026; **6**: 27.
PubMed Abstract | **Publisher Full Text** | **Free Full Text**

Lorimer M, Roch J, van Kessel S: **Populism, euroscepticism, and the populism-euroscepticism nexus [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review].** *Open Res Europe.* 2026; **6**: 73.
Publisher Full Text

Bortun V: **Plan B for Europe: The Birth of 'Disobedient Euroscepticism'?** *Journal of Common Market Studies.* 2022; **60**(5): 1416–1431.
Publisher Full Text

Gauchet M, *et al.*: *Comprendre le malheur français.* Paris: Stock; 2016.

Hainsworth P, O'Brien C, Mitchell P: **Defending the Nation: The Politics of Euroscepticism on the French Right.** Harmsen R, Spiering M, editors. *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration.* Amsterdam: Rodopi; 2004.
Publisher Full Text

Ivaldi G: **Populism in France: A Comparative Perspective.** Stockemer D, editor. *Populism Around the World: A Comparative Perspective.* Cham: Springer; 2019; pp. 27–48.
Publisher Full Text

Lorimer M: **Europe as Ideological Resource: The Case of the Rassemblement National.** *Journal of European Public Policy.* 2020; **27**(9): 1388–1405. (Special Issue: Ideologies and the European Union), edited by Carlo Invernizzi Accetti and Jonathan White.
Publisher Full Text

March L: *Radical Left Parties in Europe.* London: Routledge; 2012.
Publisher Full Text

Mudde C: *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2007.
Publisher Full Text

Rydgren J: *The Populist Challenge: Political Protest and Ethno-nationalist Mobilization in France.* New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books; 2004.
Publisher Full Text

Taggart P, Szczerbiak A: **Contemporary Euroscepticism in the Party Systems of the European Union Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe.** *European Journal of Political Research.* 2004; **43**(1): 1–27.
Publisher Full Text

Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ? ?

Version 1

Reviewer Report 10 June 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.25557.r74447

© **2026 Gaudino U.** This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

?

Ugo Gaudino
University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

I think the report is very good but needs some minor revisions before being indexed. It needs to provide a couple of more recent references about the RN and LFI, and to make the case that Reconquest is a populist party (otherwise, I would suggest discussing it in the section on non-populist Eurosceptics).

- You should give a deeper assessment of the profile of the electors of the RN, taking into account the recent 2022 and 2024 elections and providing more recent data. More solid evidence is needed about your assertions on “working-class” electors, as the concept of working-class is quite fluid and changes across countries.
- I am unsure about the categorization of Reconquest as a populist party. While it is out of question that Zemmour promotes Eurosceptic and racist narratives and that he dislikes the EU, the party looks more like a national-conservative one rather than a typical radical right populist. Zemmour has many times underlined the differences between him and Marine Le Pen’s more social-populist vision in the economy.

If you want to make the case about Zemmour’s populism, you could mention academic research showing so. In general, this section also lacks references and data.

- It is a simplification to say that LFI expresses strong solidarity with Ukraine (check Wondreys et el. 2025, The British Journal of Politics and International Relations 2025, Vol. 27(3) 696 –719). Likewise, I would find a better word than “multiculturalism”, which seems to imply ideological proximity with the British multicultural model. Mélenchon is still very attached to French laïcité. See U. Gaudino 2025 in European Journal of International Security and Bonansinga D. 2022 in British Journal of Politics and International Relations
- The report would be stronger with at least one reference to the French history of Eurosceptic positions (at the very least the referendum of 2005 on the European constitution, but it is at least since De Gaulle that the country showed some sovereigntist position regarding common policies, such as the agricultural one).
- Structurally, I think Reconquest should be 3.2 and LFI 3.3, if you want to keep the section on Reconquest (in this case, you really need to make the case that the party is populist!). Otherwise, why don’t include Reconquest in the section on non-populist Euroscepticism?

- In 3.2, you need at least to mention that Mélenchon's euroscepticism grew on the backdrop of his opposition to the EU constitution referendum in 2005, which was a key moment to understand his political evolution to the Left of the Socialist Party.
- I agree with the arguments and content of sections 4 and 5, which are well written and insightful.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Comparative politics, populism, French parties, racism

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 08 June 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.25557.r74442

© 2026 Alekseev A. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

?

Alexander Alekseev
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

I thank you for the opportunity to review this piece. It offers a timely contribution on the scholarly discussions of populism and Euroscepticism.

The report offers a brief yet thorough overview of key populist and Eurosceptic actors on the French political landscape, their discourses and core policy positions, as well as recent developments and shifts in them. It also briefly discusses non-populist Euroscepticism and provides an overview of responses by French mainstream political parties to Euroscepticism.

The report has clear strengths, but there are still substantial and structural problems with the current version that the author must address .

First and foremost, the author wrote a piece that, in principle, must be read without any supplemental materials. Thus, the report should clearly state the definitions of populism and Euroscepticism used in the text rather than simply referring to the article by Lorimer et al.

The author provides a brief account of the historical trajectories of populist and Eurosceptic parties in France. However, in the case of the National Rally, the report would hugely benefit from a more detailed discussion of party developments and divergences between the period under Jean-Marie Le Pen and the period under Marine Le Pen. What has happened after Jordan Bardella took over, at least formally, the party presidency?

- refer 1

When discussing the RN electorate, it is probably important to mention the geographic divide as the RN is popular not only in deindustrialising North and East of France but also in relatively well-off Southern France, especially PACA - and for completely different sets of reasons. See Section LA RECONQUÊTE ÉLECTORALE ET MILITANTE in:

- refer 2

It is also important to provide references for claims that are subject to debate. For example, when the author mentions that '[c]ritics have also accused it *[the RN]* of sympathising with Putin’s Russia and Trump’s America', the first part of the claim can be substantiated by references to Shekhovtsov, however, the second part - related to sympathies for Trump's America - is more controversial in academia as the RN has consistently stressed French nationalism and anti-Atlanticism in policy debates (https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/rench-presidential-election-2022-irreconcilable-clash-between-world-views-and-mediterranean-perspectives-Daguzan-IEMedYearbook2022.pdf) .

- refer 3

The discussion of the Reconquête party is more problematic. First, it does not contain any references to academic publications despite ample literature on R! in general and Éric Zemmour's trajectory in particular. See, for instance:

- refer 4

Unfortunately, this section also contains factual mistakes. R! got a total of MEP in the aftermath of the 2024 European elections. Four of them - Marion Maréchal, Nicolas Bay, Guillaume Peltier and Laurence Trochu - joined a new political formation called Identité-Libertés, which is affiliated with the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the EP.

The discussion of the developments in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine would greatly benefit from engagement with relevant literature on the subject, in particular:

- refer 5

The discussion of left-wing populism and Euroscepticism is incomplete without at least some engagement with its long history in France. However, more recent developments and in particular the analysis of LFI's discourses and policy positions cannot avoid engaging with relevant literature

specifically addressing LFI:

- refer 6,7

The author also mentions Meguid ('In Meguid's terms, Renaissance has therefore adopted a largely adversarial strategy, directly contesting populist Eurosceptic narratives and defending the EU as a source of power rather than decline'), but it is not clear who or what Meguid is, as there are no references to them.

Finally, the piece would also benefit from a more detailed engagement with the conclusions stated in the abstract. In the current version of the text the following claim should be further elaborated in the concluding section:

Although both populism and Euroscepticism are present across the French political spectrum, they do not carry equal weight. Populism has become a structural and enduring feature of French political competition, whereas Euroscepticism has generally remained softer, more selective, and less central to party identity to such an extent that is has not become a defining feature of French politics. The French case therefore highlights a configuration in which populism is strong and durable, while Euroscepticism remains comparatively moderate, flexible, and politically secondary.
All in all, the piece has all the key elements in place. I am sure that the author will be able to address all the remaining challenges and wish them the best of luck.

References

1. Stockemer, D. (2018). The Front National in France: Continuity and Change Under Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen. Springer.
2. Crépon, S., Dézé, A., & Mayer, N. (Eds). (2015). Les faux-semblants du Front national. Presses de Sciences Po. Cairn.info. https://www.cairn.info/les-faux-semblants-du-front-national--9782724618105.htm.
3. Shekhovtsov, A. (2017). Russia and the Western Far Right (1st edn). Routledge.
4. Ivaldi, G. (2022). Marine Le Pen, Éric Zemmour: Social-populisme contre caputalisme populaire. Le Baromètre de la confiance politique, (13).
5. CNRS-CEVIPOF-Sciences Po Paris, Ivaldi G: The impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on radical right-wing populism in France. 2023. Publisher Full Text
6. Chazel L: Left-Wing Populism and Sovereignty: An Analysis of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Discourse (2011–2022). 183-209 Publisher Full Text
7. Agustín, Ó. G. (2020). Left-wing populism: The politics of the people. Emerald Publishing.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?

Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: political science; comparative politics; conceptual history; discourse studies; French politics

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.