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## EDITORIAL

# The Evolving Political Discourse of Movement-Parties: The Case of La France Insoumise – Nouveau Front Populaire in the 2024 French Legislative Elections

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the evolving political discourse of La France Insoumise (LFI) during the 2024 French legislative elections, following the unexpected dissolution of the National Assembly by President Macron. These elections led to the creation of the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP), a left-wing coalition that included previously opposed parties like the Parti Socialiste (PS). The study explores whether LFI's discourse, traditionally opposed to mainstream parties, has shifted.

Combining visual, content and discourse analysis, the paper analyzes 10 speeches by LFI leaders, focusing on framing and discourse evolution. It finds that LFI's opposition to mainstream parties has softened, emphasizing unity against the far-right Rassemblement National (RN). However, LFI maintains its left-wing populist themes, particularly appeals to the people and national identity.

This research sheds light on how movement-parties adapt their rhetoric when institutionalized, offering insights into the dynamics of contemporary populism in Europe.

**KEYWORDS:** French Politics, La France Insoumise, Movement-Parties, Political Discourse Analysis, Populism

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## 1. Introduction

The 2024 French legislative elections were called unexpectedly, following the European elections in June of the same year and the sudden dissolution of the National Assembly by President Macron. Due to their unprecedented nature and the outcomes produced, these elections represent a political upheaval for the French system. Primarily, the early nature of the elections is a key novelty: for the first time since the 2000

constitutional reform, which shortened the presidential term from seven to five years, the legislative elections did not coincide with the presidential ones. This gave them a level of media attention and voter turnout comparable to first-order elections (Reiff and Schmitt 1980). Given the great novelty and unexpected nature of these elections, it was deemed worthwhile to explore them further within this work.

This paper aims to analyze the political discourse of La France Insoumise (LFI) during these elections, through the electoral speeches of some of its main leaders in central and public office. The goal is to examine how the political discourse was articulated, seeking to identify the evolution of this movement-party. Particular attention is paid to the unique context of the left-wing coalition formed for these elections, namely the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP), which brought together LFI and all the main progressive parties such as the Parti Socialiste (PS), the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV), Place Publique (PP), and other minor organizations.

This growing, albeit non-linear, dialogue between LFI and the mainstream parties, once considered rivals—particularly the PS—seems to be an innovative aspect worth analyzing and may have influenced the construction of the political discourse. Indeed, existing literature on LFI and movement-parties has highlighted how a distinctive characteristic of their framing is their clear opposition to mainstream parties (Kitschelt 2006; della Porta et al. 2017). Thus, in attempting to contribute to the discussion on the evolution of movement-parties, this paper will seek to verify whether LFI's discourse is changing following its institutionalization and increasing interaction with traditional parties.

As mentioned, the unprecedented nature of these elections lies in both their timing and outcomes. Since the 2000 reform reduced the presidential term to five years, presidential and legislative elections have typically been synchronized, occurring in the same year with a six-week interval: presidential elections in late April and legislative elections in early June. This alignment has profoundly impacted the French political system, reinforcing presidential power and fostering hyper-presidentialism (Mitrache 2024) while reducing the likelihood of cohabitation. Before the 2000 reform, staggered election schedules could result in different parties controlling the presidency and National Assembly, necessitating cohabitation. For instance, the socialist president François Mitterrand appointed neo-Gaullist prime ministers Jacques Chirac (1986) and Édouard Balladur (1993), while Jacques Chirac himself, as president, appointed socialist Lionel Jospin (1997). The end of Jospin's government in 2002 marked the conclusion of cohabitations, which had previously counterbalanced presidential dominance. Nevertheless, this reform made cohabitation less likely but not impossible: if the president faces a hostile parliamentary majority, he would be *de facto* forced to appoint a cohabitation government. This was the strategy of the left in the 2022 elections, where, after their defeat in the presidential race, they united in the NUPES coalition for the legislative elections to pressure Macron into cohabiting with a left-wing prime minister, likely Mélenchon. However, this goal was not achieved, even though Macron's coalition, Ensemble (ENS), failed to secure an absolute majority, leading to the two minority governments of Elisabeth Borne and Gabriel Attal.

The declining support for the presidential bloc during 2022-2024, marked by leftist protests against pension reform, the RN's ascent and the European election debacle, prompted Macron's unexpected decision to dissolve the National Assembly prematurely on June 9, 2024, while polls were still open. This decision came as a shock, not least because of the unilateral manner in which it was made, such that the leaders of Macron's party and

Attal himself were not consulted but only informed a few hours before the announcement (Chabal and Behrent 2024). The European elections ended with a resounding victory for the RN, leading with 31.37%, followed by the presidential bloc at 14.60% and the electoral cartel formed by PS-PP at 13.83%. LFI collapsed to fourth place at 9.89%.

The following legislative elections gained significant importance due to widespread fears that the RN might convert its European victory into a more impactful victory in the legislative elections, allowing it to appoint, for the first time, a far-right prime minister. However, the outcomes of these elections, held on June 30 (first round) and July 7 (second round), were as surprising as the manner in which they were called.

The French electoral law for legislative elections uses a two-round majority system. France is divided into 577 constituencies, each of which elects a deputy to the National Assembly. In the first round, a candidate can be elected if they obtain an absolute majority of the votes cast and at least 25% of the votes of registered voters. If no candidate meets these criteria, a second round is held, where candidates who received at least 12.5% of the votes from registered voters participate. In the second round, the candidate who receives the most votes wins the seat. The elected deputies serve for five years, unless the National Assembly is dissolved early.

The first round, held on June 30, saw the RN take first place, repeating its excellent performance from the European elections, from which it emerged as a clear winner. This was the first time that the RN placed first in the first round of legislative elections. Led by Jordan Bardella, the RN and its allies from the right of Éric Ciotti's *Républicains* (UDX) collectively obtained about 33% of the votes cast. Although this was below the results predicted by some polls, these results secured the RN victory in 38 constituencies in the first round and qualification in another 451.

According to projections presented by television broadcasters on the evening of the first round, with more than 300 triangular contests before 224 withdrawals in the following two days, the RN was initially seen as capable of securing a large relative majority, if not an absolute majority (La Montagne, June 30, 2024). Furthermore, the first round saw a strong increase in voter turnout, reaching 66.71% of registered voters, compared to 47.51% in 2022.

The shocking result of the first round set the stage for a complete reversal of the election outcomes in the second round. In light of the very real possibility that the RN could secure a majority in the Assembly and appoint the prime minister, the NFP and ENS, Macron's coalition, entered into a series of withdrawal agreements. More precisely, without the need to establish an explicit political pact, both the left and center coalitions decided to withdraw their candidates who finished third in triangular contests, rediscovering a strategic tradition already established in France.

In the French context, a "withdrawal agreement" (transl. "*accord de désistement*") refers to a more or less explicit understanding between candidates who withdraw from the second round of elections to prevent the victory of an unfavorable candidate, thereby facilitating another candidate considered ideologically or strategically closer. In these elections, the rationale behind the withdrawal agreements was to prevent the victory of the common adversary, namely the RN. This type of agreement is often utilized in so-called "triangular contests" where three competitive candidates advance to the second round. Thus, a candidate in third place, with lower chances of winning, decides to withdraw to increase the chances of victory for a

candidate ideologically closer. This strategy is not always applied uniformly, leading to situations in some constituencies where no such agreements were reached.

As a result, despite the withdrawal agreements, even though the RN secured more absolute votes than the other parties, it did not manage to obtain a relative majority of the seats, positioning itself behind the NFP and even ENS. However, it is essential to keep in mind that counting absolute votes can be misleading, given that both the NFP and ENS withdrew candidates from various constituencies, thus foregoing potential votes in those areas. There were 215 withdrawals against the RN, which was defeated in 173 of these constituencies, winning in 42 (Franceinfo, July 8, 2024).

Aside from the NFP's victory, which positioned it at the top in terms of seats, no party secured an absolute majority of the seats in the National Assembly, complicating the government formation process. However, it is worth noting that French governments do not need a vote of confidence to take office; nonetheless, they can be dismissed through a motion of censure, which must be voted on by an absolute majority. In any case, despite the NFP securing more seats than the other coalitions, in September 2024, Macron appointed Michel Barnier from the *Républicains* (LR) as prime minister.

**Table 1. Results of the 2024 legislative elections**

LIST	I ROUND	II ROUND	SEATS
NFP	8 995 226 28,06%	7 004 725 25,68%	178
ENS	6 425 707 20,04%	6 313 808 23,14%	150
RN-UDX	10 647 914 33,21%	10 109 044 37,05%	142
LR	2 106 66 6,57%	1 474 650 5,41%	39
OTHERS AND NON-RELATED	/	/	68
TOT	32 057 946	27 279 713	577
TURNOUT	66,71%	66,63%	

**Source:** own elaboration from Ministry of the Interior and Overseas

Having established the context of the 2024 elections, the key assumptions in the literature on LFI and movement-parties will now be examined, before presenting the contribution.

## 2. Movement-parties and La France Insoumise

LFI is now a well-established political party within the French system. The literature devoted significant attention to this entity due to its challenging nature (De Vries and Hobolt 2020), which created real turbulence

within the French system, specifically within the left-wing spectrum, completely overturning the balance of power.

Before discussing its characteristics, the theoretical framework of movement-parties—closely followed by LFI due to its distinguishing genetic, organizational, and discursive traits—will be outlined.

## 2.1 A theoretical framework to understand LFI

In the long evolutionary chain of political parties, movement-parties might represent one of the latest stages. The first definition of movement-parties comes from Herbert Kitschelt (2006), who studied the rise of green parties in Europe, particularly interesting for their fluid and networked structure, an alternative to traditional parties and closely tied to environmental movements. In his analysis, although with some significant differences from green parties, radical right-wing populist parties that emerged in Europe in the 1980s are also included. Kitschelt defines movement-parties as “coalitions of political activists that emerge from social movements and attempt to transfer the organizational and strategic practices of movements into the arena of party competition” (Kitschelt 2006, p.280).

The main innovations of these actors, therefore, would be the union between the conventional repertoires of parties and the unconventional ones of movements, and the lack of a rigid organizational structure, replaced by a lighter, more networked, if not entirely spontaneous, one. Additionally, Kitschelt seems to emphasize the transitory nature of these new political actors. The decreasing importance of the issues that mobilized the party or the accountability that comes with holding government positions would lead movement-parties through a process of formalization. For these reasons, Kitschelt considers them as temporary phenomena, relatively rare from a comparative perspective.

However, this theoretical framework was revisited several years later by studies that analyzed parties that emerged in response to the 2008 crisis, which would be positioned halfway between political parties and social movements (della Porta et al. 2017). These works further developed Kitschelt’s framework, focusing in particular on the genesis and distinctive characteristics of these actors.

From a genetic point of view, the causes for the emergence of movement-parties are multiple. First, the transformation of cleavage structures, due to critical junctures like globalization or the 2008 crisis, brought forth new issues that were not represented by traditional parties. Secondly, favorable institutional conditions, such as proportional electoral systems and low entry thresholds, can facilitate the rise of new actors. Another factor is the crisis of mainstream parties, with new parties politicizing issues considered neglected by the latter. Finally, the mobilization of previously unrepresented, anti-system issues has favored the rise of movement-parties that framed themselves as privileged interlocutors of movements. In summary, the emergence of movement-parties is due to favorable conditions both in the arena of party competition and in that of social movements.

As mentioned, great attention has also been given to the characteristics of these parties (della Porta et al. 2017, 23):

- From an organizational standpoint, movement-parties often adopt participatory and networked structures. While they use digital platforms to build the most decentralized organizations possible, they may at times show tendencies toward leader-centric personalization. They certainly reject the rigidities of mass bureaucratic parties and the complexity of their internal decision-making processes.

- Regarding strategy, the disenchantment with traditional parties has offered great opportunities to these new actors. Indeed, they many have transitioned from the streets to Parliaments, if not directly into governments, in just a few years. Their main strategy is based on an innovative action repertoire, balancing protest activities with electoral investments through both conventional and unconventional actions. These repertoires are drawn from the conventional and electoral strategies of parties, as well as from the protest strategies of social movements.

- As for framing, these parties present themselves as instruments of social movements to bring their demands, considered neglected by mainstream parties, into the institutional venues of representative democracy, with the promise of implementing them. Their typical narrative emphasizes hope for change, renewal, and the possibility of “giving the scepter of power to those who have never held it.”

These, then, are the main causes of the emergence and distinctive characteristics of movement-parties. It is evident how the 2008 crisis provided new impetus to these actors, who were previously sporadic in Western political systems. Now, provided these fundamental coordinates, the analysis turns to the case of LFI.

## 2.2 LFI as a movement-party

LFI is not mentioned in early studies on movement-parties due to essentially chronological reasons, as it only became relevant recently, later than other parties of this family did. However, it appears to align well with the distinctive characteristics discussed earlier.

In terms of its genesis, LFI was founded in 2016 through a nearly unilateral initiative by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who, learning from the 2012 elections—deemed disappointing—attempted a “populist shift” (Cervera-Marzal 2021; 2024) and reorganized his small far-left party, the Parti de Gauche (PdG). This party was founded in 2008 following an internal split from the PS, accused of being too moderate. Although Mélenchon did not formally dissolve the PdG in 2016, he integrated it within a broader political entity that did not even present itself as a “political party” but as a “movement,” emphasizing its capacity to transcend and incorporate multiple groups, thus adopting the name La France Insoumise (translated as “Unsubmissive France”). Running in the 2017 and 2022 elections, LFI grew steadily, eventually overturning the balance of power on the left, surpassing the PS, significantly weakened after Hollande’s term and Macron’s split. LFI established itself as a significant player, coming close to the second round of the presidential elections in both 2017 and 2022.

The real novelty of LFI lies in its organizational structure, although the literature has not focused much attention on this aspect. As mentioned, LFI presents itself as a “movement” rather than a “political party” to underscore its fluid and permeable nature. Furthermore, rejecting the excessive bureaucratic structures typical of 20th-century mass parties, it adopted the digital platform *Action Populaire*, through which it organizes its entire activism (Gerbaudo 2019). LFI also abandoned the traditional membership system in favour of free

online registration, which is sufficient to be considered a member. Additionally, it replaced representative democratic practices with a peculiar two-tier system, allowing the grassroots to organize relatively freely through the digital platform, while still adhering to vertical directives from the leadership. The leadership itself is not formally elected, as was the case in mass bureaucratic parties, but rather co-opted (Cervera-Marzal 2024). It is no coincidence that Jean-Luc Mélenchon does not hold the role of national coordinator of the party—currently held by Manuel Bompard—but instead that of a researcher at LFI's cultural foundation, the *La Boétie* Institute. Nevertheless, Mélenchon has consistently been the party's undisputed presidential candidate in every election in which LFI has participated (updated until 2022 presidential elections). By choosing a structure that the party itself defines as “gaseous,” LFI closely resembles the organizational forms of movement-parties. It shares part of its action and organizational repertoire with these same parties. Furthermore, as of 2024, together with Syriza, Podemos and the M5S, it participates in The Left, the far-left parliamentary group in the European Parliament.

Despite the limited interest in LFI's structure, what has garnered the most attention of the literature is its distinctive discursive style. Indeed, this movement-party has often been studied primarily in terms of the communication of its leader. Mélenchon's discursive style, often equated with that of LFI due to his role as founding father and perennial presidential candidate, has been described as pedagogical-professorial, aggressive and populist (Castaño 2018). However, their political discourse, before the 2017 “turning point” (Cervera-Marzal 2021), was more aligned with the traditional far-left than with left-wing populism. The initial goal of the PdG was, indeed, to “refound the left” and “unite the entire alternative left” (Alemagna and Allières 2018). Nevertheless, the disappointment of the 2012 elections led Mélenchon to make a shift in political discourse to expand his voter base. The party no longer presented itself as “*gauche de la gauche*” in a context—in France and beyond—where voters identified less with the history of the traditional left. Obviously, LFI does not deny that tradition but rejects the idea that “that history should become a barrier for those who do not share it” (Galles in Cervera-Marzal 2021, p.89). As Mélenchon himself declared, “by shifting from the left-right conflict to the one that opposes the oligarchy and the people, from class interest to the general human interest, I made a change in perspective that I consider to have significant unifying progressive power” (ibidem).

Thus, their discourse after the “populist turn” aligns with the definition of left-wing populism provided by Mouffe and Laclau, philosophers who inspire Mélenchon's political reflection. According to their definition, left-wing populist discourse is marked by several elements that are prominently featured in the rhetoric of movement-parties and LFI (Mouffe in Cervera-Marzal 2021, p.19):

- Critique of neoliberalism.
- Translation of the left-right cleavage into “people-oligarchy.”
- Presence of a charismatic leader.
- A commitment to bringing the demands of social movements into institutions.
- A re-evaluation of the role of emotions in political mobilization.
- A redefinition of right-wing political signifiers (such as nation, order, sovereignty).

Indeed, the populist discourse employed during the 2017 elections draws clear inspiration from other European parties, such as Podemos and Syriza, as well as the campaigns of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Bernie Sanders in the US—actors often classified as "left-wing populists" (Mouffe 2018) or movement-parties. Therefore, for its genetic, organizational and stylistic features, LFI can be defined as a movement-party itself. However, a more in-depth analysis will follow, after the research design is addressed in the next paragraph.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1 Research questions

The existing literature seems to have paid little attention to the evolution of movement-parties, focusing more on their genetic causes and distinctive characteristics. The aim of this work is to attempt to fill this gap at least in part: indeed, the institutionalization of LFI and the contact with once-criticized mainstream parties may have influenced the construction of political discourse. Therefore, based on this gap in the literature, the following research questions are proposed:

- How is the political discourse of La France Insoumise constructed within the Nouveau Front Populaire?
- Has participation in a coalition with previously opposed mainstream parties had an impact on the style of LFI?
- Does LFI's discourse continue to be left-wing populist, or does it lean towards that of the "classical" radical left?

#### 3.2 Methods

To answer these research questions, this study employs a multi-methodological approach to capture the nuances of LFI's discourse during the 2024 elections:

**Visual Analysis:** this methodological approach emphasizes the study of images as a significant medium for understanding the dynamics of collective actions (Doerr and Milman in della Porta 2014). Unlike traditional text-based analyses, visual methods capture the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of actors, shedding light on how these groups convey messages, construct identities and engage with broader societal discourses. This approach can be useful in order to explore the interplay between visual representations and the framing of political conflicts. Analyzing the evolution of LFI's visual communication, including campaign materials and coalition logos, the aim is to highlight the shifts in LFI's symbolic representation during the years, emphasizing its attempts to appeal to a broader electorate while maintaining its identity as a movement-party.

**Political Discourse Analysis (PDA):** this approach is defined as the analysis of the dialogue that occurs through social institutions among individuals and groups, as well as among these institutions themselves (Horbenko 2023). Therefore, PDA focuses on political speeches, written or oral, pronounced by all those actors participating in the polity (Van Dijk 1997). PDA thus evaluates the context in which the text is situated as a



fundamental component to consider. For the analysis, ten speeches from the main leaders of LFI were selected during press conferences, electoral rallies, and interviews. Once transcribed, they were qualitatively analyzed to trace the main themes and the construction of framing. The list of speeches is provided in the appendix (A).

**Content Analysis:** this approach serves to examine texts and uncover patterns and insights, widely used for studying speeches, manifestos and media. This unobtrusive method reduces biases like the 'interview effect' and enables analysis of large datasets and sensitive topics, offering deeper insights into decision-making processes (Halperin and Heat 2020). In this paper, it was employed to identify recurring themes and keywords in the selected speeches. This method complements PDA by providing a systematic analysis of the recurring words in the analyzed speeches.

### 3.3 Data collection

In order to analyze the political discourse of LFI during these elections, ten leaders' speeches were selected. These speeches have been analyzed using both discourse and content analysis. For our purpose, only speeches from LFI leaders were chosen, excluding those from other parties of the NFP: by isolating them, it becomes possible to examine both the continuities and differences with the style previously analyzed in the literature. It was deemed that including speeches from leaders of other parties in the coalition would confuse and blur LFI's style with those of these other actors.

The speeches were selected throughout the entire electoral campaign, particularly those preceding the first round, which consist of the presentation of candidates and the coalition, or appeals to vote; those that fall between the two electoral rounds; and those delivered at the end of the second round, concerning the final election results. The leaders whose speeches were analyzed are as follows, all holding prominent responsibilities within the party in central and public office:

- Jean-Luc Mélenchon: founder of LFI, co-president of the *La Boétie* Institute.
- Manuel Bompard: national coordinator of LFI.
- Mathilde Panot: deputy and group leader of LFI in the National Assembly.
- Younous Omarjee: MEP of LFI and vice-president of the European Parliament.

**Table 2. Analyzed speeches from LFI's leaders**

CODE	DATE	SPEECH	SPEAKER
D01	14/6	NFP presentation speech	Manuel Bompard
D02	28/6	Pre-first round appeal	Mathilde Panot
D03	30/6	Pre-first round appeal	Manuel Bompard
D04	30/6	Post-first round speech	Jean-Luc Mélenchon
D05	1/7	Post-first round interview	Manuel Bompard

D06	7/7	Post-second round speech	Mathilde Panot
D07	7/7	Post-second round speech	Younous Omarjee
D08	7/7	Post-second round speech	Jean-Luc Mélenchon
D09	7/7	Post-second round speech	Manuel Bompard
D10	7/7	Post-second round speech bis	Jean-Luc Mélenchon

**Source:** own elaboration

Regarding the visual analysis, the data consist of the logos and primary campaign posters used by LFI in this election, which were then compared with those from previous campaigns. Evidently, this analysis does not claim to be exhaustive and could be deepened with further qualitative and quantitative data: for instance, the sample of selected texts could be expanded, or the NFP manifesto could be studied through quantitative techniques. Thus, the goal is to stimulate a general discussion on the French elections of 2024 and a more specific one on the evolution of movement-parties. Following the outline of the research design, the analysis can now proceed.

## 4. The discourse of LFI-NFP in the 2024 Legislative Elections

### 4.1 The evolution of LFI's posters from 2012 to 2024

As mentioned before, the distinctive style of LFI gathered the attention of many scholars. Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party have often been analyzed through the lens of Mélenchon's leadership, characterized by a pedagogical, aggressive and populist style (Castaño 2018). Initially rooted in the traditional far-left, LFI underwent a significant shift in 2017 to broaden its appeal, moving from a "left-right" rhetoric to a "people-oligarchy" opposition. This strategic repositioning reflects an effort to transcend the historical limitations of the far-left and embrace a unifying populist narrative (Cervera-Marzal 2021). Inspired by other movement-parties, LFI's discourse now aligns with key tenets of left-wing populism, including critiques of neoliberalism, emotional mobilization and redefining political signifiers like sovereignty and nationhood (Mouffe 2018).

This rebranding operation has been criticized as a sort of "farewell to the working class," if not an outright betrayal of the cultural tradition of the left (Cervera-Marzal 2021, 26). Indeed, at party meetings, *L'Internationale* is no longer sung, but rather *La Marseillaise*; red flags are replaced by the French tricolour waving in the squares and at rallies, and the red background of the 2012 electoral posters fades into more neutral, if not outright faded, colours. In 2022, however, the colour that characterizes Mélenchon's campaign is purple, with shades reminiscent of red. In the poster, the word "*pouvoir*," more associated with traditionally far-left language, disappears, and instead, "*peuple*" is used in 2017 and "*autre monde possible*" in 2022, thus embracing a style closer to populism, appealing to the people and the possibility of building an alternative to the "corrupt" ruling oligarchy.

**Figure 1. Posters of the presidential elections of 2012, 2017, and 2022.**



A similar transformation also seems to affect the party's logo itself. Indeed, it abandons the red that characterized the PdG-FdG of 2012. On the contrary, the symbol of LFI in 2017 is orange and light blue, becoming purple in 2022. Even the logo of NUPES, the electoral coalition for the 2022 legislative elections that united the entire left, differs from the previous FdG coalition: it not only features the typical red of the left but also purple, which is the colour of LFI, along with green, which evokes environmentalism.

**Figure 2. Logos of PdG, FdG, LFI (2017), LFI (2022) and NUPES**





Almost in the opposite direction, the logo of the NFP for the 2024 elections represents a novelty and, to some extent, a return to the style of the FdG of 2012. First, the coalition uniting all the parties of the French left decides to invoke the experience of the Front Populaire of 1936, led by SFIO leader Léon Blum, in alliance with the radicals, communists, and other minor left-wing formations. The intention is clearly to draw upon the struggle against Nazism and Fascism of those years, modernizing it and adapting it to the fight against the radical right of the RN, the main opponent of the NFP. The chosen colour is red, with the label in white. On the right side, the symbols of the main parties that make up the coalition are displayed: EELV, LFI, PCF, and PS, followed below by the names of the minor affiliated parties. On the left side, there is a palette that seems to represent the parties within the coalition: the green of the ecologists, the socialist pink, the yellow of Place Public, the purple of LFI, and the dark red of the communists. The 2024 logo does not appear to connect with the left-wing populist style, characterized by more muted and neutral colours like in 2017; rather, it is evident that there is a historical reference to the anti-fascist experience of the popular fronts, linking to the classical tradition of the French and European left.

**Figure 3. Logo of NFP for 2024 legislative elections**



However, to determine whether a consistent stylistic change can be identified, the electoral speeches of LFI's leaders need to be studied. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, the discourse of LFI will be analyzed—isolating it—in order to verify the aforementioned points.

## 4.2 Key-words and themes in LFI's discourse

Primarily, a list of the most frequently used words within the analyzed speeches is presented, providing initial insights into the key themes and communication strategies. These words may indicate the values, priorities, and messages conveyed to the electorate. They will now be examined collectively, with irrelevant terms such as prepositions and fillers excluded:

**Table 3. Most recurring words in the analyzed speeches**

#	WORD	COUNT	PERCENTAGE FREQ.
1	France-français.e.s	55	0.85%
2	Populaire.s	48	0.75%
3	Nouveau-nouvelle	47	0.73%
4	Front	40	0.62%
5	Faire	34	0.53%
6	Pays	29	0.45%
7	Peuple	25	0.39%
8	Dire	25	0.39%
9	Premier-première.s	25	0.39%
10	Nation-national.e	23	0.36%
11	Vote-voter	20	0.31%
12	Rassemblement	19	0.30%
13	Monde	17	0.26%
14	Programme	16	0.25%
15	Majorité	14	0.22%

**Source:** own elaboration

The main frames that inductively emerge from these words are as follows and will be tested within the analyzed speeches in the next sections.

### 1. Calls to Nation and Patriotism:

*France-français.e.s*, *Nation-national.e*: the frequent use of words related to France suggests an appeal to patriotism. The discourse likely aims to awaken a sense of belonging, unity, and national pride among voters. It has already been observed that LFI, following its 2017 shift, has intensified references to national identity in its rhetoric (Cervera-Marzal 2021). Similarly, other left-wing populist parties have tried to redefine the

concept of "*nation*" in line with their own discourse, a concept which the right has traditionally dominated politically (Mouffe 2018).

## **2. Inclusion and Appeal to the People:**

*Populaire.s, Peuple*: the frequent use of "*populaire.s*" and "*peuple*" indicates a message of inclusion and direct dialogue with the people as the privileged reference of LFI's discourse.

## **3. Change and Renewal:**

*Nouveau-nouvelle, Premier-première.s*: these terms evoke the idea of a fresh start, change, and renewal. The use of "*nouveau/nouvelle*" and "*premier/première*" suggests that the electoral program could focus on a break from the past, particularly in opposition to Macron's neoliberal policies, which the NFP strongly opposes.

## **4. Identity and Opposition:**

*Rassemblement, Nouveau, Front, Populaire*: among the most frequently used words are the three terms that form the name of the coalition—Nouveau Front Populaire—as well as the name of its main adversary, the Rassemblement National. Their frequency may suggest a strong emphasis on the coalition's identity, in contrast to the opponents they seek to defeat.

## **5. Call to Action:**

*Faire, Dire, Vote-voter*: the verbs "*faire*," "*dire*," and "*voter*" evoke concreteness and commitment, highlighting the importance of action and participation as key factors for social and political change.

## **6. Program and Governance:**

*Programme, Majorité*: the mention of terms like "*programme*" and "*majorité*" indicates a focus on the capacity to govern and implement a concrete political plan. There is particular attention to the need for a parliamentary majority to carry out these policies.

In conclusion, LFI's discourse appears to revolve around terms that directly invoke national identity and the people, understood in an inclusive sense rather than an exclusive one, in line with left-wing populist rhetoric. As will be seen later, the "people" referred to here is the *demos*, the typical subject of left-wing protest populism, rather than the *ethnos*, which characterizes the exclusionary and identity-based populism of the right (Taguieff in Tarchi 2019). This message is combined with a clear distinction and opposition to the adversary, the radical right represented by the RN. Additionally, a pragmatic component is present in LFI's rhetoric, stressing the need for mobilization to build a solid parliamentary majority and implement the NFP's electoral program.

## **4.3 Analysis of the electoral speeches**

Following the analysis of the most recurring words, the actual analysis of the speeches can now proceed, within which these terms gain context. Once selected, the speeches were transcribed and coded according to the techniques of qualitative political discourse analysis. The main frames were identified, referring to the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational components of framing (Caiani 2023). The diagnostic component includes all those frames that provide a definition of the problem and, in particular, its responsible parties—namely, the opponents identified by LFI. Prognosis refers to the proposed political solution, directly linked to



the diagnosis and aimed at social change. Finally, motivational frames are those through which, based on the other elements, political actors invite political action and encourage mobilization.

The analysis of the speeches will now proceed. The first three speeches analyzed fall between the end of the European elections and the first round, scheduled for June 30, 2024. The described context is one of a historical moment, a crucial crossroads that France has reached, “an extraordinary political situation, full of dangers, with the threat of the far-right coming to power and its racist and antisocial project” (D01). Thus, the first opponent identified by LFI is precisely the far-right of the RN, which has a real chance of taking power, representing the main enemy to be defeated. A second opponent is President Emmanuel Macron, who had been leading the country until that moment, establishing a “disastrous world of Macronism” (D02), from which a “total break” (D01) is necessary. The NFP thus has the opportunity to implement a break program against Macron's neoliberal policies, particularly concerning the pension reform, minimum wage, price freezes, and the defense of free public services. Furthermore, these speeches emphasize the urgency and necessity of a peace program for the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza (D01 and D02). Finally, the NFP is not presented as a simple coalition of parties, but as “a new aggregation that goes well beyond, uniting numerous political organizations, but also associations, collectives, union leaders, people from the arts and culture, and intellectuals” (D01). It is therefore a political subject halfway between the arena of political parties and that of social movements, similar to what movement-parties would do.

**Table 4. Pre-first round speeches**

FRAME / SPEECHES	D01	D02	D03
DIAGNOSTIC	Historical moment, new phase but in a situation of danger.	Opposition to Le Pen's sister, the candidate in the constituency. Opposition to the evil world of Macronie.	Media lies portray the RN as the winner. The far right is the main enemy.
PROGNOSTIC	Risk of the far right taking power, which is racist and classist.	Defense of public services, against pension reform, increase in the minimum wage.	Need to form a NFP government to change everything.
MOTIVATIONAL	Need for a total break with Macron's program.	Appeal to mass voting for the NFP to implement the program.	Call for mass voting, door-to-door appeal.

**Source:** own elaboration

The subsequent speeches take place between the first and second rounds, focusing particularly on the analysis of results and calls for mobilization in view of the second round. The second round represents a unique opportunity, of “exceptional intensity” (D04), which could bring the NFP to power in order to implement a political program capable of “transforming the lives of the French people” (D05).

Macron is described as the true loser of the elections, portrayed as a neutralized opponent unable to present a prime minister close to him: Mélenchon states, “this vote has inflicted a heavy and indisputable defeat on the President and his candidates (...) tonight one thing is clear, Mr. Gabriel Attal will not be prime minister” (D04).

Given the now harmless nature of Macron's party, the NFP proposes a series of agreements to withdraw candidates to disadvantage the RN, specifically a “unconditional withdrawal of all candidates finishing third in cases where the RN is in the lead” (D05). Manuel Bompard cites the case of Élisabeth Borne, Macron's former prime minister and historical opponent of LFI: “in the Calvados constituency, the RN came in first. Former Prime Minister Borne came in second, and the LFI candidate came in third. He withdrew” (D05). Thus, due to the alleged neutralization of Macron, he transitions from being considered an opponent to a potential or instrumental ally in preventing the RN's victory.

Therefore, in the second round, the RN becomes the only real rival to defeat, and criticisms of Macron's mandate gradually diminish or disappear. The NFP presents the electorate with a historic choice: the RN with its racist and classist project or the NFP with a project of break and change. In this context, calls to vote become crucial, aiming to reach those who did not go to the polls and to mobilize the votes of young generations and urban peripheries.

**Table 5. Post-first round speeches**

FRAME / SPEECHES	D04	D05
DIAGNOSTIC	Macron has led the country to a turning point. The second round is a historic opportunity. The RN seeks a discriminatory France, and with Macron defeated, the RN is the only opponent; Attal won't be prime minister.	Macron is defeated in the first round and can't appoint a prime minister. The RN is the main threat and must be stopped.
PROGNOSTIC	The NFP coalition countered the RN in the first round. To oppose its racist agenda, an inclusive France is needed. Withdrawing in triangular elections is vital.	If the NFP wins, it can implement its social program to improve lives. Need to withdrawal agreements.
MOTIVATIONAL	A massive vote has spared us from disaster. Need to unite the people, withdraw third-party candidacies and mobilize youth and urban areas for the second round.	Call to mobilize: reach out to non-voters. Respect voters' free will, but block the RN and withdraw.

**Source:** own elaboration

The following speeches belong to LFI's concluding rally, which took place on the evening of the election results. A prominent theme that emerges is the decisive victory of the NFP, which has defeated the RN's discriminatory agenda, diverting “the threat of fascists to power” (D07). Unlike the speeches following the first round, there are now renewed references to Macron's mandate and the necessity to overcome it, with the election being described as “the third defeat of Emmanuel Macron and his world of values” (D06), which forces the President “to appoint a prime minister from the NFP or resign” (D08). As mentioned earlier, the withdrawal agreements during the second round likely softened the criticisms of Macron's candidates, at least during that phase of the campaign.

It is reiterated that the victory of the NFP allows for the immediate implementation of a humanist, social program that respects the cultures living and thriving in France, as opposed to the RN's project, which aims to exclude and ghettoize them. Thus, the victory of the left would enable the construction of a “new France”



(D08) and, in particular, “a new France that rises up, an anti-racist France, a France anchored in the values of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*” (D07).

In addition to heralding a new era in French history, the speeches call for not dissipating the energies gathered during the campaign and for continuing mobilization. In his closing speech, Manuel Bompard asserts that “the battle continues (...) and that there will be nothing without your mobilization, that there will be nothing if you go home, that there will be nothing if you do not make yourselves heard, if you do not mobilize” (D09). Thus, mobilization becomes essential to apply pressure on President Macron, consequently urging him to appoint an NFP government.

The electoral rally concludes with a new speech by Mélenchon, featuring his characteristic pedagogical and professor-like tones, in which he discusses the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, and invites the crowd to sing along (D10). The explanation of the anthem's lyrics is used to identify the people as a revolt and their opponents as the conservative nobility from whom power must be seized, almost directly linking to the experience of the French Revolution.

**Table 6. Post-second round speeches**

FRAME / SPEECHES	D06	D07	D08
DIAGNOSTIC	Incomplete victory in tough times, defeating the RN's racist project and Macron.	Moment of a New France. Defeat of the fascists. No mention of Macron.	Key issues are the abstention and the spreading hate. The President needs to resign.
PROGNOSTIC	A program based on respect for languages, religions, and cultures, with the potential to change lives.	Immediate implementation of an anti-racist, humanitarian program.	Opposite program, namely, a New France built with a social program and the union of all people.
MOTIVATIONAL	A historic victory, with France as a global example, celebrating youth, the suburbs, and activists.	New France that asserts itself thanks to the people's vote. Emphasis on the role of Overseas regions.	Emotion for an unprecedented historic victory, driven by the mobilization of united youth and working-class efforts.

FRAME / SPEECHES	D09	D10
DIAGNOSTIC	Macron's reforms, backed by the RN, oppose free education, wealth tax, and public services. They conflict with the NFP's program.	Use of the anthem to identify his enemies, such as the nobility.
PROGNOSTIC	The NFP's program is the only alternative: minimum wage, end pension reform, repeal immigration law.	Use of the anthem to pinpoint popular unity as the solution.

MOTIVATIONAL	A new page in French history. A moment to continue fighting without lowering our guard.	Singing the anthem to celebrate, linking to the French Revolution.
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**Source:** own elaboration

#### 4.4 Overall presentation of LFI's framing

Now, the main frames, their evolution across the campaign phases, and their contribution to the NFP's political discourse can be recapped.

**Table 7. Overall framing**

FRAMING	MAIN THEMES
DIAGNOSTIC	Uniqueness of the Moment Contrasting the RN Contrasting the Macronie
PROGNOSTIC	Program for a New France Social and Environmental Sustainability
MOTIVATIONAL	Appeals to Vote Appeals to Mobilization

**Source:** own elaboration

#### DIAGNOSTIC FRAMING

The themes that refer to the diagnostic component of framing seem to be essentially the following three:

1. *Uniqueness of the Moment*: the context in which the 2024 elections are taking place is portrayed as an unprecedented situation and a historic moment that cannot be repeated. The French people seem to be faced with a choice that will inevitably shape the country's future. The frame emphasizing the historicity of the moment appears to remain quite stable throughout all phases of the electoral campaign, consistently highlighting the crisis caused by Macron's policies, but also the opportunity to overturn them with the NFP government.
2. *Contrasting the RN*: the RN, labeled as a far-right party, is presented as the main opponent to be defeated, with its program of social and civil exclusion. Despite the substantial stability of this frame, after the first round, the RN emerges as the sole adversary to be defeated, given Macron's clear defeat, which instead becomes harmless and neutralized.
3. *Contrasting the Macronie*: the neoliberal policies of President Macron are depicted as the diagnosis that triggered the crisis the Republic is experiencing. As will be seen shortly, the NFP's program is constructed precisely as a project of rupture and change compared to the policies that characterized Macron's mandate. After the first round, Macron is considered the first of the defeated, and with the fading possibility that he

can form a government on his own, the attacks on his party also diminish in favor of a strategy of withdrawal.

### **PROGNOSTIC FRAMING**

Once the responsible parties for the problem have been identified in the figures of Macron and the RN, the discourse of LFI insists on identifying a possible solution and way out of the situation:

1. *Program for a New France*: the program proposed by LFI and the NFP aims to construct a New France that is opposed to both the neoliberal one represented by Macron, which has already materialized in the President's two terms, and to the classist and racist project of the RN, which has not yet been implemented.
2. *Social and Environmental Sustainability*: the NFP's program combines the protection of social rights with civil and environmental rights, alongside the goal of peace in the international context. The measures that are emphasized most vigorously include the reversal of Macron's pension reform, the increase of the minimum wage (SMIC), the price freeze, and the achievement of peace in Ukraine and Palestine.

### **MOTIVATIONAL FRAMING**

The motivational components seem to be the most substantial part of the narrative, consisting in a strong call to action:

1. *Appeals to Vote*: a fundamental part of this component consists of appeals to vote, both during the first and second rounds. To motivate voters and encourage them to go to the polls, the uniqueness of the moment and the possibility of achieving a significant turning point through the NFP's total rupture program are emphasized. After the first round, there is an emphasis on the necessity to call back those who did not vote to also defeat the RN, following the clear defeat of President Macron. Therefore, the motivation offered is linked to both the diagnosis and the prognosis of the problem.
2. *Appeals to Mobilization*: even after the second round, the LFI discourse insists on the necessity to continue mobilization and not limit oneself solely to the voting moment. The ultimate goal of this mobilization would be to exert pressure on the President to appoint an NFP government as soon as possible.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

The findings can now be summarized, and the research questions addressed. The first question concerns how the discourse of LFI is constructed within the NFP, specifically focusing on its fundamental characteristics. Firstly, it was noted how the discourse of LFI is profoundly influenced by the exceptional circumstances surrounding the 2024 legislative elections. A central area of importance is occupied by motivational framing, which becomes the most prominent component in the analyzed speeches. The literature has already noted that parties adopting a left-wing populist style place great emphasis on the role of emotions and exploit them to mobilize their supporters (Mouffe 2018; Nguyen 2019). However, in this context, the significant presence of motivational frames can also be explained by the impending election and the consequent need to encourage the electorate to go to the polls.

In all the analyzed speeches, there is ample space for appeals to electoral mobilization, calls for the vote from those who abstain, and also gratitude towards the constituencies that mobilized, particularly referring to younger generations and urban peripheries. Moreover, the electoral moment takes on greater relevance as it is depicted as a “crossroads of history” and a unique opportunity to oust President Macron, come to power, and prevent the far-right from taking control. The speeches reiterate the importance of continuing mobilization after the electoral moment to pressure the President to appoint a government of the NFP.

The prognostic framing, on the other hand, relates to the proposed solution to the identified problems. The prognosis offered by the NFP consists of the faithful application of the political program of the coalition, which is constructed in opposition to Macron’s neoliberal policies and would outline a model of a social and inclusive France, alternative to the racist and classist project of the RN. The measures that are emphasized include increasing the minimum wage, overcoming the pension reform, price control, ecological transition, and initiating peace negotiations in Ukraine and Palestine.

Regarding the diagnostic framing, it has been stated that the main responsible actors for the crisis in which France has been plunged, and thus the adversaries that LFI faces, are the RN as the maximum expression of the far-right in France, and President Macron, whose neoliberal policies are believed to have generated the aforementioned crisis more than any other. Therefore, the situation the country experiences during the 2024 elections is unique because Macron’s failed project is fading, but an even more dangerous project, the classist and racist one of the RN, is looming on the horizon.

The diagnostic component of the framing thus allows for the answering of the second research question: whether participating in the NFP, a coalition that includes some previously criticized mainstream actors, has impacted LFI’s discursive style. Certainly, a significant difference compared to this party’s traditional style emerges clearly: the mainstream left parties, particularly the PS, with which LFI formed the NFP coalition, are not considered adversaries to be fought within the political system. Thus, the strategic choice to ally with the PS, which was a traditional adversary, has led to a clear impact on LFI’s discursive style, transitioning from hostility towards the PS and other traditional actors to the necessity of allying with them to defeat the RN. Macron’s party itself becomes a potential ally with which to organize agreements of non-competition.

This change in the designation of adversaries is particularly relevant also because the literature has considered the distance from mainstream parties as a characteristic trait of movement-parties. Indeed, as previously mentioned, LFI was born out of the PdG, a small far-left party formed from an internal split within the PS, to which Mélenchon belonged before 2008. In recent years, LFI seems to have managed to overturn the balance of power with the PS, forcing it into an alliance.

However, the relations with the PS still do not appear to be entirely relaxed. Some frictions were observed both in the European elections of June 2024, when LFI and the PS ran separately due to proportional representation, and in the post-electoral phase of the same legislative elections, when the two parties struggled to agree on who should assume the role of prime minister in case of appointment. In fact, the name supported by LFI, that of the President of Réunion Huguette Bello, was vetoed by the PS, and conversely, the socialist candidate Laurence Taubiana was not accepted by LFI, throwing the coalition into a temporary state of paralysis. Subsequently, all parties in the NFP agreed on a third name, Lucie Castets, who, however, was not appointed as prime minister, excluding the left from the government. Despite these frictions, in LFI’s discourse, the PS and more generally mainstream parties seem to transition from traditional adversaries to potential allies, albeit not natural ones. As stated, this change in strategy, which shifts from “opposition to coalition,” has partially modified LFI’s own style. Two main reasons might explain this:

1. *Electoral-strategic reason*: LFI may have built an alliance with traditional parties, particularly with the PS, for reasons related to the electoral system and the imperative need to run for elections in a united front against the threat of the far-right. Even the withdrawal agreements established with Macron would respond to this need. It is therefore not excluded that in future occasions the PS or other mainstream parties may once again be portrayed as adversaries of LFI and part of the diagnosis of the problems identified by LFI.
2. *Ideological reason*: LFI may have formed an alliance with the PS because past divergences are now partially diminished. In fact, after years since its formation, LFI may have institutionalized itself, becoming a relevant actor in the French system and moderating the radical tones of its beginnings. Similarly, the PS may have experienced a partial “return to the left” following its internal crisis, similar to what other European social democratic parties have done, such as the Democratic Party (PD) in Italy and the Socialist Party (PSOE) in Spain.

Regarding LFI's discursive style in more detail, no further significant new developments are noted apart from these. The third research question addresses whether LFI's style can still be considered left-wing populist. The main stylistic elements of this populist discourse, such as inclusive appeals to the people and references to national identity, are still present and play a fundamental role in distinguishing itself from the style of other actors in the political system. More in-depth analyses could identify internal differences among the various leaders of LFI: in fact, Mélenchon's populist tone may be more pronounced compared to that of other party leaders, who might instead align more closely with the discourse of “classical” radical left.

Thus, despite LFI's style remaining quite similar to that already described in the literature, the real change appears to be of a strategic nature, which indeed leads LFI to approach the mainstream parties that were once criticized and opposed, with the prospect of preventing the advance of the far-right.

In any case, this work does not claim to be exhaustive; rather, it aims to provide some lines of debate and insights for future research. In particular, a comparative approach could further explore the relationship between movement-parties and their respective previously opposed mainstream parties, to verify whether their relationship has become more collaborative over the years, modifying the style and strategy of both.

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[https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/legislatives/infographies-resultats-des-legislatives-2024-les-desistements-pour-faire-barrage-au-rassemblement-national-ont-ils-fonctionne\\_6651813.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/legislatives/infographies-resultats-des-legislatives-2024-les-desistements-pour-faire-barrage-au-rassemblement-national-ont-ils-fonctionne_6651813.html)

## Appendix A – Speeches

D01: Bompard, M. 14/06/2024. *NFP presentation speech*.

[https://youtu.be/zRwZKnnQFpI?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs\\_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL](https://youtu.be/zRwZKnnQFpI?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL)

D02: Panot, M. 28/06/2024. *Pre-first round appeal*.

[https://youtu.be/\\_c7hA5ApNSo](https://youtu.be/_c7hA5ApNSo)

D03: Bompard, M. 30/06/2024. *Pre-first round appeal*.

[https://youtu.be/zIU1uIpLOk4?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs\\_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL](https://youtu.be/zIU1uIpLOk4?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL)

D04: Mélenchon, J.L. 30/06/2024. *Post-first round speech*.

[https://youtu.be/2bU4nAI7vBg?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs\\_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL](https://youtu.be/2bU4nAI7vBg?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL)

D05: Bompard, M. 01/07/2024. *Post-first round interview*.

<https://youtu.be/RQeZ3Nn2tOU>

D06: Panot, M. 07/07/2024. *Post-second round speech*.

D07: Younous, O. 07/07/2024. *Post-second round speech*.

D08: Mélenchon, J.L. 07/07/2024. *Post-second round speech*.

D09: Bompard, M. 07/07/2024. *Post-second round speech*.

D10: Mélenchon, J.L. 07/07/2024. *Post-second round speech bis*.

[https://youtu.be/vBkMPsudQ7A?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs\\_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL](https://youtu.be/vBkMPsudQ7A?list=PL49hPUZTPboXYYs_74WKkRdOgfXHVtNuL)