

Discourse of Suspension: Analysis of the National Rally's Nationalist and Populist Discourse in the Farmers' Protests

Javad Kouhestani 

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium
Email: mohammad.javad.kouhestani.maklavani@vub.be

How to cite this paper: Kouhestani, J. (2026). Discourse of Suspension: Analysis of the National Rally's Nationalist and Populist Discourse in the Farmers' Protests. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 16, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2026.161001>

Received: September 19, 2024

Accepted: November 17, 2025

Published: November 20, 2025

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Abstract

This study examines the discursive strategies of the National Rally (RN), a far-right political party in France, within the context of the farmers' protests against EU policies (2024). Utilizing a post-structuralist discourse theory, the research delves into how RN leaders, Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella, re-articulate the grievances of French farmers within nationalist and populist frameworks. The RN strategically employs populism to position itself against both external EU bureaucrats and internal elites like President Macron, aiming to consolidate power in the EU June election. By dissecting speeches, media representations, and key events, the research demonstrates the strategic use of populism to mobilize support and secure political power. It argues that RN's rhetoric sustains a "state of emergency" by creating a crisis narrative, crucial for maintaining their populist appeal. Furthermore, the paper examines the role of Lacanian fantasy in RN's discourse, suggesting that the perpetuation of an unsatisfied desire for resolving the crisis is central to their strategy in which the elites play the role of the enemy barrier of their desire fulfillment. The study applies discourse-theory (Laclau & Mouffe; Glynos & Howarth) to examine how the RN constructs meaning around the farmers' protests. A purposive corpus of speeches, party texts, and media coverage was coded for key signifiers and antagonisms to trace the re-articulation of farmers' grievances into nationalist and populist narratives.

Keywords

Discourse Theory, Populist Discourse, National Rally, Farmers' Protests

1. Introduction

In recent years, Europe's agricultural sector has faced growing challenges that

have fueled farmers' frustration and large-scale mobilization. Declining farm incomes, rising production costs, and market volatility have heavily burdened small and medium producers (Finger & Benni, 2021; Vinocur & Brzeziński, 2024). Stricter environmental rules under the reformed CAP and the Green Deal have further raised compliance costs and uncertainty over future subsidies (Pe'er & Lakner, 2020; Cuadros-Casanova et al., 2023). Farmers also protest unfair competition from free-trade agreements and cheap imports that undermine domestic production and food security (Boysen et al., 2022; Ferrari et al., 2025). In response, they have organized continent-wide demonstrations, road blockades, and tractor convoys demanding fair prices, protection from market volatility, and recognition of their economic role (Finger et al., 2024; Nagel et al., 2025).

The anger among farmers across Europe is not initially rooted in political ideology; rather, it is often a contextual reaction to certain EU policies perceived as threatening or discriminatory towards farmers. However, this does not mean that their expression of resentment will remain disconnected from political agendas. A conflict never emerges in an objective isolation, yet it is expressed through a *mediation* that can be "cultural", "social", or "political" (Moffitt, 2014; Torfing, 1999: p. 63). Using the post-structuralist approach of discourse theory, we gain insight into *how* this mediation shapes the contingent structure of meaning, by employing concepts such as "articulation" and "dislocation" to elucidate the underlying mechanisms (De Cleen et al., 2020; Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

In France, the far-right party known as National Rally (RN: *rassemblement national* in French), previously called National Front (FN: *Front National* in French), has actively engaged in the farmers' revolts against EU policies. Through speeches and media portrayals, prominent party figures such as Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella have used discursive practices to re-formulate the farmers' grievances within the party's nationalist and populist rhetoric. In addition to illustrating the discursive mechanisms of nationalism and populism within the RN, this article argues that the RN had used populism *strategically* to secure power in the EU election in June 2024. For this purpose, discourse theory is applied to examine the various representations of the RN in speeches, events, and media portrayals during this "state of emergency".

The last European electoral results confirm that the National Rally (RN) has significantly expanded its support among rural and agricultural voters, securing 31.4 percent of the national vote in the June 2024 European elections, its strongest performance to date (European Parliament, 2024). This surge, most visible in small rural communes and farming regions, especially in the regions called "La diagonale du vide" with low population density (Intercommunalités, 2024), followed months of farmer protests that amplified anti-elite and anti-EU sentiments. The consolidation of the RN's influence within France's agrarian landscape underscores the need to interrogate how the party discursively re-articulates farmers' material grievances into nationalist and populist narratives of protection, sovereignty, and crisis. This study explores the conceptual mechanisms of RN's "dis-

course of suspension” to explain how the RN sustains a permanent state of emergency—transforming unresolved demands into a source of political desire.

2. Approaching the Crisis and the RN's Adjacency

First, In the months leading up to the June 2024 EU election, the ongoing wave of farmers' protests across the European Union, which can be traced back to 2019, has reached a significant peak. Although there are common concerns in different regions, the interpretation of the conflict is more contextual than it might appear (Cokelaere & Brzeziński, 2024; Henley & Jones, 2024; Tanno & Liakos, 2024). Dutch farmers, for instance, place more emphasis on the reduced production due to the EU environmental regulations (Schaart, 2019; Tullis, 2023), specifically nitrogen emission measures, which also threatens their community image as a major agricultural exporter. Meanwhile, Ukraine-EU free-trade agreement, and the subsequent influx of Ukrainian agricultural imports, is perceived as an essential source of discontent for Polish and Czech farmers (Gijs et al., 2024; Murray, 2024). In France, compounded by the grievances against the cuts in subsidies for diesel fuel and low price of the products, the longstanding conflict with the global trade agreements of the 1990s has resurfaced in opposition to the EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement during the current demonstrations (Fowler & Armstrong, 2024; Reuters, 2024). The logic behind highlighting the differences in emphasis across these regions is not to overlook other reasons behind the protests, such as the unequal distribution of EU subsidies and GAEC 8, nor to ignore the shared concerns among all these regions. This variety, however, can indicate the regional importance of discursive practices in shaping the meaning of the current conflict.

The recurring gaps between institutional decision-making and social demands can be understood through what discourse theory terms dislocation—moments when established systems of meaning and representation fail to accommodate emerging grievances (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Torfing, 1999). Such dislocations open a discursive space in which new meanings and identities can be articulated, allowing political and social actors to invest in the conflict and redefine its terms. This proximity or adjacency between social discontent and political articulation is never predetermined; it is the outcome of competing attempts to fix meaning and claim representation. In this sense, the farmers' protests across Europe do not merely reveal economic discontent but expose a broader crisis of political signification, in which different actors strive to mediate, translate, and reframe the meaning of “the people”, “sovereignty”, and “Europe”.

In France, the political party that has invested politically and, as it will be discussed in the following, discursively in the gap between *French* farmers' demands and the EU policies is the RN. From their direct and fierce criticism of the Common Agricultural Policies (CAP) and free-trade agreements to their advocacy for exempting sanctions on Russia's gas and oil, the RN has historically portrayed itself as the protector of French farmers against the EU policies. Consequently, they not only gained significantly more popularity among farmers—35% com-

pared to 20% for Macron's Renaissance Party (Baralon, 2017)—but the Agricultural Show at the *Salon International de l'Agriculture* on February 24th also proved to be a media catastrophe for Macron. His arrival sparked a violent revolt, in stark contrast to the warm welcome and numerous selfies that Bardella and Le Pen received. Nevertheless, what does seem critical, if not dangerous, when analyzing the proximity and articulation of RN's political agenda with the farmers' demands? The following discussion will examine *how* the RN's nationalist and populist mechanisms play important roles in shaping their discourse around the farmers' protests.

3. Analytical Framework: Discourse Theory

This study adopts the post-structuralist approach of discourse theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and extended by Glynos and Howarth (2007). Within this framework, discourse is understood as a contingent system of meaning that organizes social relations through articulation—the linking of elements into partially fixed configurations around key nodal points (see Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Carpentier, 2010). The analysis therefore does not treat political language as a reflection of reality but as a constitutive practice that shapes how actors and conflicts are represented. This theoretical orientation is especially useful for understanding how political forces intervene in moments of dislocation, when existing structures of meaning are destabilized.

The corpus is a purposive sample of salient, widely-circulated texts and events that structure the conflict: public speeches and statements by Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella (e.g., Bardella's Marseille rally excerpt; Le Pen's remarks at the Salon International de l'Agriculture and the 2022 presidential debate), party documents (e.g., RN's ecology program pamphlet), media representations of the Agricultural Show (Feb. 24) and the wave of protests before the June 2024 EU election, and statements from major farmers' organizations (e.g., references to FNSEA and Coordination Rurale). I conducted close, iterative readings to code recurrent signifiers, metaphors, and oppositions; map displacements (e.g., from sectoral urgency to political urgency); and triangulate across speeches, events, and reporting to capture how meanings travel and sediment. The approach is interpretive and non-causal: the aim is not exhaustiveness or frequency counts but to explicate the discursive logics by which farmers' grievances are re-articulated and sustained as a state of emergency, culminating in the study's theorization of the discourse of suspension.

4. The First Rupture, Nationalism

Nationalism, through the lens of discourse theory, is not defined by enumerating the nation's descriptive features, but it is characterized by the "partial fixation" of the nodal point of "the nation" in a binary opposition (regional, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc.) between *us*, inside, and *them*, outside (Sutherland, 2005; De

Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). More precisely, the signifier “the nation” has no natural relation to a signified, such as the people who speak French; instead, its meaning is constructed through the presence of the *constitutive* “Other”—those who are not French (see the role of the Other in nationalism in Stavrakakis, 2007: p. 199). In addition to discourse theory, Micheal Freeden’s argument (1998) about nationalism, as a “thin-centered ideology”, helps us to understand how the “perimeter practices” of nationalism causes a fixation in the meaning of other signifiers situated in a spatial proximity. A land, for instance, is not just a land in a nationalist discourse but it becomes the nation’s landscape, getting its spatio-historical meaning from the mentioned us/them relationship (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). In the case of far-right nationalist discourse, specifically relevant to our analysis, there is not only a division between “us” and “them”, but there is also an assertion that the nation should have sovereignty over the land and protect it from external threats (Forchtner, 2019).

In the political literature, RN has been historically portrayed as a far-right nationalist party, even before being labeled as “populist” (Boukala & Tountasaki, 2019; Eger & Valdez, 2018; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). Despite Marine Le Pen’s attempts of “*dédiabolisation*” of the party’s xenophobic traditions (see Almeida, 2013), the nationalist binary, under the name of “protectionism” or defending French values, stands out in their ideological and media portrayal (Boukala & Tountasaki, 2019). The current gap between farmers and the EU fuels the RN’s us/them discourse, with the EU depicted as an external globalist threat undermining France’s natural beauty, production, and identity—themes recurrently emphasized at various events. To group multiple adversaries together, this antagonism extends to the agricultural sector itself. The visual representation of *French* cows—the true celebrities of the agricultural show, symbolizes them as the victimized emblem of the nation, placed in direct opposition to “low-quality” organic imports alongside other domestic food products. Even immigrants, frequently targeted as outsiders in far-right discourse (Wodak, 2015), are not exempt from this conflict. On different occasions, Le Pen notes that Moroccans come to France to work and, while mentioning their hard work, points out that they remit their earnings to their home country to buy property and live well, while “our” farmers struggle to purchase property due to their low salaries (see Tullis, 2023 for the same argument in the Netherlands’ context). Here, a wide range of signifiers, like farmers, land, cow, food, etc., appears to be connected to the nation as the nodal point of nationalism, and gets their meaning, or *significance*, from this articulation.

Although the mechanisms linking farmers’ dissatisfaction with the RN’s nationalist discourse have been illustrated, the *strategic* position of RN in the current conflict goes further. In a segment of Jordan Bardella’s speech among RN’s supporters in Marseille on March 3, a displacement in the mentioned nationalist rupture can be identified by the introduction of “the enemy” to “the people”:

What the EU wants is the great erasure of France which results in the decline of France at home, on its own soil. [...] And the great erasure has a name: **Emmanuel Macron**.

5. Moving Beyond, Populism

Like nationalism, there is a formal definition for populism according to discourse theory, which precludes positive or moralistic formulations (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; see also Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: p. 6 for the latter). The populist discourse is formed when the “empty signifier” of “the people”—the nodal point of populism, partially anchors to an oppositional position against “the elites” (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). According to Laclau (2005: p. 75), this contingent fixation of the signifier of the people causes the “symbolic unification” in the people’s unsatisfied demands and mobilizes them against the elites. This formal definition helps us, firstly, to understand the differences between nationalism and populism (see Breeze, 2018 regarding AFD and UKIP) and, secondly, to analyze the strategic usage of populism (De Cleen et al., 2018; see De Cleen, 2016 regarding Flemish Interest Party).

As De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) argue, there is a spatial disparity in the orientation of the binaries in nationalism and populism, in addition to the mentioned different nodal points. Nationalism constructs a horizontal (in/out) binary, whereas this direction is vertical (up/down) in populism, positioning the people as the “underdog” (De Cleen, 2017). The nationalist discourse, even if “the people” is used, signifies an “ethno-cultural” division, while populism depicts the people as suffering under the establishment (Stavrakakis et al., 2017). Understanding this distinction enables us to explain how the RN, alongside its nationalism, adopts populism as a *strategy* to secure power. To scrutinize this strategy, it is crucial to examine two points of *displacement* within the RN’s discourse in the current conflict.

First, RN re-formulates the farmers’ anger in a Manichean discourse of populism against the outside elites, EU bureaucrats, and inside elites, Macron and Renaissance party (see Henley & Jones, 2024; NYS, 2024). These two groups of elites are also linked in the RN’s discourse because the EU is not merely viewed as an external threat to the suffering French people (also suffering French farmers, land, cows, etc.), but “Macron’s Europe” is the real “enemy” of the people/farmers (referring to Bardella and Le Pen’s statements in the Paris Agricultural Show and their speeches before and after the event). Here, the farmers’ different objects of mobilization are *condensed*, or *displaced*, with the populist logic of “taking back power” from the enemy elite (see Torfing, 1999: p. 98). As Laclau (2005) argues, rhetorical displacement necessarily results in a false construction of meaning. This falsity, however, does not imply any ethical demonization of RN’s rhetorical practice; rather, it highlights the hegemonic operation of displacement as a representational process. In other words, the process of meaning-making itself is founded upon a false procedure, which opposes the notion of naturalness or any pre-exist-

ing fixity in language within the sphere of meaning.

Unlike discourse theorists, this mobilization appears “natural” for Le Pen (see her speech in Marseille on March 3), and “the people”, also their manifested demands, are considered to be homogeneous against the elites (This *supposed* homogeneity is not necessary in all populisms, see De Cleen et al., 2018: p. 7; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). This mechanism of “horizontal articulation” of demands, called the “chain of equivalences” by Laclau (2005: p. 171, *my emphasis*), is also intensified by the intentional silence of the historical disagreement between Le Pen and FNSEA, the largest farmers’ organization in France. Ironically, when Le Pen states that “you [Macron] have divided this country” she simultaneously suggests, discursively, that Macron is uniting the people against himself. As Stavrakakis et al. (2017) argue, the elite, represented here by Macron, serves as a “strategic amplifier” for the RN’s nationalist discourse by ignoring the demands of the French people and favoring outsiders (Figure 1).



Representation of the discursive shift from a nationalist inside/outside opposition toward a populist vertical antagonism between “the people” and “the elites”. **Note.** Conceptual figure based on Lacanian theory of the signifier and discourse theory where he reversed the Saussurean sign model (Lacan, 2006; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Figure 1. The first displacement.

The second, which is also a supplement for the former, is the signifier of “urgency”. Farmers’ demands for immediate action are targeted at regulations, bureaucratic processes, or discriminations, such as “the immediate payment of EU subsidies” or “the immediate financial support for the segments affected”. The signifier of “urgency” for RN, however, gains its meaning within its populist logic. It is not an issue about time and satisfaction of demands, but targets the elites *who* delay this urgent satisfaction. In other words, in RN’s populist discourse, the urgency of the farmers’ demands is redirected towards the urgency of “taking back power”. In the next section of this article, it is argued how the EU election in June is characterized as a critical moment of urgency within the RN’s populist discourse, which underscores the pivotal role this event plays in framing the political narrative around the farmers’ protests (Figure 2).



Representation of the rearticulation of the signifier “urgency” from a temporal demand for action to a political call for reclaiming power. **Note.** Conceptual figure based on Lacanian theory of the signifier and discourse theory (Lacan, 2006; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Figure 2. The second displacement.

6. From Populist Urgency to Affective Investment

The discursive logic of populism, as discussed in the previous section, allows us to grasp how political actors such as the RN construct antagonisms between the people and elites. Yet, the rhetorical elements alone cannot fully explain why subjects become *affectively invested* in such constructions or why they persist even when promises remain unfulfilled. As scholars of post-structuralist discourse theory have noted (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2007; Howarth, 2013), discourse not only organizes meaning but also operates as an affective structure that binds subjects through enjoyment, fear, and resentment. The populist signifiers of *urgency* and *crisis*, therefore, do not merely describe a political situation but evoke emotional attachments that make the discourse resonate among those who feel excluded or betrayed by the elites.

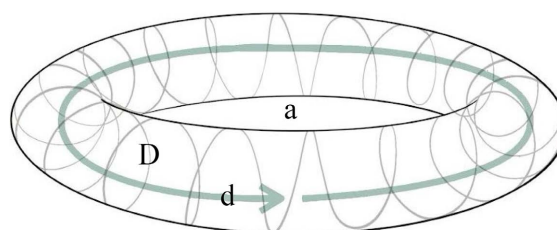
Within the RN's discourse, the appeal to urgency—to *immediate action* and *taking back control*—serves as a performative mechanism that converts farmers' frustrations into shared emotional struggle. This transformation, however, goes beyond rational articulation: it relies on the circulation of affects that intensify identification with the people/farmers as a moral community. Drawing on Moffitt's (2014) notion of the *performance of crisis*, the RN does not simply represent a crisis; it continuously performs one, thereby maintaining a sense of constant emotional tension. The anger toward EU bureaucrats, the resentment of Macron's government, and the pride in French land and culture together form what could be described as the *affective infrastructure* of RN's populist discourse—a structure that makes its antagonisms meaningful and durable.

To account for the endurance of this affective attachment, it becomes necessary to move beyond the level of discourse and examine the psychic mechanisms that sustain it. Here, Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a valuable conceptual bridge by theorizing how desire, fantasy, and enjoyment operate within political identification (see Stavrakakis, 2002). The populist crisis gains stability not only because it is discursively articulated but also because it satisfies a deeper desiring economy in which subjects derive enjoyment from the very persistence of the conflict. Thus, the next section explores how fantasy and the suspension of satisfaction—what might be called the *political unconscious* of RN's populism—serve to reproduce the state of emergency on which the party's appeal depends.

7. The Role of Fantasy and the Suspension of the “Urgent”

The “state of emergency” in Bardella and Le Pen's speeches can be analyzed by Moffitt's argument about the necessity of crisis in populism (Moffitt, 2014), and the Lacanian role of fantasy in the formation of a discourse (Glynos, 2001; Stavrakakis, 2007). For the far-right, the crisis is *mediated* through suspending a simplified fantasy, for which “the elite” is held responsible (see also Wodak, 2019). Thus, the nationalist fantasy of RN, like Frenchifying CAP, does not obtain its *significance* from the 13 pages of a simplified text with postcard images, yet the presence of the enemy barrier, Macron and EU bureaucrats, sustains their desire

towards the fantasy. However, this fantasy is not accessible for the desiring subject, not because the so-called reality is more complicated than the imaginary, but due to sustaining the desiring itself (Glynos, 2001). Recalling the definition of populism in discourse theory, we see that eradicating the enemy from the populist binary would erase the people's logic of mobilization and dismantle the entire populist discourse. Hence, the elite sustains populism, despite being introduced as the enemy of it. In other words, the desire to annihilate the enemy is equal to the desire of the enemy itself, meaning the suspension of desire satisfaction. The following figure, which is adopted from Lacanian topological model of torus (Lacan, 1961-1962), explains the necessary space for the suspension of desire satisfaction, "crisis" in Moffitt's article, in order to sustain the populist discourse (Figure 3).



(a) Object of desire (the hole which is the realm of fantasy and is necessary for the structure of the torus/*the ultimate satisfaction of desire = annihilation of the elite*); (D) Demands (cyclic pattern which are not fulfilled due to the twist of the real/*the fragmented demands of the farmers*); (d) Desire (the green line/*if it is fully met, the torus is shrunk in the hole*).

Figure 3. Lacanian torus and the populist discourse of the far right (the latter is showed by *Italic format*).

Lacan's topological turn, exemplified by the figure of the torus, provides a rigorous formalization of how desire and structure interlock. As Ragland (2015) and Friedman & Tomšič (2017) emphasize, the torus replaces the image of the closed, self-identical sphere with a surface that folds upon itself around an irreducible hole. This hole is not a mere absence but the Real that sustains the subject's circulation within the Symbolic. On the toric surface, demand (D) travels the outer loop—representing the repetitive articulation of signifiers—while desire (d) circles the inner void, the point of structural impossibility that prevents closure. The two loops never coincide; their non-overlap produces the subject's divided condition and the perpetual movement of desire. In this sense, the torus makes visible what discourse theory alone cannot: the *libidinal topology* of political identification, where meaning is maintained only through the persistence of lack.

Expanding on this, Greenshields (2017) and Ragland & Milovanovic (2004) show that the torus also models the relation between the subject and the Other. The two are like interlinked tori, each defined by the other's lack—what Lacan called *extimité*, the paradox of the most intimate being outside itself. The torus thus captures the logic of the populist "state of emergency" not as a temporary rupture but as a topological structure of repetition, where the impossibility of clo-

sure guarantees continuity. The hole is what gives the structure its *existence*; to close it would annihilate both desire and the discourse that depends on it. The torus therefore operates as more than a metaphor: it is a formal diagram of how fantasy organizes collective enjoyment, how political subjects circle endlessly around an unattainable fullness that their discourse must continually reproduce.

To understand this figure, one must begin with the concept of the “Lacanian twist”. Demands attempt to fulfill themselves by returning to an assumed original state of complete satisfaction. It probably reminds us of Freudian reading of Fechner, which is not irrelevant at this moment (Freud, 1920). However, these demands do not follow a fully cyclic path back to their original state. Instead, they experience a twist, transforming the space from two dimensions to three. This twist preserves the cyclic nature of the demands, preventing the previously supposed 2D cycle from being shrunk into a hole (as they are homotopic). Within this twist, we can observe the trace of the Lacanian Real, which, though vague and inaccessible, allows the continuity of the demand. The Lacanian twist posits a dynamic at the social and political level, allowing us to move beyond the traditional formulations of political and social discourses, which assumes entities exist in a static relationship.

This is not the end of the process that the subject, in this case, the people within the realm of politics, undergoes. Throughout these three-dimensional cyclic patterns of demands, their holes, referred to as “flexible lacks” by Stavrakakis et al. (2014), align and create another cycle, which is desire. According to Greenshields (2017: p. 73), desire is located in the hole within the Other of the demands, orbiting around another hole, which is the object *a* or the object of desire. This is also an empty space but is essential for the formation of desire itself. The most important point here is that although the contents of the demands may vary, what unites their holes is the desire for a lack, a desire for something that castrated the subject, preventing it from achieving fullness. This concept is addressed by the elite in populist discourse, where “the people” is the subject. Finally, it is crucial to note that the Lacanian torus does not prescribe any predetermined content to define the subject but instead illustrates how the relationships between different positions of emptiness shape the discourse. This relates to the formal definition of populism by discourse analysts.

Three main points emerge from the depiction of the RN’s populist discourse through the Lacanian torus. First, the desire has a unifying effect on different demands, while its structure is contingent upon the inaccessibility of the object of desire. Second, the populist desire must maintain a necessary distance from its object; otherwise, the desire risks collapsing into the void. Hence, the “urgency” in the populist discourse of RN does not signify any time sooner than the EU election in June. Even after achieving success in this election, the RN must continue to partially “postpone-procrastinate” the crisis to maintain the perception that the elites are responsible for it, otherwise the populist discourse will collapse into the void (see Glynos, 2001). Third, this illustration explains how the RN employs pop-

ulism as a strategy to gain power by directing the farmers' diverse grievances towards a common enemy—Macron and EU bureaucrats.

The pessimism of RN towards Macron and “his EU” can be conversely interpreted as the optimism of their populist discourse in finding the ultimate solution in an actor, not the structure (see Žižek, 2006; Žižek, 2020). They can only “enjoy” the suffering of the suspension of the actor's annihilation, before being trapped in the “unbearable anxiety” of encountering the real (Glynos, 2001). Nevertheless, the far-right in France led the EU election in June, indicating the results of their populist strategy, which is related to their support of the farmers' protests (Mudde, 2024). The conjunction of this support and EU election in their speeches and media portrayal implies their investment in using a populist strategy in this case.

8. Key Findings and Broader Reflections

The analysis demonstrates that the National Rally's engagement with the farmers' protests is not merely reactive or opportunistic but strategically embedded in a broader discursive logic of nationalism and populism. The party's nationalist rhetoric constructs the French countryside, farmers, and land as the emblematic core of the nation, threatened by the intrusion of external actors—most notably the European Union, global markets, and immigrants. Through this articulation, the RN translates material grievances into symbolic narratives of protection and sovereignty, producing a moralized distinction between an authentic “France profonde” and an alien bureaucratic order. Populism, in turn, extends this nationalist framework vertically by positioning the people against elites. The antagonism thus shifts from a spatial opposition (inside/outside) to a hierarchical one (below/above), allowing the RN to connect the farmers' specific demands to a universalized sense of injustice. Within this populist discourse, the call for “urgency” becomes less about agricultural reform than about reclaiming political power from the establishment. Together, these two discursive logics sustain what this article terms the *discourse of suspension*—a performative state of perpetual crisis in which the deferral of satisfaction reproduces political desire.

This discursive structure is not unique to the French far right but can also resonate with broader tendencies among European populist movements. Similar articulations can be observed in the Flemish party Vlaams Belang (VB) (Lambrecht & De Cleen, 2024) or Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) (Nagel et al., 2025), where farmers' or rural protests have been reinterpreted through nationalist-populist lenses. These parties likewise fuse material discontent with identity politics by elevating the ordinary people as victims of elites and institutions. What distinguishes the RN case, however, is the explicit affective linkage between sovereignty and rural identity, mediated through the fantasy of protecting the land—a linkage that renders the farmers' protests a fertile terrain for nationalist rearticulation.

Nonetheless, alternative perspectives can enrich and challenge this interpretation. A political-economy approach, for instance, might argue that the RN's suc-

cess stems less from its discursive construction of crisis and more from structural transformations in the French countryside—declining agricultural incomes, deregulation, and perceived urban neglect. Similarly, a political communication or media framing analysis could emphasize how algorithms, social media echo chambers, and sensationalist coverage amplify the RN's crisis narrative beyond its ideological content. Moreover, psychological or sociological frameworks focused on authoritarian predispositions, cultural resentment, or social identity could complement discourse theory by explaining why certain subjects are more receptive to nationalist-populist messages than others. While discourse theory foregrounds the contingent articulation of meaning and subject positions, these alternative approaches highlight material and institutional conditions that facilitate the resonance of far-right discourse.

Finally, this study faces a key limitation. The corpus is selective and interpretive rather than exhaustive, as it focuses on emblematic speeches and events instead of large-scale media or survey data. Future research could triangulate this qualitative analysis with computational text mining or audience reception studies to examine how the RN's discourse circulates and evolves across different publics.

9. Conclusion

Analyzing the populist and nationalist discourse of the RN in the context of the farmers' crisis is important on several levels. Firstly, it indicates the theoretical and practical point of rupture between the farmers' demands and desire of the RN. Without proposing a concrete structural solution, it becomes apparent only after gaining power that Le Pen might have been driving tractors to their end, or perhaps the tractors were being used by Le Pen to achieve her own goals. Secondly, the far-right's use of populist strategies to gain power could ultimately lead to a diminished focus on the enemy. This, in turn, might result in a regression to their earlier, more explicitly xenophobic ideas, which were not populist. Finally, this essay indicates that the *significance* of a group is not solely determined by its size, as evidenced by the mere 4% of France's population working in the agricultural sector, but also by the discursive practices that shape its importance.

This article indicated that populism has been a great source of political mobilization. Although the far-right has leveraged this strategy to seize power, it can also be adapted by more inclusive and democratic parties on the left (Custodi, 2020; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). For the left, maintaining democracy even after succession in political milestones necessitates a significant effort in both refining discursive practices and developing concrete structural solutions.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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