



By: TA | AP Insight

The Paris appeals court decides on the political fate of Marine Le Pen



Paris' appeals court is set to rule Tuesday in Marine Le Pen's **embezzlement case**, a decision that could determine whether one of France's leading **presidential contenders** can run in next year's election.

Le Pen, 57, is appealing a March 2025 conviction that found her and other members of her National Rally party guilty of misusing European Parliament funds by paying party staff with money intended for EU parliamentary assistants between 2004 and 2016.

The lower court sentenced her to prison time, suspended pending appeal, and imposed a five-year ban on holding elected office.

Le Pen has denied any wrongdoing and still hopes to mount a fourth bid for the presidency.

If she is **barred from running**, her longtime protégé Jordan Bardella, 30, could instead become the party's presidential candidate, reshaping the race to succeed President Emmanuel Macron.

Le Pen is looking for an acquittal

In what would be the best-case scenario for Le Pen, the appeals court could clear her of all charges.

During the five-week appeal trial earlier this year, Le Pen acknowledged "**a mistake**." She told the court some employees paid as EU parliamentary aides performed work for her party, then known as the National Front, but insisted that she believed such work was allowed and never attempted to hide it.

She also reproached European Parliament officials for not warning her party, at the time, that the way it was hiring people was potentially against any rules.

Prosecutors could still appeal to the Court of Cassation, France's highest court, to challenge an acquittal decision

Le Pen's lawyer, Rodolphe Bosselut, told the three-judge panel his client "is entrusting you with the work of her life, and the question is thus whether it will end here or whether it can be rebuilt."

Prosecutors could still appeal to the Court of Cassation, France's highest court, to challenge an acquittal decision.

If she gets a two-year ban — or less — on holding elected office

The appeals court could find Le Pen guilty but reduce the ban on holding elected office to two years or less — or impose no ban at all.

Because the lower court ordered the ban to take immediate effect, Le Pen has been serving that portion of the sentence since March 31 last year.

A ban of two years or less would expire before the first round of the French presidential election, scheduled in April 2027.

Any prison sentence, electronic monitoring or other judicial restrictions could severely hamper a nationwide campaign

But that does not automatically mean Le Pen would run: Any prison sentence, **electronic monitoring** or other judicial restrictions could severely hamper a nationwide campaign.

Le Pen has suggested she would not launch a presidential bid in such case.

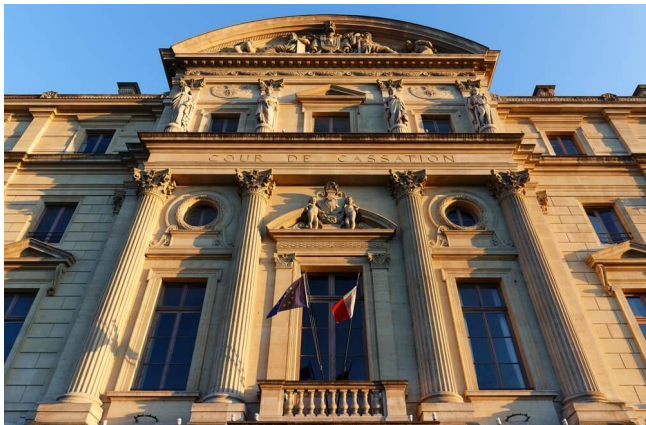
"If I'm allowed to be a candidate but am effectively prevented from campaigning freely, then you understand that wouldn't be

possible,” Le Pen said in an interview with LCI channel Wednesday.

“I can’t be dependent on a judge to authorize me to go hold a campaign rally ... or to visit a market.”

The court could hand down a heavy sentence

Prosecutors requested the appeals court to sentence Le Pen to four years in prison, including three suspended, in addition to a ban on holding elected office for five years.



The Court of Cassation has previously said that, if asked to review the case, it would seek to issue a ruling before the 2027 presidential election

They accused Le Pen of being at the head of a “system” meant to “siphon off” EU public funds to the benefit of her party.

Although prosecutors did not ask for it, the appeals court is free to order the ban on holding elected office to take immediate effect, like the lower court did.

Le Pen could still appeal to the Court of Cassation, but it's unclear whether it would suspend the sentence pending a final ruling.

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Le Pen says she won't wait to

make her decision

“You can’t launch a presidential campaign at the last minute,” Le Pen said on the sidelines of the appeal trial.

She has argued that prolonged uncertainty — including a possible appeal to the Court of Cassation — would effectively prevent her from running because she would not want to jeopardize her party’s chances.

France’s presidential race is expected to begin taking shape in September

France’s presidential race is expected to begin taking shape in September before accelerating early next year.

Candidates also must secure the endorsements of 500 elected officials to qualify for the ballot, making it difficult to replace a presidential nominee late in the campaign.

“If I’m prevented from running but the Court of Cassation rules in my favor three or four months later, it will be too late to conduct a proper presidential campaign,” Le Pen told RTL radio last year.