PART

FRANCE

Michelle Hale Williams[1]

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

2.1 THE CONTEXT OF FRENCH POLITICS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the evolution of religion and social class in France.
- Discuss the impact of educational reforms in France.
- Explain France's regime changes from the First to the Fifth Republics.
- Identify the distinguishing aspects of French political culture.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

With the world watching, France was bested in penalty kicks by Argentina in the 2002 World Cup. The French team crossed the stage first to shake hands and receive runner up medals, then captain Lionel Messi led his team in turn, as Emmanuel Macron beamed with palpable French pride. The 25th president of France is a known soccer enthusiast, but he also relishes taking to the world stage (France taking the world stage). Macron stresses the vital importance of the European Union frequently, making it a mission of his presidency to restore and reinforce a united Europe. Yet he is also a staunch French nationalist, who believes that France has a destiny to fulfill in leading Europe and modeling western liberal values for all for all of the world.

France is widely considered to be the first modern nation-state; it is also one of the oldest and most important countries in Europe. The culture, architecture, and cuisine of France have been much admired and copied. Its language once served as the chief medium of diplomacy, and its political philosophies and institutional patterns have exerted influences far beyond the country's borders. Until the end of World War II, France had the second-greatest colonial empire, with possessions in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and North and West Africa.

The third largest country in Europe (after Russia and Ukraine), France is more than twice the size of Great Britain, 60 percent larger than Germany, and four-fifths the size of Texas. Except in the north and northeast, France has natural frontiers: the Atlantic Ocean on the west, the Pyrenees in the south, and the Alps and Jura Mountains in the east. Its wide variations in landscape—the northern flatlands of Flanders, the forests of Normandy, the mountainous east and center, the beaches of the Vendée in the west, and the subtropical Riviera coast in the south—are accompanied by regional trends in cuisine, dress, speech, and attitude. Its population, which in 2023 reached 68.5 million, is less than Russia's and Germany's but eclipses that of all the other case studies included in this volume. Its fertility rate is the highest in Europe.

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Ever since the country's early efforts at unification under centralized auspices, Paris has been the locus of national political power as well as France's cultural and economic center. Paris contains the biggest university complex, three-fourths of the nation's theaters, and many of its museums and art galleries, and it is the hub from which most of the railroad lines radiate. The Paris region constitutes about 2 percent of the nation's land area, but it boasts its largest factories and accounts for a third of its industrial production. It also contains more than 20 percent of its total population. In recent years, differences between north and south and between Paris and the rest of the country have been narrowing because of advancements in national transportation and communications and the growing geographic mobility of the population.

For many generations, the French referred to "our ancestors the Gauls"; they prided themselves on their descent from Gallo-Roman tribes that had fused over centuries into a homogeneous nation. In fact, however, France is one of the most ethnically and racially diverse countries in Europe, with about 21 percent of its population consisting of immigrants or the children of at least one immigrant parent.[1] The French civic nation has long prided itself on its status as an immigrant nation, able to put allegiance to the state and its republican values above particularism including ethnic or religious identity. The Italians, Germans, Poles, and others who settled in France over the course of several generations blended easily into the melting pot of Celtic, Latin, and other elements, and the more recent immigrants from Africa and Asia have made the population truly multiethnic. At the same time, the French acquired a deep sense of national identity from living in one of the first large European countries to have its boundaries more or less permanently fixed. Several decades ago, however, the collective consciousness of minorities began to reawaken. Alsatians, Bretons, Corsicans, and other indigenous ethnic groups—and more recently the Jewish, Muslim, and other ethnoreligious communities—have demanded that their cultural uniqueness be recognized. The retention of a monolithic national identity has become more difficult in view of the changed nature of immigration. In 2009, more than 3 million foreigners lived in France, making up 5 percent of the population, and this number grew to more than 4.2 million foreigners by 2014 comprising 6.4 percent of the population.[2] By 2021, the number of foreigners in France had risen to nearly 6.9 percent of the population.[3] This figure is smaller than the number of immigrants, because many of the latter have been naturalized, a process that traditionally has been relatively easy.[4] A large proportion of the newcomers since the 1960s came from non-European countries and adhered to non-Christian religions. A significant number were Muslims migrating from former French colonies such as Morocco and Algeria. This development led to an extensive debate about the future of national identity, a debate that Nicolas Sarkozy encouraged when he campaigned for the presidency in 2006, leading to his origination of a cabinet minister for immigration, integration, national identity, and solidarity in 2009. In 2015, France was pushed in its farthest anti-immigrant direction yet in reaction to the January attack by Islamists of the satirical newspaper offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in which 12 were killed, followed in November by coordinated terrorist attacks centered around Paris that left 130 dead.

For many years, foreigners and natives widely believed that, apart from Paris, France was essentially a peasant country. The Industrial Revolution did not proceed so early and so thoroughly in France as it did in Great Britain and Germany; by the end of World War II, an estimated one-third of the French labor force was still employed in agriculture. Most of the farms

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

were and still are small, as the consolidation of landholdings was impeded by the traditional division of a family's acreage among several descendants. Industrial development was long delayed by the lack of private investment capital and the limited need for manpower in the cities. In the past 70 years, however, agricultural modernization has been impressive. As a consequence, employment in agriculture has declined from more than 30 percent of the active population in 1946 to 3 percent in 2021.[5] The French Ministry of Agriculture estimates 389,000 remaining farms in 2020, down 21 percent from 2010,[6] and many farms are in debt. Driven by pesticide restrictions, organic farming mandates, water shortages, fertilizer tax, and slim price margins, French farmers blocked traffic in Paris with hundreds of tractors in a show of protest in 2019, 2021, and 2023. In 1946, a little over half the population (then 40.5 million) lived in cities; today, more than 81 percent do so.[7] As the number of farms and rural villages declined steadily and the number of urban agglomerations continued to grow, the French began to speak of a "terminal peasantry." In a parallel development, an extensive national superhighway system, high-speed rail, and a modern telecommunications network tied the provinces more closely to Paris, and the sense of separation between the small towns and the capital diminished.

Yet despite urbanization, many French men and women continue to share the belief that life in the country is more satisfying than an urban existence, which may account for the tendency of middle-class city dwellers to acquire second homes in the country. Indeed, the "peasant romanticism" long fortified by the patterns of family loyalty, parsimony, and conservative moral values carefully nurtured by the Catholic Church has been rediscovered today as an ideal by those disenchanted with the economic insecurities, overcrowding, and growing social disorganization and crime in the cities, and it has become part of the ideology of extreme-right movements. There is no doubt that urbanization has contributed to an increase in crime and the growth of the prison population from 48,000 in 1992 to nearly 72,173 in 2023, making it second only to the United Kingdom among West European countries.[8]

RELIGION AND SOCIAL CLASS

For a long time, most of the population of France embraced Roman Catholicism; indeed, France was considered "the eldest daughter of the Church." Once the Protestant Reformation spread to France in the sixteenth century, the country became riven by bitter struggles between Catholics, who were supported by the ruling elite, and Protestant Huguenots (mainly Calvinists), many of whom were massacred. After a period of toleration, the privileges of the Protestants (such as the right to live in certain fortified towns) were revoked in the seventeenth century, and many Protestants left the country. With the consolidation of absolute rule under the Bourbon kings, the position of Catholicism as the state religion was firmly established. Dissatisfaction with monarchism implied a questioning of the church and its privileges, and revolutionary sentiments were accompanied by anticlerical attitudes.

The revolutionary commitment to *laïcité* (secularism), associated with a "religion of reason," made considerable headway during the Third Republic (1870–1940), when, under the leadership of left-wing parties, a national school system was created from which religion was entirely

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

absent. The hold of Catholicism gradually weakened as a consequence of industrialization, the rise of a new working class, and demographic and social changes. In 1905, the Catholic Church was formally "disestablished." France became a secular country in constitutional terms (except in the province of Alsace where, for historic reasons, the clergy continues to be supported by public funds).[9] Just under a majority of the French population is nominally Roman Catholic, but only an estimated 5 percent of them attend church regularly.[10] In 2021, France had only 12,000 priests, half as many as it had at the turn of the twenty-first century, and the majority of them were more than 75 years old.[11] Many inhabitants of the larger cities, and the great majority of industrial workers, are de-Christianized except in the most formal sense.

Yet Catholicism cannot be divorced from French culture. When the world watched flames engulf the iconic Notre Dame Cathedral on April 15, 2021, President Macron rushed to the scene declaring that it would be rebuilt "more beautiful than before" within five years recognizing its centrality among landmarks of Paris.[12] The cathedral remains the heart of small towns, most legal holidays are Catholic, and many political movements and interest groups are still influenced by Catholic teachings. (When Pope John Paul II died in April 2005, flags in France were flown at half-staff, and in Marseilles, civil service workers received a half day off work so that they could go to church.) Furthermore, public policy attitudes have often reflected Catholic social doctrine: aid to large families, the notion of class collaboration (instead of conflict), the long-held opposition to the legalization of birth control and abortion, and the legal dominance—until well into the 1960s—of the male head of the family. Devout Catholics constituted a large proportion of those who demonstrated against the legalization by Parliament of same-sex marriage in 2013. Today, around 15 percent of primary school children and 20 percent of secondary school children attend private schools, the vast majority of which are Catholic parochial schools that benefit from governmental financial support.[13] Of the 1.5 million French Protestants, many are prominent in business, the so-called free professions (such as lawyers, physicians, and architects), and, more recently, politics and administration.

Jews have lived in France since before the Middle Ages, and today they number about 442,000.[14] During the Dreyfus affair in the 1890s, antirepublican feelings were accompanied by a campaign to vilify Jews and to eliminate them from public life. During the Nazi occupation of France (1940–1944), persecutions and the deportation of more than 70,000 Jews to Nazi death camps ravaged the Jewish community and reduced it by a third. Since the early 1960s, the number of Jews has been augmented by repatriates from North Africa. Much like Protestants, Jews have tended to support republican regimes and have preferred left-of-center parties identified with anticlericalism. Although Jews are fully integrated into French life, anti-Semitism has not been eliminated and tends to be perpetuated by extreme-right political parties and, more recently, by Muslim immigrants. But it is tacitly supported by secular and extreme-left elements in the guise of anti-Zionism. In any case, Jews have become increasingly the target of hatred and physical violence.

Since the mid-1960s, France has experienced a significant influx of Muslims, primarily from North Africa. Many of them perform the most menial work in industrial cities. Estimated at almost 6 million,[15] the Muslim population constitutes the second largest religious group. Many French people, especially the lower-middle and working classes, feel that the growing presence of these "exotic" immigrants has contributed to the growth of unemployment and criminality

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

in France and will sooner or later disfigure the very nature of French society. Moreover, practicing Muslims, unlike other minorities, are said to adhere to a religion that rejects the primacy of French civil law, secular education, gender equality, and religious pluralism and therefore poses a challenge to the values of the republic. Other observers are more optimistic; they argue that Islam comes in many forms and that a large number of Muslims have become acculturated to French values and way of life.[16]

The growing racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in France, which has generated conflict and violence against minorities, has been met with a variety of responses. On the one hand, the National Assembly has passed both antidiscrimination laws and legislation penalizing the dissemination of ethnic, racial, and religious hatred, and the government and others have made efforts to acculturate minorities and integrate them into the mainstream. The government has fought racial discrimination by means of administrative measures affecting housing and employment and has even resorted to selective affirmative action (discrimination positive). On the other hand, the French people have been hesitant to accept cultural pluralism.[17] They have been uneasy about *communautarisme*, the identification with cultures and subcommunities based on ethnicity or religion.[18]

The growth of the Muslim population and the continuing decline of Christianity have led to a renewal of the debate about the place of religion in a republic committed to the principle of *laïcité*. In an attempt to legitimize and integrate Islam, the government established the French Council of the Muslim Faith (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman [CFCM]) with branches at the regional level. The CFCM represents a diversity of Muslim organizations and functions as official interlocutor with the public authorities.[19] To dilute religious influence in education, the government successfully sponsored legislation to ban the wearing of the Islamic headscarf (*hijab*) by Muslim schoolgirls as well as the wearing of ostentatious Christian and Jewish accoutrements in public schools. There is a growing fear of Islamism, a politically charged fundamentalism that is regarded as hostile to France.

Superficially, the French social system is typical of that found in other European countries. The medieval divisions of society into nobility, clergy, townspeople, and peasants gradually gave way to a more complex social structure. The traditional, land-based aristocracy declined due to the diminishing economic value of agriculture, and today the aristocracy has a certain vestigial importance only in the military officer corps and the diplomatic service.

Members of the modern upper class (*haute bourgeoisie*)—a status derived from graduation from a prestigious university or the inheritance of wealth or both—generally make up the higher echelons of the civil service and serve as the directors of large business firms and as bankers. The next social group is the *grande bourgeoisie*, which includes university professors, high school teachers, engineers, members of the free professions, middle-echelon government functionaries, and the proprietors of medium-size family firms. The middle and lower-middle class, today the largest social category, comprises elementary school teachers, white-collar employees, small shopkeepers, and lower-echelon civil servants. The lower classes (*classes populaires*) include industrial workers, small-scale farmers, and many artisans. Below these categories is the *Lumpenproletariat* that has been growing in the past decades and is found in ethnic minority enclaves around large cities; it consists predominantly of Muslim and African immigrants and their offspring.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

These class divisions have traditionally been important insofar as they have influenced a person's political ideology, lifestyle, place of residence, and choice of political party. A typical member of the free professions has tended to adhere to a liberal party (that is, one oriented toward individualism), a businessperson to a conservative (or moderate) party, and an industrial worker to a socialist party—and, more recently, the National Front (see Chapter 2.3). The class system and interclass relationships have been constantly changing, however. Nor is the correlation between class membership and adherence to a specific political party as predictable as it once was. In recent years, there has been a growing underclass of uprooted farmers and redundant artisans, industrial workers now jobless because of the decline of traditional manufacturing and the growth of the high-technology sector, and immigrants who cannot be precisely categorized and whose relationship to the political system is fluid, if not marginal. Moreover, distinctions between classes have been partially obscured by the redistributive impact of a highly developed system of social legislation and the progressive democratization of the educational system.

EDUCATION

The centralized national school system established at the end of the nineteenth century was based on uniform curriculums stressing national, secular, and republican values and theoretically creating opportunities of upward mobility on the basis of talent, not wealth. Traditionally, the Ministry of Education controlled the educational curriculums, from public elementary school in small villages to lycées in large cities and was the major voice in the administration of universities. In practice, the system (at least until the late 1950s) fortified existing social inequalities, because most children of the working and peasant classes were not steered toward the lycées, the academic secondary schools whose diplomas were required for admission to university, and therefore were condemned to perpetual lower-class status. Since the early 1960s, a spate of reform legislation has been aimed at making schooling more uniform, at least up to the age of 16.

Since the 1960s, endlessly continuing educational reforms of the curriculum have focused on the balance between elitism and democratization. Most recently (in 2015) this was illustrated in the debate about whether to retain the teaching of Latin and Greek in the middle schools (*collèges*), to the detriment of more modern and interdisciplinary subjects. Curricula are now more practical, technological, and less classical-humanistic. Under new laws, universities have become more flexible and less hierarchical, and they allow students to participate in decision making (albeit the pace of implementation has occasionally been impeded by insufficient funds and the resistance of the academic establishment). As a consequence, nearly 90 percent of lycée students now get the *baccalauréat*, the lycée diploma, and numbers have risen steadily over the past two decades since the middle 1990s.[20] However, earning "the bac" no longer ensures university admissions due to recent reforms addressing insufficient student preparation and high dropout rates for university studies. The controversial reforms, which brought protesters to the streets in 2018, place less emphasis on a terminal exam and more on motivation and secondary school performance, and utilize the Parcoursup online platform. While admission to the French *grandes écoles*, the elite schools, has long been highly competitive, most ordinary universities

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

traditionally had no preselection. More university graduates are finding jobs as compared with ten years ago making pursuit of it a good return on investment, and university enrollments have exploded, rising from 1 million in 1985 to 2,900,000 students in higher education in 2022, with 1.6 million of these at public institutions financed by the government.[21] Although tuition fees are minimal despite hints that the government may change that, many students from families in straitened circumstances complain that state scholarship aid (*bourses*) covering registration and other fees as well as living expenses and books is inadequate. Comparatively speaking, French state universities have tended to receive less state funding despite more state intervention, yet with more authority to decide matters of budgets, curricula, admissions, and contracts with the private sector thanks to a 2007 law expanding the purview of state university presidents.

Among the major beneficiaries of educational reforms, and of social changes in general, are women. Before World War II, women could not vote. Although they obtained that right in 1945, they gained complete equality only gradually. In 2000, the constitution was amended—followed by legislation—to institute a system of gender parity in the nominations for elective office, but only 12.3 percent of members of the National Assembly elected in 2002 were women (compared with 10 percent in the previous assembly). In 2007, the representation of women in the assembly had risen to 18.5 percent while the 2022 elections resulted in 37.3 percent or 215 of 577 seats occupied by women. Women have also steadily gained seats in the regional councils. Female cabinet ministers have also increased to approximate parity, with the second female prime minister in history currently holding that office. The place of women in the executive has been greatly enhanced since the 2012 parliament voted to set a 40 percent minimum quota for women in higher governmental administration, to be attained by 2018. Women continue to advance in the private sector workforce as well, however the same discrepancies affecting many advanced industrial countries exist including promotion rate discrepancies, differential salaries, and gaps in leadership roles at the highest levels.[22]

The attitudes of the French toward politics have been shaped by their education and social condition. Scholars have suggested that the French are more critical of their regime than are Americans or the British, and there are periodic studies of what is wrong with their country.[23] French citizens have frequently participated in uprisings and revolutions, and they have exhibited "anti-civic" behavior patterns such as tax evasion, draft dodging, and alcoholism. They have often shown contempt for law (and the police), and members of the working class, in particular, have been convinced that the legal system favors the "established" classes. Until a few decades ago, a large segment of the population adhered to political ideologies and parties calling for a replacement of the existing political order. Today the French are more accepting of a constitutional consensus, yet some populist and extremist parties have gained legitimacy while mainstream parties have increasingly gone out of favor.

This insufficient acceptance of the existing regime—a phenomenon called "crisis of legitimacy"—was produced by, and in turn reflected in, the apparent inability of the French to create a political formula that would resolve satisfactorily the conflict between the state and the individual, centralism and localism, the executive and the legislature, and representative and "direct" democracy. Since the abolition of the old regime of royal absolutism, there has been a dizzying succession of governments—republics, monarchies, empires, and republics again—most of them embodying drastically different conceptions of the proper division of governmental authority (see Table 2.1).

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

TABLE 2.1 ■ France: Political Cycles and Regimes

Moderate Monarchy	Liberalization	Conservative Reaction
Constitutional monarchy of 1791	Republic of 1792	Dictatorial government of 1795
Restoration of 1815	"July Monarchy" of 1830	Second Empire (1852–1870)
Early Third Republic (1870–1879)	Later Third Republic (1879–1940) Fourth Republic (1947–1958) Fifth Republic (since 1981)	Vichy regime (1940–1944) Early Fifth Republic (1958–1981)

Source: Adapted from Dorothy Pickles, *The Fifth French Republic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1965), 3–5.

REVOLUTIONS, REGIME CHANGES, AND LEGITIMACY CRISES

France might well be described as having a dynamic disposition as opposed to a status quo orientation in terms of its comfort with any particular regime. Many regimes doomed themselves, creating institutional solutions that were too extreme and therefore could not last. The Revolution of 1789, which led to the abdication of King Louis XVI in 1792, was followed by a series of experiments that, collectively, has been termed the First Republic. It was characterized by the abolition of the old provinces and the restructuring of administrative divisions, a reduction in the power of the church and the inauguration of a "rule of reason," a proclamation of universal human rights, and the passing of power from the landed aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. It was also marked by assassinations and mass executions—the Reign of Terror—which ended when order was established under Napoleon Bonaparte. At first leader of a dictatorial Consulate (1799) and then president (1802) of what was still, formally, a "republic," Napoleon had himself proclaimed emperor in 1804. In 1814, Napoleon's empire collapsed after a military defeat, but the emperor left behind a great heritage of reforms: the abolition of feudal tax obligations, a body of codified laws, the notion of a merit-based professional bureaucracy (much of it trained in specialized national schools), and a system of relationships (or rather, a theory about such relationships) under which the chief executive derived his legitimacy directly from the people through popular elections or referendums. The chief executive's rule was unimpeded by a strong parliament, subnational government units, or other "intermediary" institutions or groups. At once heroic and popular, the "Bonapartist" approach to politics had a strong impact on segments of the French nation; much of what came to characterize Gaullism was heavily influenced by that approach.

The power of the clergy and nobility was revived in 1815 when the Bourbon monarchy was restored, but that was to be a constitutional regime patterned on the English model and guaranteeing certain individual liberties and limited participation of the parliament. In 1830, the Bourbon dynasty, having become arbitrary and corrupt, was replaced by another regime, that of Louis-Philippe of the House of Orleans. In 1848, the French rebelled once more and inaugurated what came to be known as the Second Republic. They elected Louis Napoleon (a nephew of Napoleon I) president for a 10-year term, but in 1852 he too proclaimed himself emperor.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

The Second Empire was a "republican" empire insofar as a weak legislative chamber continued to exist and, more important, because Louis Napoleon derived his power from the people rather than from God.

The Second Empire was noted for many achievements: industrial progress, a stable currency, and the rebuilding and modernization of Paris. But popular disenchantment with what had become a dictatorial regime and France's military defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1870 brought it down.

The Third Republic, the regime that followed, was inaugurated in bloodshed: the Paris Commune of 1871, in which thousands of "proletarians" rebelled and were brutally suppressed by bourgeois leaders. Most of these leaders did not, in fact, want a republic. The National Assembly (then called the Chamber of Deputies) was elected to make peace with Prussia. It was dominated by monarchists, but they disagreed on which of the competing pretenders—Bourbon, Orléans, or Bonaparte—should be given the throne. Consequently, the assembly adopted a skeletal constitution that provided, on a temporary basis, for an executive and a legislative branch and outlined the relationship between them. This constitution, which contained no bill of rights, lasted nearly 70 years and set the pattern for subsequent republican regimes.

In the beginning, the president, who was elected by parliament for seven years, tried to govern while ignoring that body, and he even tried to dissolve the National Assembly, whose political composition he did not like. In 1877, parliament rebelled and forced the president to resign. Henceforth, presidents became figureheads, and prime ministers and their cabinets were transformed into obedient tools of powerful parliaments and were replaced or reshuffled about once every eight months. Many observers viewed this instability as endemic to republican systems as such and encouraged romantic monarchists to attempt to subvert the republic. Yet this republic had many achievements to its credit, not the least of which was that it emerged victorious and intact from World War I. It might have lasted even longer had France not been invaded and occupied by the Germans in 1940.

After the German defeat of France, the unoccupied southern half of the country was transformed into the "French State," which took the form of a fascist puppet regime led from Vichy, a provincial resort town, by Marshal Philippe Pétain, an aging hero of World War I. The behavior of the French during this period, both in the Vichy state and in the occupied part of the country, was complex and ambivalent, and the debate about who collaborated with the Nazis and who resisted them continues.[24]

The Fourth Republic, which was instituted in late 1946, two years after France was liberated, essentially followed the pattern established during the Third Republic. Although its highly detailed and democratic constitution included an impressive bill of rights, it made for a system even less stable than that of the Third Republic. There were 20 governments (and 17 prime ministers) over a 12-year period; the National Assembly, though theoretically supreme, could not provide effective leadership. Ambitious deputies, seeking a chance to assume ministerial office, easily managed to topple cabinets, and a large proportion of the legislators—notably the Communists on the left and the Gaullists on the right—were not interested in maintaining the regime.

Yet the Fourth Republic was not without accomplishments. It inaugurated a system of long-term capitalist planning under which France rebuilt and modernized its industrial and

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

transport structures. It put in place an extensive network of welfare state provisions, including comprehensive medical insurance. And it took the first steps toward decolonization—relinquishing control of Indochina, Morocco, and Tunisia—and paved the way for intra-European collaboration in the context of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and, later, the Common Market.

The Fourth Republic probably would have continued had it not been for the problem of Algeria and the convenient presence of a war hero, General Charles de Gaulle. France was unable to decolonize Algeria easily, or grant it independence, because more than 2 million French men and women, many of them able to trace their roots in that territory several generations back, considered it not only their home but also an integral component of France. A succession of Fourth Republic politicians lacked the will or the stature to impose a solution to the problem. Meanwhile, the war that had broken out in Algeria in the mid-1950s threatened to spill over into mainland France and helped to discredit the regime.

Under the pressure of the Algerian events (and the threat of a military coup in continental France and North Africa), the Fourth Republic leadership decided in mid-1958 to call on de Gaulle. He had been a professional soldier, a member of the general staff, and, several months after the outbreak of World War II, deputy minister of war. After France's capitulation in June 1940, he refused to accept the permanence of surrender and the legitimacy of the Pétain regime. Instead, he fled to London, where he established a "government in exile" and organized the "Free French" forces, which were joined by many of the Frenchmen who had escaped in time from the continent. In 1944, de Gaulle became the provisional leader of liberated France, presiding over a government coalition composed of Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists. In 1946, he retired from the political scene, having failed to prevent the ratification of the Fourth Republic constitution (a document he opposed because it granted excessive powers to the parliament). In retirement, de Gaulle continued to be a force of inspiration to a political movement, the Rally of the French People (Rassemblement du Peuple Français [RPF]). These original "Gaullists" wanted to replace the Fourth Republic with a new regime led by a strong executive.

The Fifth Republic, established in 1958, is an institutional mixture of a powerful president and a weak legislature or a strong state with weak governments. The institutional relationships common to this republic are described in Chapter 2.2; what follows here is a description of the French political culture—that is, political attitudes that are widely held and behavior patterns that cut across specific social classes and party ideologies.

ASPECTS OF FRENCH POLITICAL CULTURE

Except for parts of the industrial working class, most French people have shared the universal ambitions of French civilization and have not seemed to consider the often-exaggerated chauvinism of their intellectual elite to be inconsistent with such ambitions. They have taken pride in France's international prestige, cultural patrimony, and intellectual accomplishments, although these may have borne little relationship to reality and may not have benefited all citizens equally. In recent years, some members of the intellectual elite have been worried about the excessive

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

influence of mass culture and the "pollution" of the French language by Americanisms. A recent manifestation of France's cultural insecurity was a government bill to allow universities to offer selected courses taught in English, thus upsetting a 1994 ban against using a language other than French as a medium of instruction. The bill was denounced by some politicians and academics variously as cultural suicide, a death warrant for the French language, and a humiliation of French speakers.[25]

A World War II photo portrait of General Charles de Gaulle of the Free French Forces and first president of the Fifth Republic, serving from 1959 to 1969.

IanDagnall Computing / Alamy Stock Photo

The French have had a tendency toward hero worship that has led them, on several occasions, to accept "men on horseback": the two Napoleons, Marshal MacMahon (in the 1870s), Marshal Pétain, and General de Gaulle. This tendency has been balanced by one of rebelling against authority. Moreover, although the French have often opted for leftist or revolutionary ideologies and politicians, leftist rhetoric has sometimes been an empty exercise because there was little expectation that it would (or ought to) translate into leftist government policies. Public opinion polls conducted from the 1950s to the 1990s typically showed that the proportion of French voters preferring Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste [PS]) candidates was consistently higher than the proportion of those who favored the nationalization of enterprises or the equalization of incomes—both traditional components of socialist ideology.

The French have often held their politicians in contempt; indeed, according to a recent survey, only 43 percent of respondents indicate that they do not at all trust the government.[26] At the same time, the French have allowed politicians leeway for tax evasion, money laundering, collusion with business, and other behavioral departures from bourgeois moral norms. The ground gained in recent years by populists who discredit mainstream parties and the "establishment elites" of government suggests that such toleration has been replaced by popular impatience with, and the electoral punishment of, corrupt politicians. The disillusionment with the "political class" has manifested itself in negative voting behavior: Less than half of adults vote in legislative elections, more in presidential contests, and most of those who do tend to vote against the government, as they did in the presidential elections of 2002, 2012, 2017, and 2022, the regional elections of 2004, 2010, 2015, and 2021 (see Chapter 2.3), and the referendum on the European constitution in 2005. The "ballot blanc" use reached an all-time high in 2017 presidential elections and it has roots traceable to the French Revolution as a sign of protest, since this vote for no one gets counted separately from vote cast totals to signal frustration.[27]

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

At the same time, the French have a widespread desire to enter public service, and much prestige is attached to it. Traditionally, the French have been sharply critical of the regime, but they have a highly developed sense of belonging to the nation and they have greater faith in the state than in the market. The ideology of statism (*étatisme*), which can be traced to the Bourbon monarchy, conceives of the state in terms of a mystique that transcends civil society and even government. This statism is reflected in a large civil service and a high proportion of expenditure for the production of public goods, such as mass transport, education, and social services. There is a culture of entitlement expressed in the belief in the continuity of "established rights" (*droits acquis*). One of the most involved and enduring protest movements in French history, the yellow vests (gilets jaunes), began in 2018 as a protest against rising fuel costs and then spread to a litany of other issues including high cost of living, and taxation disparities. From the outset on November 17, more than 300,000 protesters constructed barricades and blocked roads wearing their signature yellow safety vests required to be kept in all French vehicles. Although greatly inconvenienced by these events, the general public supported the strikers—both to express their social solidarity and to avoid having traditional welfare state entitlements for any part of the population called into question. Where the power of the purse provides an impetus for policy regulation and interest representation in many advanced industrial democracies, in France the power of the streets plays a strong role to regulate politics.

Yellow vest protesters direct anger over economic and social conditions at President Macron.
ALAIN JOCARD/AFP via Getty Images

Ideology is now far less important than it was at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and a growing number of French men and women have become market oriented. Such a change, however, is a far cry from an unqualified embrace of classic liberalism. France's traditional nationalism has been moderated, and most of its citizens are more open to Europe and the world at large. Yet at the same time they are reluctant to accept the consequences of globalization.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Other important changes have emerged as well—especially over the past two decades. For example, there is now little question about the legitimacy of the political system: most French people accept the institutions of the Fifth Republic, a consensus signaled by the gradual convergence of the parties of the right and left and, indeed, in a growing impatience with ideological labels.

Conversely, the state has been desanctified in the eyes of many French citizens, and the role of the market has become more widely accepted. At the same time, the state retains at once its multiple roles as protector, insofar as 5.7 million French citizens work for it and several million more depend on it.[28] A contemporary challenge for the French comes therefore in reconciling a desire to perpetuate a strong state with many social responsibilities while at the same time changing to adapt in a postindustrialized and globalized world. The French want more leadership, but at the same time more participatory democracy, ideological leftism but also behavioral conservatism. In fact, to be on the left in France today is increasingly "identitarian" rather than programmatic or even ideological. The election in 2017 and again in 2022 of President Macron may underscore a growing consensus between PS and LR (Republicans) on economic policy since he was able to win as neither a candidate of the left nor the right.

Although the French still have an "instrumental" view of the state in the sense that it is expected to continue to be important in economic, social, and cultural affairs, their expectations have become somewhat more realistic. This development is reflected in the fact that in recent years the French have been attaching greater value to liberty than to equality. Even though the French have become more ego-oriented, they have also come to attach increasing importance to "civil society" and its component parts. For example, in addition to placing greater reliance on the market, the French have participated in the rapid growth of voluntary associations on the national and local levels. These developments have served to reduce the social distrust and lessen the "fear of face-to-face relations" that was once considered a major aspect of French political culture.[29] They also tended to foster a greater openness to "out-groups," both within France and outside it. One manifestation of that change is the widespread public support of fairer treatment of immigrants (which compensates for pockets of intolerance) and a higher appreciation of aspects of non-French culture. The massive riots by Muslim and African immigrants and their descendants—the "immigrants of the second generation"—in 2005 challenged France's position on ethnic and racial minorities. Perceived Islamophobia has prompted recurring protests since then, notably in 2013 and 2021. Many of the rioters have been unemployed, lived in suburban ghettos, and felt politically, socially, and economically marginalized. They saw no way out of their isolation and neglect. These events introduced considerable doubt about the efficacy and seriousness of government efforts to integrate immigrants into a monocultural French society and even called into question the relevance of the Jacobin monocultural ideal itself.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

2.2 WHERE IS THE POWER IN FRANCE?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the powers and limitations of the roles of president and prime minister.
- Describe the power, members, and organization of Parliament.
- Explain the organization, role, and oversight of the French administrative system.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC WAS DRAWN UP several weeks after General Charles de Gaulle was invested as the (last) prime minister of the Fourth Republic. The new constitution, which was adopted by an 80 percent vote in a popular referendum held in September 1958, was tailor-made for de Gaulle. It contained many features found in previous French republics: a president, a prime minister, and a parliament composed of two chambers—a National Assembly and a Senate. Institutional relationships were rearranged, however, to reflect the political ideas that the famous general and his advisers had often articulated—that is, the ideology of Gaullism.

THE PRESIDENT AND THE GOVERNMENT

De Gaulle and his advisers—foremost among them Michel Debré, the principal draftsman of the constitution, who was to become the Fifth Republic's first prime minister—wanted to have a strong government. It would be capable of making decisions and conducting an assertive foreign policy without having to worry about excessive parliamentary interference or premature ouster.

The president is clearly the central feature of the Fifth Republic system. The constitution originally provided for presidential election by an electoral college composed of some 80,000 national, regional, and local legislators, but since the approval by referendum of a constitutional amendment in 1962, presidents have been elected by popular vote. Because many political leaders, including aspirants to the presidency and former presidents, found the seven-year presidential term of office too long, the term was reduced to five years by referendum in 2000.

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.
Do not copy, post, or distribute

The president is invested with near-monarchical powers, which were expanded through interpretation by the first three of the eight incumbents of the office so far: Charles de Gaulle (1959–1969), Georges Pompidou (1969–1974), Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974–1981), François Mitterrand (1981–1995), Jacques Chirac (1995–2007), Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2012), François Hollande (2012–2017), and Emmanuel Macron (2017–). Under the constitution of the Fifth Republic, the president appoints the prime minister, who then supposedly selects the rest of the cabinet. De Gaulle and Pompidou took an interest in many of these appointments, and Giscard d'Estaing, Sarkozy, and Hollande decided the composition of the entire cabinet on a rather personal basis. These choices were endorsed almost automatically by the National Assembly, which was controlled by politicians more or less in the same ideological camp as the respective presidents.

Under President Mitterrand, a Socialist, the situation became more complicated. For five years after his election in 1981 and the election immediately thereafter of a Socialist- controlled assembly, the composition of governments reflected the president's wishes to a large extent. But after the parliamentary elections of 1986, and again in 1993, when the Gaullists and their allies recaptured control of the assembly, the president was forced to appoint a prime minister and cabinet to the Assembly's liking rather than his own. The "cohabitation" of a Socialist president with a Gaullist government (where the president and prime minister come from different political parties)—a situation not clearly envisaged by the drafters of the Fifth Republic constitution—led to a restructuring of the relationship between the two: a delicate form of power sharing in which the prime minister took responsibility for most domestic policies and the president retained a measure of authority in foreign affairs and national defense as well as a vaguely defined influence in internal affairs.

After Mitterrand's reelection as president in 1988 and the recapture of control of the assembly by the Socialists immediately thereafter, the situation returned to "normal"—that is, the president's preeminence was reestablished. Mitterrand, however, decided not to exercise his restored powers fully but to share them with his prime minister, Michel Rocard, and, to a lesser extent, with parliament—not only because the cohabitation experience had chastened him but also because he had, in a sense, become an elder statesman who transcended politics.

Presidential supremacy was restored again in 1995 with the election of Jacques Chirac, a Gaullist, as president and the appointment of Gaullist Alain Juppé as prime minister. Two years later, however, France was subjected to a third experiment with cohabitation, where the president and prime minister came from different political parties, as a consequence of a premature parliamentary election. Although the National Assembly elected in 1993 was supposed to remain in place until 1998, Chirac decided in 1997 to dissolve it and call for early elections (see Chapter 2.3). This move was prompted by the pressure on France to make drastic cuts in public expenditures in preparation for participating in the common European currency, which was scheduled to be inaugurated in January 1999. The requirement to reduce the government deficit to a maximum of 3 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) would force the parliament to make unpopular cuts in the welfare state budget. Although the

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

assembly had an overwhelming Gaullist and center-conservative majority, the retrenchment measures required under the EU common monetary policy could not be completely enacted before the expiration of the normal life of the assembly, and it was feared that the public would take revenge on that legislative chamber at the next regular election. The early election was, therefore, seen as a preventive step. Although the president expected the Gaullists and their allies to lose some votes, he was confident that they would still retain comfortable control of the assembly.

The victory of the Socialist Party and its left-wing allies in the parliamentary elections of 1997 was as dramatic as it was unexpected. Because it was an unnecessary election, its outcome, a consequence of Chirac's miscalculations, served to undermine his presidential authority. He had no choice but to appoint Lionel Jospin, the Socialist leader who had run as a presidential candidate only two years earlier, as prime minister. In this new cohabitation, Jospin asserted himself strongly as a decision maker, so that he came to rival, and even eclipse, the authority of the president not only in domestic affairs but also in foreign policy. Sarkozy's election to the presidency in 2007 was followed in short order by legislative elections, which resulted in continuing control of the National Assembly by the Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire [UMP]), the party of the president. This outcome gave Sarkozy virtually complete control over the decision-making apparatus, which he used to structure a (more or less nonideological) government to his liking and promote far-reaching policy innovations and institutional reforms.

A comparable situation prevailed when Hollande, a Socialist, defeated Sarkozy in the presidential elections of 2012, and when the legislative elections immediately thereafter provided him with a solid parliamentary majority. Nevertheless, Hollande did not prove to be a strong president. His presidential weakness became indisputable when it was announced in late 2016 that he would not stand for reelection in 2017, a decision unprecedented among presidents of the Fifth Republic. For a president who campaigned on a platform of increasing French governmental transparency, his critics point to a lack of clarity in both his policies and left ideology. Additionally, he failed to reduce unemployment, address terror attacks in Paris, confront the EU crisis, or navigate French labor policy disputes. Unlike his predecessors, he had never held a ministerial position. He had been secretary general of the Socialist Party, and his first government, led by Jean-Marc Ayrault, seemed to have been selected less for experience—only two ministers had held cabinet office before—than for intraparty balance. Ayrault, formerly mayor of Nantes, turned out to be a weak head of government. He was unwilling to articulate his own views and unable to impose himself vis-à-vis other cabinet ministers, who took public positions on policy issues without clearing them with him beforehand.[1] To some extent his weakness stemmed from his background: He was not Parisian, had not attended any of the *grandes écoles*, and had never held a ministerial post. For his part, however, Hollande himself was unable to promote a clear presidential image. A year after taking office, his popularity had sunk to less than 30 percent, and to less than 10 percent at the end of his mandate.

As the French left once again searched for its identity, it hoped to avoid a situation in 2017 reminiscent of the 2002 elections, when the Socialist presidential candidate failed to make it

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

to the second ballot. The signs emerged as early as March 2014, when after heavy losses by the party in the municipal elections, Hollande reshuffled his cabinet, replacing Ayrault with Manuel Valls, the tough-minded former minister of the interior. He also appointed Ségolène Royal as a minister of state for the environment, knowing her reputation for controversial and contradictory policy pronouncements. Hollande continued desperate measures to revive the left with a second cabinet reshuffle in August 2014, appointing Emmanuel Macron, a former banker inclined to neoliberalism, as minister of the economy. Macron resigned from the cabinet in August 2016 and formed his own movement, On the Move! (*En Marche*!), soon thereafter declaring his intentions to run as a centrist candidate in the forthcoming presidential elections. This came in reaction to the February 2016 cabinet reshuffle in which Christiane Taubira, the only remaining leftist minister, resigned in opposition to a bill to denaturalize individuals with dual citizenship who had committed serious crimes. In the spring of 2016, the government's ideological balance had to be restored and readjusted toward the left, and so three ecologists were added to the government and former prime minister Ayrault replaced Laurent Fabius as foreign minister. The French left continued its efforts to find common ground among the traditional working-class left, the social democrats, the progressives, and the neoliberal economic centrists. While not unique to France, the problem is perhaps more pronounced in France, where the left has been historically a clear force in relations between labor and business.

The failure of the left to connect with working-class voters combined with disenchantment with the mainstream right and the political establishment more broadly, which led to the unprecedented presidential elections of 2017 and 2022. In both instances, the top two candidates in the runoff, Emmanuel Macron (La République En Marche!) and Marine Le Pen (National Front, later National Rally), represented ideological positions and parties beyond the traditional mainstream partisan alignments. The outsiders were inside the corridors of power, and the president seemed, on paper, to be poised for dominance given leadership in both the presidency and legislature. Yet questions swirled about how stable and enduring Macron's mandate would be, built upon a new political movement and based at least somewhat on a vote against his opponent. These conditions would provide a new kind of test for the strong French presidency.

FRANCE AT A GLANCE

Type of Government

Republic

Capital

Paris

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Administrative Divisions

Thirteen regions, subdivided into 101 departments.

Regions: Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Bretagne, Centre-Val de Loire, Corse, Grand Est, Hauts-de-France, Ile-de-France, Normandie, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Occitanie, Pays de la Loire, and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Overseas regions: Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique, Mayotte, and Réunion

Dependent areas: Clipperton Island, French Polynesia, French Southern and Antarctic Lands, New Caledonia, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Wallis and Futuna

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Independence

486 (unified by Clovis)

Constitution

Adopted by referendum September 28, 1958; became effective October 4, 1958; amended many times.

Legal System

Civil law system with indigenous concepts; review of administrative but not legislative acts

Suffrage

Eighteen years of age; universal

Executive Branch

Chief of state: president
Head of government: prime minister
Cabinet: Council of Ministers appointed by the president on the suggestion of the prime minister
Elections: president elected by popular vote for a five-year term (changed from seven-year term in October 2000); prime minister appointed by the president

Legislative Branch

Bicameral parliament: Senate and National Assembly.
Senate: 348 seats—328, metropolitan and overseas departments and regions; 10, overseas territories; and 12, French citizens living outside France. Members are indirectly elected by an electoral college, with one-half the seats being renewed every three years.
Term: six years.
National Assembly: 577 seats. Members are elected by popular vote under a single-member majority system and serve five-year terms.

Judicial Branch

Supreme Court of Appeals: judges appointed by the president from nominations of the High Council of the Judiciary; Constitutional Council: three members appointed by president, three appointed by president of National Assembly, and three appointed by president of Senate; Council of State

Major Political Parties (see more detail in Chapter 2.3)

Democratic Movement (MoDem), Europe Ecology—The Greens (EELV), France Unbowed (FI), French Communist Party (PCF), Left Radical Party (PRG), Horizons, National Rally (RN), New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), New Ecological and Social People's Union (NUPES), Renaissance (formerly Republic On the Move!) (RE), Radical Party of the Left (PRV), Reconquest! (R!), Republican and Citizen Movement (MRC), Republic Arise (DLR), Socialist Party (PS), The

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Republicans (LR), Union of Democrates and Independants (UDI), Union of Right and Center (UDC), We Resist! (R!), Worker's Struggle (LO).

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* 2023 (updated). https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/france/

The president has a variety of appointive powers over military officers, political advisers, and some of the members of several judicial organs (on the advice, to be sure, of the prime minister). In addition, the president retains the powers traditionally associated with chiefs of state: to appoint ambassadors and other high civilian personnel, to receive foreign dignitaries, to sign bills and promulgate laws and decrees, to issue pardons, to preside over cabinet sessions, and to send messages to parliament. The president cannot veto bills, but may ask parliament to reexamine all or a part of any disliked bill. The president also has the right to dissolve the assembly before the expiration of its maximum term of five years and to call for new elections. The only two constraints are rather mild: the requirement that the president "consult" with the prime minister and the Speakers of the two chambers and the stipulation that the assembly not be dissolved less than a year after its election. So far, presidents have made use of the dissolution power on five occasions: in 1962, 1968, 1981, 1988, and 1997.

The president is involved in the political process in a variety of ways. This individual may submit to the Constitutional Council an act of parliament or a treaty of doubtful constitutionality, and may submit to a popular referendum any organic bill (i.e., one relating to the organization of public powers) or any treaty requiring ratification. The constitution stipulates that the president may resort to a referendum only on the proposal of the government (while parliament is in session) or after a joint motion by the two parliamentary chambers (which meet in congress in Versailles for formal ratification). President de Gaulle ignored this stipulation, however, when he called for a referendum in 1962. Since the founding of the Fifth Republic, there have been nine referendums (after the popular ratification of the constitution itself): in January 1961, on self-determination for Algeria; in April 1962, on the Evian agreement on independence for Algeria; in October 1962, on the method of electing the president; in April 1969, on the reform of the Senate; in April 1972, on approving Great Britain's entry into the European Common Market; in November 1988, on proposals for autonomy for New Caledonia, a French dependency in the Pacific; in September 1992, on the ratification of the Maastricht treaty on European Union; in November 2000, on the reduction of the presidential term of office; and in May 2005, on the constitution of the European Union.

The president also conducts the nation's diplomacy. He negotiates and signs (or "ratifies") treaties, and he must be alerted to the progress of all international negotiations conducted in the name of France.

One of the most interesting and significant constitutional provisions relating to presidential power is Article 16, which reads as follows:

When the institutions of the Republic, the independence of the nation, the integrity of its territory or the fulfillment of its international commitments are threatened in a grave and immediate manner and when the regular functioning of the constitutional governmental

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

authorities is interrupted, the president of the Republic shall take the measures commanded by these circumstances, after official consultation with the prime minister, the chairs (Speakers) of the assemblies, and the Constitutional Council.

Such emergency powers, which exist in various Western democracies, are intended for use during civil wars, general strikes, and similar public disorders that presumably cannot be handled through the normal, and often time-consuming, deliberative parliamentary processes. De Gaulle invoked the provisions once, during a failed plot organized in 1961 by generals opposing his Algeria policy. Although Article 16 is not likely to be used again soon, and although there is a stipulation that parliament must be in session when this emergency power is exercised, its very existence has been a source of disquiet to many who fear that a future president might use it for dictatorial purposes. Others view Article 16 more liberally—that is, as a weapon of the president in the role of a constitutional watchdog, mediator, and umpire.

In addition to Article 16 (and to extension of martial law in the case of war or invasion), the government may proclaim a "state of national emergency" for a limited period and with the approval of the president and the Council of State. Such a state was proclaimed for eight months immediately after the terrorist attacks in Paris of November 2015 and subsequently extended. During this period, a number of measures were taken, such as searches and seizures, police interpellations and administrative detentions, and telephone taps. The constitution makes a clear distinction in its wording between the chief of state and the head of government. The prime minister, not the president, "directs the action of the government," "ensures the execution of the laws," "exercises regulatory powers," and "proposes constitutional amendments to the president." Unfortunately, some doubt whether the prime minister and the government can be functionally separated from any president who wishes to be more than a figurehead. Indeed, the constitutional text is not without ambiguity. For example, one article specifies that the prime minister is in charge of national defense, and another makes the president commander in chief of the armed forces. Similarly, the prime minister's power to "determine the policy of the nation" may conflict with, and be subordinated to, the president's responsibility for "guaranteeing national independence."

In fact, except during the first two periods of cohabitation, prime ministers have had little independence and little discretion in relation to the president in all areas in which the latter has taken a personal interest. Furthermore—here again, except under "abnormal" conditions when the assembly and the president are on different sides of the political divide—the prime minister may be dismissed not only by parliament but also (though the constitution does not stipulate this) by the president. Indeed, 16 of the 24 prime ministers preceding Élisabeth Borne were replaced for a variety of reasons while still enjoying the confidence of the assembly. Although their appointment does not need to be officially approved by parliament, most prime ministers have, in fact, gone before the assembly to be "invested" (formally confirmed for office). Prime ministers do not, in principle, have to reflect the party composition of the assembly, and they do not have to belong to any party at all, although in practice they cannot function, or even remain in office, without the support of a majority of deputies.

Traits that make for the ideal prime minister for a given president tend to vary with circumstances. While politicians who have held cabinet positions and other elected offices tend to be selected, at times, presidents have favored military veterans, financiers, academics, and diplomats. For example, Michel Debré, who became prime minister in 1959, had been a loyal Gaullist

Do not copy, post, or distribute
Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

even during the Fourth Republic, but he was replaced in 1962 by Georges Pompidou, a former lycée professor and banker who had once worked intimately with de Gaulle and led his presidential staff. In 1968, when it became necessary to deflect from the president the mishandling of problems that had given rise to the mass rebellions in May and June of that year, Pompidou was replaced by Maurice Couve de Murville, a professional diplomat. When Pompidou was elected to the presidency in 1969, he chose Jacques Chaban-Delmas, a former Radical-Socialist and wartime Resistance hero, to serve as prime minister.

In 1976, Raymond Barre represented a "nonpolitical" professor of economics. Pierre Mauroy, the first Socialist prime minister of the Fifth Republic, was selected in 1981 by President Mitterrand because of Mauroy's nearly ideal background. Scion of a working-class family and trained as a teacher, he had served as the mayor of a large industrial city. He also had been prominent in the old Socialist Party of the Fourth Republic and managed to get along well with the leaders of the party factions.

In 1991, the public image of the government—and, by derivation, that of Mitterrand himself—had been tarnished by the ongoing unemployment, growing delinquency, immigrant riots, and scandals involving campaign funding of Socialist politicians. Edith Cresson, the first woman prime minister in French history, was selected after having headed a succession of ministries while cultivating a reputation both as a loyal follower of Mitterrand and his brand of socialism, as a proponent of government policies favoring business and industry.[2]

Chirac, after he was elected president in 1995, selected his close friend Alain Juppé, who had begun his career in the higher civil service as an inspector of finance later serving as Balladur's foreign minister. Following premature elections in 1997, Chirac had little choice in appointing Jospin, who had become the unchallenged leader of the democratic left and was widely considered the architect of the victory of the Socialists and their left-wing allies.

Dominique de Villepin, who became prime minister in 2005, had impressive credentials. A career diplomat, he had been a major adviser to Chirac on foreign policy, and he had served as foreign minister under prime ministers Balladur and Raffarin. He also directed Chirac's 1995 presidential campaign and served as secretary general of the presidential palace. His relationship with Parliament, however, was tenuous, in part because he had never been elected to it (nor to any other office) and he often ignored it.

After the municipal elections of 2014, which resulted in significant losses for the Socialists, Ayrault was replaced by Manuel Valls, his interior minister, in order to improve his government's internal unity, give it an image of tenacity in the face of challenges to law and order, and incline it in a neoliberal (i.e., business-friendly) direction. Élisabeth Borne has never held elected office yet became prime minister in 2022 amidst widespread pension reform protests. As a civil engineer with experience in labor and transportation management, plus several ministerial roles including in energy and ecology, Macron may have seen in her the ability to add credibility on both infrastructure environmental issues.

The size and complexity of cabinets have varied from one government to another, as has the attribution of responsibilities. A new cabinet position may be created to emphasize a special policy focus; thus, Sarkozy created a Ministry for Immigration, Integration, and National Identity in order to guide the ongoing debate about "who is French," and Hollande appointed a minister of industrial renewal who was to promote job creation and prevent further delocalization of industries.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Cabinet stability, however, has been much greater under the Fifth Republic than under the Fourth Republic, with only 19 prime ministers—one of them, Chirac, serving on two separate occasions—over a 53-year period, 1959–2012 (see Tables 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4). But there were more than 30 cabinet rearrangements during that time. Such rearrangements were made for a variety of reasons: deaths, changes in domestic or foreign policy orientations, voluntary resignations (often prompted by disagreements over government policy), and changes in the political party composition of the assembly. During ordinary periods, most of these "reshuffles" were made at the behest of the president; during cohabitation, they tended to be decided by the prime minister, often to rearrange the partisan makeup of the cabinet or to "freshen up" the image of the government.

Under the constitution, the chief of state presides over cabinet sessions. Similar provisions existed in earlier regimes, but, especially in the Third and Fourth Republics, they meant little, because "working" sessions of the cabinet were, in effect, led by the prime minister. In the Fifth Republic, the president—except, again, during cohabitation interludes—has effectively led most cabinet meetings and determined their agendas. Moreover, he has had a major voice in determining the size of the government, which has ranged from 24 to 49 full and junior ministers, and in deciding which of the full ministers—usually between 16 and 28—are "cabinet" ministers—that is, they participate in the weekly cabinet sessions. Such liberty will be limited in the future, because under a constitutional amendment of 2008, the size of the cabinet will be subject to legislation by parliament.

The role of the prime ministers has not been negligible. Many have been political personalities in their own right, and most have had experience in elective office.[3] They have accepted the prime ministership for reasons of ambition, more than half viewing it as a stepping-stone to the presidency. Nevertheless, they have played a distinctly subordinate role in policymaking except during periods of cohabitation; they have rarely been given credit for the achievements of their governments; and they have been used as scapegoats, to be replaced when the president loses popularity. Yet as government leaders, prime ministers have presided over important interministerial committees, counseled presidents on policy, and promoted and defended legislation in parliament and before public opinion. But the association between president and prime minister does not necessarily constitute a genuine policymaking partnership; in fact, all presidents thus far have clearly rejected the notion that there is a two-headed executive and have affirmed presidential supremacy, except during the cohabitation periods 1986–1988, 1993–1995, and 1997–2002, when the executive was temporarily "depresidentialized."[4]

The complex and ambiguous relationship between the president and prime minister has given rise to a debate about which of the two has been the more important decision maker. Chirac has been quoted as saying, "I decide, the minister[s] execute."[5] Sarkozy made similar statements; he asserted that he was elected to act and that he intended to do so. Prime Minister Fillon accepted the primacy of the president; as he put it, "it is the president who governs."[6] In practice, such statements suggested that the president may make decisions that contravene the policies preferred by the prime minister.[7] The majority view is that the president is the real power, but, according to some, it is the prime minister who makes the concrete *domestic* policy

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

TABLE 2.2 ■ Political Composition of Selected French Fifth Republic Governments Before 1981

President:	de Gaulle			Pompidou			Giscard d'Estaing		
Prime Minister:	**Debré**	**Pompidou**		**Chaban-Delmas**		**Messmer**	**Chirac**	**Barre**	
Political Party	**January 1959**	**April 1962**	**April 1967**	**July 1968**	**June 1969**	**July 1972**	**June 1974**	**August 1976**	**July 1979**
Gaullists	6	9	21	26	29	22	12	9	12
Republicans	—	3	3	4	7	5	8	10	11[a]
Centrists	3[b]	5[b]	—	—	3[c]	3[c]	2	2[d]	4[d]
Radicals	1	1	—	—	—	—	6[e]	5	1[f]
Left Radicals	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Socialists	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Communists	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Miscellaneous	7[g]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3[h]
Nonparty	10	11	5	1	—	—	8	10[i]	10[i]
Total (including prime minister)	27	29	29	31	39	30	36	36	41

[a] Known until 1977 as Independent Republicans.

[b] Popular Republican Movement (MRP).

[c] Center for Democracy and Progress (CDP).

[d] Center of Social Democrats (CDS).

[e] Reformers.

[f] "Democratic Left."

[g] Includes five independents.

[h] Includes one Social Democrat, one member of the National Center of Independents and Peasants (CNIP), and the prime minister, attached to the Union for French Democracy (UDF).

[i] Collectively designated as the "presidential majority."

Source: Compiled by the author.

decisions that count.[8] Still others take a more balanced view.[9] In fact, the relative power of each depends on the political composition of the National Assembly. If, on the one hand, that body is controlled by the president's party, the president's authority is virtually unchallenged. If, on the other hand, the assembly is controlled by a different party, the prime minister, whose tenure depends on support by the assembly, plays the dominant executive role and the president's

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

TABLE 2.3 ■ Political Composition of Selected French Fifth Republic Governments, 1981–1988

President:	Mitterrand					
Prime Minister:	Mauroy		Fabius[a]	Chirac[b]	Rocard	
Political Party	May 1981	June 1981	July 1984	March 1986	May 1988c	June 1988[d]
Gaullists	—	—	—	20	—	—
Republicans	—	—	—	7	—	1
Centrists	—	—	—	7[e]	—	1
Radicals	—	—	—	2	1	1
Left Radicals	3	2	3	—	2	3
Socialists	39	37	36	—	26	25
Communists	—	4	—	—	—	—
Miscellaneous	1[f]	1[f]	1[g]	—	2[h]	3[h]
Nonparty	—	—	3	6	11	15
Total (including prime minister)	43	44	43	42	42	49

[a] Cabinet: 18 ministers (including 14 Socialists).

[b] Cabinet: 15 ministers (including seven Gaullists, five various Union for French Democracy [UDF], three nonparty).

[c] Cabinet: 19 ministers (including 14 Socialists).

[d] Cabinet: 22 ministers (including 14 Socialists, one Left Socialist, four UDF, three nonparty).

[e] Center of Social Democrats (CDS).

[f] Movement of Democrats, an ex-Gaullist group supporting Mitterrand in the presidential elections of 1981.

[g] Unified Socialist Party (PSU).

[h] Direct (nondifferentiated) members of UDF.

Source: Compiled by the author.

position is more or less reduced to that of a figurehead. The president may be weakened for other reasons as well. After the failed referendum of 2005, Chirac, although continuing to have the nominal support of the parliament, was discredited both at home and abroad and considered a political dinosaur.[10]

In contrast, Sarkozy's position was strengthened when the parliamentary election that followed soon after his accession to the presidency produced an assembly dominated by his own party. As a result, he was able to get major pieces of legislation enacted, including a number of institutional reforms embodied in constitutional amendments.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

TABLE 2.4 ■ Political Composition of Selected French Republic Governments Since 1993

President:	Chirac			Sarkozy			Hollande		Macron		
Prime Minister:	**Balladur**	**Juppé**	**Jospin**	**Raffarin**	**Villepin**	**Fillon**	**Ayrault**	**Valls**	**Philippe**	**Castex**	**Borne**
Political Party	**March 1993**	**May 1995**	**June 1997**	**May 2002**	**May 2005**	**June 2007**	**May 2012**	**August 2014**	**June 2017**	**July 2020**	**July 2022**
Gaullists	14	19	—	16	30	21	—		—	_	_
Republicans	7	8	—	6[b]	1[b]	—	—		3	4	4
Centrists	5[d]	6[d]	—	8[e]	1[e]	—	—		28 v	34 v	16
Radicals	1	1	—	1	1	—	—		—	_	_
Left Radicals	—	—	3	—	—	—	2	5	__	_	_
Socialists	—	—	18	—	—	5	31	33	__	3	1
Communists	—	—	3	—	—	—	—		—	_	_
Miscellaneous	2h	2[i]	2[j]	—	—	3	2[k]	1[g]	6		5
Nonparty	1l	6	1	8	—	3	1	1	__	_	2
Total (including prime minister)	30 n	42[o]	27[p]	39[q]	33[r]	32[s]	36 t	40[u]	37 w	41x	28y

Source: Compiled by the author.

Note: the parties and party families associated with each ideological label have changed over time, and author discretion has been applied to classify them for the purpose of illustrating shifts and changes in the party system.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

THE PARLIAMENT

In terms of its bicameral structure and internal organization, the legislature of the Fifth Republic bears a clear resemblance to that of earlier republics. The National Assembly is composed of 577 deputies, 556 from metropolitan France, 10 from overseas departments and territories, and 11 seats representing citizens abroad. All are elected for a five-year term by direct popular vote on the basis of a single-member constituency. Until 2003, members of the Senate were chosen for nine-year terms by an electoral college composed of National Assembly deputies, department councillors, and delegates of city councils. One-third of the membership was renewed every three years. The number of senators has been increased periodically—from 295 in 1979 to 305 in 1981, 319 in 1987, and 321 in 1991. In July 2003, the parliament approved an organic law that reduced the term of senators from nine to six years and called for renewal of half of its membership every three years and an increase in its membership from 331 in 2004 to 341 in 2007, 346 in 2010, and 348 in 2016. The law also reduced the age of eligibility for election to the Senate from 35 to 30 years.

Executive officials seek to mobilize support among deputies elected to the National Assembly.
GEOFFROY VAN DER HASSELT/AFP via Getty Images

The organization of the parliament follows traditional patterns. Each chamber is chaired by a president (Speaker), who is elected in the assembly for five years and in the Senate for three years. The Speaker is assisted by vice presidents (or deputy Speakers), six in the assembly and four in the Senate, reflecting roughly the number of major party groupings in each chamber. These officers, who collectively constitute the "conference of presidents" in each chamber, formally determine the allocation of committee seats and the organization of parliamentary debates.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

To participate meaningfully in legislative affairs, deputies must belong to a parliamentary party (*groupe parlementaire*). In the Fourth Republic, a minimum of 14 deputies constituted a parliamentary party. With the establishment of the Fifth Republic, the required number was raised to 30. This change forced small contingents of deputies to align (*s'apparenter*) with larger ones, thereby reducing the number of parties in the legislature. After the parliamentary elections of 1988, the number was reduced to 20 in order to reward the 27 Communist deputies for their selective support of the government and, in particular, for supporting Laurent Fabius, the former Socialist prime minister, as Speaker of the assembly. In 2009, the minimum number of deputies needed to form a parliamentary group was reduced to 15.

The maximum duration of ordinary sessions of parliament used to be five-and-a-half months a year: 80 days in the fall (from early October) and 90 days in the spring (from early April). In 1995, the constitution was amended to provide for a single ordinary session of nine months, from October through June, totaling 120 days. Special sessions may be convened at the request of the prime minister or a majority of the deputies, but such sessions must have a clearly defined agenda. Since 1981, many special sessions have been called, largely to deal with budgetary matters and matters of financial urgency.[11]

In theory, both chambers have equal powers with the following exceptions: Budget bills must always be submitted first to the assembly, and only the assembly may oust the government on a vote of censure (described later in this section). The decision-making role of parliament as a whole, however, is limited, particularly in comparison with the legislature's role in earlier French republics and in other western European democracies. The areas in which parliament may pass legislation are clearly enumerated in the constitution (Art. 34). They include, notably, budget and tax matters; civil liberties; penal and personal-status laws; organization of judicial bodies; education; social security; jurisdiction of local communities; establishment of public institutions, including nationalized industries; and rules governing elections (where not spelled out in the constitutional text). Matters not stipulated fall in the domain of decrees, ordinances, and regulations, which are promulgated directly by the government.

The distinction between laws and decrees is not a clear-cut one. In some areas—for example, local government, education, or labor and social policy—the parliament often does little more than establish general principles and leaves it to the government to fill in the details by decree or executive order. In addition, the government may ask the parliament (under Art. 38) to delegate to the government the power to issue decrees in areas normally under parliamentary jurisdiction. This procedure was used frequently during de Gaulle's presidency. This "fast-track" approach was used most recently in September 2017 by Prime Minister Philippe for the Ordinances Reforming Labor Law, five ordinances signed by Macron and touted as promoting dialogue between employers and employees, protections for small business, and the right to telework, among other objectives..[12] This procedure has a limited duration—six months—and the action taken must be validated by a formal government bill.

As is the custom in all parliamentary democracies, a distinction is made in France between a government bill (*projet de loi*) and a private member's bill (*proposition de loi*). The former has priority; in fact, since the founding of the Fifth Republic, less than 15 percent of all bills passed by parliament have originated with private members (or backbenchers), and most of these passed

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

because the government raised no objections or because it encouraged such bills. Finance bills can be introduced only by the government, and backbenchers' amendments to such bills are permissible only if they do not reduce revenues or increase expenditures. Furthermore, if parliament fails to vote on (in practice, to approve) a budget bill within 70 days of its submission, the government may enact the budget by decree.

The government has the deciding voice on what bills are to be discussed in parliament and how much time shall be allocated to debate on parts of a bill. It can also prevent amendments to a bill by resorting to the "blocked-vote" procedure—that is, demanding that the legislative body vote on the text of the bill as a whole. This procedure has been used well over 100 times in the assembly, with more than 90 percent of such bills passing. In the Senate, where about one-third of the bills introduced in the blocked-vote fashion have been rejected.

Enactment of a bill requires passage in both the assembly and the Senate. Should the two chambers disagree on any aspect of a bill, a variety of procedures can be used to achieve agreement. The bill in question may be shuttled back and forth between the chambers until a common text is agreed on. Alternatively, the government may call for the appointment of a conference committee, or it may ask each chamber for a "second reading."[13] If disagreement persists, the assembly may be asked to decide by a simple majority vote, thereby enacting the bill in question. Neither chamber allows members to filibuster.

Constitutional amendments are subject to a special procedure. The initiative belongs both to the president (after consulting with the prime minister) and to parliament. Once an amendment bill has passed both chambers in identical form, it is submitted to the people for ratification. A referendum may be avoided if parliament, in a joint session convoked for this purpose by the president, ratifies the amendment by a three-fifths majority.[14]

Checks on the Executive

Although the constitution grants the legislature jurisdiction in areas broad enough to embrace the most important domestic policy matters, in the Fifth Republic the parliament has been in a poor position to exercise this power. In the Fourth Republic, more than two dozen assembly standing committees contributed much to the legislative process. Indeed, these committees, because of the expertise of their members, became quasi-independent centers of power. Although they produced high-quality legislative proposals, they sometimes offered counterproposals to government bills, designed to embarrass the government and bring it down. By contrast, in the Fifth Republic only six standing committees (usually consisting of 61–121 deputies each) were permitted under the constitution until 2016, when this number increased to eight. They do their work within carefully limited time periods and are forbidden to produce substitute bills.

In theory, the parliament can do more than just register and ratify what has been proposed to it by the government. During the first decade of the Fifth Republic, parliament, and above all the assembly, was relatively docile. Especially since the mid-1970s, however, parliament has been more actively engaged in lawmaking (see Chapter 2.4). Evidence of this more active role is the growing number of successful amendments to government bills introduced both by legislative committees and backbenchers.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

During the weekly question periods in the National Assembly, deputies pose questions (in written or oral form) to individual ministers. Answers, which are not immediately forthcoming, may be provided by a minister or by a person deputized by him, such as a higher civil servant. Such question-and-answer sessions are sometimes followed by a very brief debate or sometimes by no debate at all. These sessions cannot be followed by a vote of censure, which would prompt resignation of the government.

Motions of censure must be introduced by a unique and specific procedure and separate from the assembly's routine business. These motions require the signatures of at least one-tenth of all the deputies, who may cosponsor only one such motion during each parliamentary session. A "cooling-off" period of 48 hours also must precede the vote on such a motion. A motion of censure carries only if an absolute majority of the entire membership of the assembly supports the censure. The government may also challenge or provoke the assembly to consider a motion of censure simply by making a specific bill or a general policy declaration a matter of confidence (Art. 49, sec. 3). If no successful censure motion is approved, the bill in question is considered to have passed, and the government remains in place. In the 65 years between 1958 and 2023, the government resorted successfully to this "provocation" method 100 times.

Among typical instances were an electoral reform bill in 2003, a decentralization bill in 2004, and the labor relations bill of February 2006 that provoked massive demonstrations and strikes. During this period, 50 motions of censure were introduced by deputies, but only one, in October 1962, obtained the requisite majority vote. In that particular instance, President de Gaulle was required to accept the parliamentary dismissal of his prime minister (then Pompidou). But de Gaulle nullified the effect of the censure vote by dissolving parliament and, after the elections that followed, simply reappointing Pompidou to head a "new" government. The constitutional reforms ratified on July 23, 2008, restricted the use of Article 49: It can henceforth be used only for finance bills or bills on the funding of social security, and no more than once during each parliamentary session.[15] Article 49.3 was used by the Hollande government in February 2015 to push through a controversial, liberalizing budget bill drafted by Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron in a climate where the Socialist party unity and its majority appeared to be waning. In May 2016, Article 49.3 was invoked regarding a Labor reform bill from the government of Prime Minister Manuel Valls designed to make layoffs easier and workdays longer, yet conservative opponents fell 42 votes short of the needed 288 to halt progress on the bill. The most recent invocation of 49.3 occurred in March 2023 as the government attempted to force a controversial pension reform bill through the legislature.

The 2008 reforms provided for many other measures aimed at strengthening the role of parliament. Among them are the following:

- the right of the Conférence des Présidents (a committee of parliamentary leaders including the chairs of each parliamentary party) of the assembly to lengthen the time allotted for debate on a bill
- the reduction of the amount of time allotted to the government to answer written parliamentary questions
- an increase in the maximum number of standing committees raised from six to eight

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

- the requirement that certain nominations made by the president be confirmed by a joint committee of the two chambers of parliament
- the obligation of government to seek parliamentary authorization for the use of armed forces outside the country for more than six months

The reforms also expanded the rights of the opposition by increasing its role in proposing the parliamentary agenda and in calling for the appointment of committees of inquiry. The 2008 reforms constituted the first major restructuring of executive-legislative relations since 1958 and served to democratize political life. They were ratified in joint session on July 23, 2008, by 539 votes to 537, one vote more than needed.[16] Yet it is not clear if they have affected the dominance of the executive over the legislative process.

Another weapon that parliament can use against the executive is the Constitutional Council. This body consists of nine members—one-third each chosen by the president, the Speaker of the National Assembly, and the Speaker of the Senate—appointed for nine-year terms, with one-third renewed every three years. Its members do not need to be lawyers; they often include politicians and academics. In addition, former presidents of the Republic are members ex-officio. Originally, the council was viewed as largely advisory; but under the constitution it must be consulted on the constitutionality of an organic bill before it becomes law and on the constitutionality of treaties before they are considered ratified. It also pronounces on the legality of parliamentary regulations and the propriety of referendum procedures and watches over presidential and legislative elections and confirms the results. It must also be consulted if the president invokes the emergency clause (Art. 16) of the constitution. In addition, the president, the prime minister, the Speaker of either chamber, and, since the passage of a constitutional amendment in 1974, 60 deputies or 60 senators may submit any bills, before they become law, to the council for a judgment. Under the original text of the constitution, the validity of a bill could be challenged only *before* it became law, a challenge used most often by members of the opposition. Under a constitutional amendment ratified in 2008, ordinary citizens may appeal to the Constitutional Council to challenge an action based on legislation (*after* it has been passed, as in the United States and Germany) held to be in violation of fundamental liberties (Art. 61 -1). Such challenges must go through the "filter" of the highest administrative courts and civil/criminal courts, the Council of State or the Court of Cassation, respectively.

The Constitutional Council's decisions have had a significant impact on legislation, as recent cases show. It paved the way for government pension reform in 2023, as those opposed to reducing the French retirement age by two years to 62 petitioned the Constitutional Council to block the changes or put them to a referendum vote to no avail. However, in 2021, the council invalidated provisions of a counterterrorism bill that would have restricted comings and goings of terrorists released from prison for two years saying that was too long and one year was more reasonable.[17] Critics have argued that the council has been excessively politicized, a charge magnified when lame-duck presidents of France have appointed councilors just before leaving office and by the fact that most are not jurists but politicians including former presidents and prime ministers.[18]

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Incompatibilities and Cumulations

Under the Fourth Republic, deputies were often too willing to unseat a government in the hope that there would be a portfolio for them in a subsequent cabinet. If they should, in turn, be ousted from the cabinet, they would still retain their parliamentary seats. The constitution of the Fifth Republic, however, purposely changed all that. Under Article 23, a position in the cabinet is incompatible with simultaneously occupying a seat in parliament. Consequently, any deputy (or senator) who ascends to the cabinet must resign his or her parliamentary seat—which is immediately filled, without special election, by that person's "alternate" or replacement (*suppléant*), whose name was listed on the ballot alongside that of the deputy during the preceding assembly elections. If the alternate resigns or dies, a by-election must be held.[19] Deputies appointed by the government for special tasks (as *chargés de mission*) may retain their parliamentary seats if the appointment is for less than six months.

The spirit of the incompatibility clause has been violated repeatedly. Cabinet ministers have run for parliamentary seats they do not intend to occupy, and presidents have encouraged that practice to test popular support for the government. Constituents vote for such candidates because they are better able to secure "pork barrel" appropriations when their representative sits in the cabinet rather than in the parliament.

The incompatibility rule had not affected the traditional accumulation of concurrently held elected offices (*cumul des mandats*). For many years, most deputies were concurrently mayors or members of regional, departmental, and municipal councils, and a sizable number were serving as members of the European Parliament as well. Of the 577 deputies elected to the assembly in 2012, 476 deputies (83 percent) have been *cumulards*, holding at least one supplementary elective office—most of them as mayors. A typical combination of members of parliament has been mayor and/or president of an urban agglomeration. Others have combined their parliamentary mandates with positions as presidents of regional or general (departmental) councils.

In 2014, French law changed disallowing national deputies and senators from exercising local executive functions as mayors or presidents and vice presidents of regional, departmental, or municipal councils. Additionally, national senators and deputies cannot occupy seats in the European parliament. As the 2022 national elections concluded, 120 of 577 National Assembly deputies occupied incompatible seats upon their election, which by the 2014 law required action to resolve the incompatibility within thirty days following their election.[20]

The diminution of multiple-office holding continues: Beginning in 2017, parliamentarians could no longer be simultaneously presidents or vice presidents of regional councils. May 2019 marked the effective date for European Parliament Members (MEPs) to relinquish multiple levels of office-holding. The momentum is in place to discontinue multiple levels of simultaneous elected office holding stemming from 2014 legislation, even if implementation comes in phases.[21] The limitations on the power of deputies have not served to improve their public images or, indeed, their self-images. Still, there is no proof that individual legislators in France are substantially less powerful or less rewarded than their counterparts in Great Britain. In 2023, the gross monthly base salary of French deputies and senators was €7,493 (roughly corresponding to that of higher civil servants and senior university professors).[22]

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.
Do not copy, post, or distribute

In addition, the typical deputy receives a rental subsidy, car allowances, reimbursements for administrative assistance (partly paid for by the assembly), as well as travel allowances and tax concessions. For many deputies, such compensation is insufficient to cover the cost of maintaining two residences and traveling to and from their constituencies, and some are forced to pursue their "normal" professions as best they can. To prevent double-dipping, the total monthly base salary for holders of multiple offices was set at €15,000. This, however, does not include the perks that may be added, especially for mayors of sizable communes. Finally, deputies are allocated substantial sums to spend at their discretion.[23] Deputies have used this money, inter alia, to subsidize voluntary associations, charities, and cultural activities in their constituencies.

Most deputies are not wealthy, and in terms of social background, age, and occupation, they are reasonably representative of the population. In some respects, the Assembly elected in 2017 resembled its predecessors, notably the underrepresentation of workers and farmers and a predominance of those from professional occupations. Yet it has a distinctive profile in many respects. It is younger (its average age is under 49 compared to 54 in the preceding assembly), more representative of the private sector (59 percent compared to 39 percent), and much more feminine (223 women of 577, or 38.8 percent, compared to 26.9 percent). Of the 59 ministers or former ministers who ran for the assembly, only 20 were elected, and of the 345 incumbent deputies, only 140 won. Conversely, 424 elected to the assembly had never before been deputies.[24] The 2022 elections continued to transform the composition of the National Assembly in notable ways, extending a trend of younger deputies, greater gender and ethnic diversity, and noteworthy examples of people from working class occupations. This includes at least three former cleaners, a former delivery driver, a former call center worker, and former law enforcement officers. Deputies under age 40 now number 118 of 577 in what has been heralded the "influx of Kevins" and "goodbye to its Bernards" as names tend to be generational.[25] Parliament continues to be a major pool for recruits to ministerial positions, although in recent years it has faced some competition from the civil service and occasionally from the corporate world. It may no longer be as powerful in the legislative process as it was in the Fourth Republic, but parliament is still important as a forum for the debate and processing of government-initiated bills.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE

One feature of the French polity that has changed little, and is not likely to do so in the near future, is the administrative system. Since the time of the Old Regime and Napoleon, this system has been highly centralized; the various echelons below the national government—departments (*départements*), districts (*arrondissements*), and communes—continue to be administrative rather than decision-making entities, whose responsibilities can be defined, expanded, or contracted at will by the national government.

At the pinnacle of the system is the permanent civil service. Defined in its broadest sense, it is the corpus of nearly 5.5 million government employees and constitutes about 20 percent of

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

France's total labor force. In addition to the ordinary national civil servants, it includes military officers, teachers (public elementary school through university), employees of local government bodies, and employees of the railroads, civil aviation, electric power companies, and other nationalized sectors. Denationalization (or privatization) policies, pursued at a steady pace for many years, will undoubtedly result in a reduction in the number of state employees. In both the 2017 and 2022 elections, President Macron placed reduction of the civil service workforce prominently on his agenda, although he met with substantial employee demonstrations in protest and subsequently has backed away from dramatic cuts.

The civil service proper (*la fonction publique*) numbers about half the number cited above. It is subdivided into several categories, ranging from custodial and manual workers to high administrative functionaries who are directly responsible to cabinet ministers. The civil service is functionally divided into "sectoral" categories. The most prestigious of these are the General Inspectorate of Finance, Court of Accounts, Foreign Ministry, and Council of State (the pinnacle of the national administrative court system)—collectively labeled the *grand corps*. This body also includes the prefectoral corps, whose members, the prefects, are the chief agents of the government at the departmental and regional levels and are under the authority of the minister of the interior.

Since the time of Napoleon, recruitment to the higher civil service has been tied to the educational system. A variety of national schools, the likes of which are not found in other countries, train specialized civil servants. These *grandes écoles*, which are maintained alongside the regular universities, have highly competitive entry and graduation requirements. The best known are the Ecole Polytechnique,[26] which trains civil engineers and scientists; the Ecole Normale Supérieure, whose graduates become professors in prestigious lycées and universities; and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA). The ENA, which opened its doors only in 1946, has trained the majority of higher administrative personnel for the *grand corps* and the prefectoral corps. It numbers among its graduates four presidents (Giscard d'Estaing, Chirac, Hollande, and Macron), nine prime ministers (Fabius, Chirac, Rocard, Balladur, Juppé, Jospin, Villepin, Philippe, and Castex), and many cabinet ministers.[27]

The French have often criticized the independent stature and self-assured behavior of the higher civil service. They have argued that although it makes for stability, it tends to undermine democracy. This criticism has been based on the upper- and upper-middle class origins of most of the higher functionaries due to the fact that they are subject to neither popular elections nor adequate controls and on the belief that they have tended to serve not the citizen but an abstraction called "the state."

Nevertheless, the higher civil service has not been monolithic or dictatorial, nor has it been immune from internal conflicts and external pressures. The professional civil service is, in principle, nonpartisan, but it is not immune to political change; and new presidents and prime ministers often resort to political housecleaning in the higher civil service. Although the ENA has recruited only a minuscule portion of its student body from the working class and the peasantry—despite a number of half-hearted attempts to broaden the method of recruitment[28]—its graduates, the *Enarques*, have been as likely to be progressives (even leftists) as they are conservatives or reactionaries. Over the past several decades, the prestige of the *Enarchie* has declined,

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

in part owing to its conformism, elite isolation, and arrogance of its members.[29] This combined with the strong populist, and therefore anti-elite, mood gaining significant ground in recent years led Macron to announce the closure of the ENA in 2021 in what he referred to as a "deep revolution in recruitment for public service."[30]

A successor higher education institution emerged in the Institut du Service Public (ISP) with a core objective of diversifying the composition of the French civil service, moving it away from its association with "clubby, mostly male French elitism."

Sometimes conflicts erupt between the civil servants who work for the Ministries of Finance and Industry and who often have close personal and ideological ties with big- business managers and those who work in the Ministries of Health and Education and who tend to have affinities with their clientele and therefore have a social reform outlook. Differences of opinion also often occur between the civil servants in the Ministry of Justice, who are concerned with procedural propriety, and those in the Ministry of the Interior, who tend to be sympathetic with the police's preoccupation with public order. There is also a certain tension between the traditional bureaucrats who serve in the standard ministries and have a legalistic orientation and the technocrats who have been trained in economics, statistics, and management methods. Despite periodic commitments to rationalize operations, the size of the civil service has grown steadily (see Table 2.5). A critique of over-administration proves fair, as France's civil service is excessively large—due to numerous state responsibilities and the persistence of job-protection policies. Compared to civil services in other European countries, and to the private sector in France, they are often considered a pampered category in terms of salary, job protection, retirement pensions, and other economic benefits.[31] While pressures persist to cut positions in the civil service in the name of fiscal austerity, the administrative state is deeply entrenched in French political culture.

The number of independent administrative authorities has grown steadily. There are more than 400 autonomous commissions of various sizes and purposes—on evaluation, investigation, reflection, surveillance, and control. At this writing, they include the following: Commission

TABLE 2.5 ■ Civil Service Employment in France

	State Civil Service	Local Civil Service	Public Hospitals	Total
1986	2,287,458	1,121,383	756,201	4,165,042
1996	2,401,791	1,262,361	825,710	4,489,862
2006	2,524,440	1,662,501	953,590	5,140,531
2013	2,385,488	1,878,745	1,152,707	5,416,940
2022	2,521,300	1,931,800	1,207,000	5,660,200

Sources: 1986–2006 data is from p. 9 of: Philippe Bezes, Gilles Jeannot. *The Development and Current Features of the French Civil Service System. Van der Meer Frits, Civil Service Systems in Western Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 185–215, 2011. https://hal-enpc.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01257027; 2013 and 2020 data is from p. 9 and p. 8 of Rapport Annuel Sur L'état De La Fonction Publique – Éditions 2016 and 2022, "Effectifs par type d'employeur" http://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Nationale de l'informatique et des Libertés (CNIL), created in 1978 to guard against abuse of government files on citizens; the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (1989); the Commission nationale de contrôle des interceptions de sécurité, dealing with the bugging of telephones (1991) and created in response to criticisms by the European Court of Human Rights; the High Authority in the Fight Against Discrimination and for Equality (Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité, 1999); the Nuclear Safety Authority (Autorité de sûreté nucléaire, 2006)[32]; and the High Council for the Family (Haut conseil de la famille, 2009).[33] Like the independent regulatory commissions, their U.S. counterpart, these agencies are supposed to be immune to partisan intrusions, but charges of partisan political interference persist. In addition, there are ad hoc committees appointed by the government, such as the Gallois Commission on Growth and Competitiveness and the Moreau Commission on the Future of Retirements, which were appointed in 2012. The recommendations submitted by these bodies to the prime minister often serve as the basis of government policy.

Public Corporations

A component of the administrative system that is difficult to categorize, and yet is of great importance, is the nationalized sector. The state's involvement in the management of economic matters has resulted in special approaches to recruitment, job classification, and political control. On occasion, positions of responsibility in nationalized, or "public," enterprises are given to individuals co-opted from the private sector or are handed over as political "plums" to politicians who have proved their loyalty to the president.[34] Because of the complexity of the management problems, parliamentary oversight of nationalized enterprises has been difficult. Yet at the same time, their very existence can be a useful weapon in the hands of a government interested in long-term economic policymaking or at least in influencing the behavior of the private economic sector in its production and pricing policies.

From the beginning of the postwar period to the early 1980s, about 15 percent of the French economy was in government hands, including mass transport, gas, electricity, nuclear energy, the postal service, civil aviation, the procurement and distribution of fuel, a large proportion of banking and insurance, and one automobile manufacturing firm (Renault). In 1981 and 1982, the Socialist government (in conformity with its preelection platform) introduced bills to bring additional sectors under public control, among them a dozen industrial conglomerates (manufacturing metals, chemicals, electronics, machine tools) and most of the remaining private banks. Such a policy proved to be ill-advised, however, and soon after coming to power in 1986, the Gaullist Chirac government proceeded to denationalize most of these sectors, as well as most of the government-owned television networks. When the Socialists returned to power in 1988, they continued the privatization policy but at a slower pace. The pace sped up considerably, however, after the installation of the Gaullist governments of Balladur and Juppé. For them, privatization, in addition to conforming with the Gaullists' recently emerging neoliberal (market-oriented) ideology, served to bring a quick infusion of funds into the public treasury. Not all the privatization projects had smooth sailing, however: Juppé's proposal to privatize the Thomson firm, France's largest industrial-military production conglomerate, was shelved because of widespread opposition. For similar reasons, the Socialist government of

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Jospin, which took office in 1997, had to scale back the privatization of the country's civilian airline and the telecommunications monopoly. Later, the Villepin government, spurred on by both EU rules as well as the need for cash, resumed attempts at privatization, notably of the network of superhighways and civilian maritime lines, in the face of fierce opposition by the trade unions and leftist political parties. The Fillon government continued this policy, as it prepared to transform the postal service from a government department to a mixed enterprise. The Valls government in 2014 merged the state-owned railway company SNCF with track owner RFF, facilitating future competition in transport routes and services, with rail travel already suffering reduced demand amidst the rise of European low cost airlines. Macron initiated several notable privatization measures in 2019 aimed at modernizing the French economy, including an attempt to sell the French government's 50.6 percent stake in airport operator Aéroports de Paris (ADP) and its 72 percent stake in lottery operations Francaise des Jeux (FDJ). The government generated 1.8 billion euros in selling its shares of FDJ, as Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire indicated plans to invest 1.5 billion euros in artificial intelligence (AI).[35] Public reaction has been mixed and opposition fierce as many French people have expressed concerns about the loss of lifestyle and social stability with a reduced state role in the economy.

Control and Redress

One institution that has played a significant role as a watchdog over administrative activities is the Council of State (Conseil d'Etat). Originally created in 1799 by Napoleon to resolve intra-bureaucratic disputes, it has gradually assumed additional functions. It advises the government on the language of draft bills; it reviews the legality of decrees and regulations issuing from the executive; and, most important, it acts as a court of appeal for suits brought by citizens against the administration. Such suits, involving charges of bureaucratic arbitrariness, illegalities, or abuse of power, are initiated in departments' administrative tribunals. Unfortunately, several years may elapse before such cases come before the Council of State.

A 1973 innovation was the "mediator," the French equivalent of the ombudsman or citizens' complaint commissioner. This official, appointed by the president for a six-year term on the recommendation of parliament, may examine a variety of complaints involving, for example, social security agencies, prisons, nationalized industries, and administrative and judicial malfunctions. The mediator may request from any public agency information considered pertinent to the investigation, initiate judicial proceedings against misbehaving bureaucrats, and suggest improvements in the laws to the government. Appeal to the mediator, which is free of charge, is not direct; rather, it comes through a deputy or senator. In 2009, following a constitutional amendment ratified a year earlier, parliament enacted a law creating a new position: defender of the rights and liberties of citizens. This official, to be appointed by the president in 2011 for a nonrenewable six-year term, replaces the mediator. Citizens can appeal directly to this office. Recent actions have included a 2018 coastal municipality Grande-Synthe demanding governmental action on emissions and climate policy where it alleged a lack of attentiveness. In 2021, the Council of State ruled that the federal government must take action on climate change or face fines for failing to comply.[36]

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Subnational Government and Administration

The extent to which national decisions can be, or should be, influenced by officials at the local level has been intensely debated in France over the past two decades. Questions have also arisen about whether the existing subdivisions are the proper size, whether they are adequately financed, and whether they provide a meaningful arena for the political participation of citizens.

Metropolitan France consists of 96 departments (*départements*), which are the basic subnational administrative units into which the country was divided during the Revolution of 1789. In addition, there are four overseas departments.[37]

Each department is both self-administering *and* an administrative subunit of the national government. Whatever autonomy the departments possess is reflected by its general council, which votes a budget; decides on local taxes and loans; and passes laws on housing, roads, welfare services, cultural programs, and educational services (supplementary to those made mandatory by the national government). Members of the general council are popularly elected by single-member constituencies—the cantons—for six-year terms; half of the membership is renewable every three years. The council, in turn, elects a president, or chair. Traditionally, however, the executive officer of the department was the prefect, an agent of the national government who used to be charged with administering the department on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior and other national ministries. Therefore, the prefect was involved in maintaining public order, together with the mayor of a town. The local police force, however, was an instrument of national administration and, as such, was directly under the authority of the minister of the interior in Paris.

In 1982, the prefects were renamed commissioners of the republic. They still functioned as agents of the national government, but they left budgetary and many other policy decisions to the general councils, except for services and expenditures mandated by national legislation. In 1987, the title of commissioner was changed back to prefect. The prefect is assisted by a cabinet composed of specialists in public works, agriculture, housing, and other services. Many subprefects and their staff are underemployed, prompting Valls as Ayrault's Interior Minister to take steps to reduce them as subprefectures numbered 238 in 2012, and they employed a total of 5,580 people. Meanwhile, the average gross salary of the subprefect that year was €7,000 a month (equivalent to about $90,000 a year).[38] In 2023, 234 subprefectures remain within 96 mainland prefectures and five overseas prefectures corresponding to the total of 101 French departments.

On the level beneath the departments are the 332 arrondissements, the basic single-member constituencies for parliamentary elections. Some heavily populated arrondissements are subdivided into two or more constituencies. A further subdivision is the canton, which contains agencies such as units of the national gendarmerie, tax offices, and highway services.

In 1972, the departments were grouped into 22 regions. The regions have their own assemblies, elected by popular vote on the basis of proportional representation for six-year terms. The regional assemblies and their presiding officers all serve to coordinate the activities of several departments. In 2014, the number of regions was reduced to 13 metropolitan regions, with five overseas regions (see map of France). Among the immediate consequences of this move,

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

intended to cut costs, were conflicts over the choice of regional capitals and the location of regional offices.

The lowest, but most significant, administrative unit is the commune. The 34,965 communes as of 2021 range in size from villages of fewer than 100 inhabitants to the national capital. Communes have varied responsibilities, including fire protection, upkeep of elementary school buildings, provision of selected social services, imposition of certain taxes, and maintenance of public order.[39] When some communes have become too small to provide a full range of services, they have been either administratively merged with neighboring communes or associated with them functionally. Under provisions put into effect in the early 1970s, certain services, such as water supply and fire protection, may be performed jointly by several communes. Conversely, some communes are so large that special regimes have been invented for them: Paris and Lyons are themselves subdivided into arrondissements.

Paris has always been a special case. Between 1871 and 1977, Paris did not have a mayor but was ruled by two prefects directly on behalf of the national government: a prefect of the Seine (the former name of the department in which the capital is located) and a prefect of police. Each of the 20 arrondissements had its own mayor, whose functions were generally limited to maintaining civil registers, performing marriages, changing street names, and doing the like. Since the reinstitution of the mayor for all of Paris, the 20 district mayors have been replaced by "civil administrators." The prefect of the Paris department and the prefect of police, however, remain in place.

The relationship between the national government and the subnational units has been rendered confusing by the functional units that overlap geographic boundaries. In addition to the departments and regions, there are 25 educational districts (*académies*), which administer the educational system from elementary school through university, 16 social security regions, and six military districts. All of these functional units have been, in the final analysis, administrative conveniences put in place by the national government, and they have provided little in the way of local decision-making opportunities.

Decentralization: Processes, Consequences, and Problems

Given the "power of the streets" nature of French political culture, decentralization as a characteristic of French government seems integral. As the multilevel administrative state suggests, France goes to great lengths to provide a clear role for local politics. The competences of the various subnational authorities and the relationship between them began to change dramatically with the decentralization policies inaugurated during the presidency of Mitterrand in the early 1980s. These policies, which continue to this day, have provided for greater autonomy of the prefect in relation to the national government, greater decision- making competence in selected domains such as education, welfare, and housing for local, departmental, and regional units, and increased revenue-gathering authority.[40] Such changes have been made not by constitutional revision but by acts of parliament and therefore can be rescinded, at least in theory.

In March 2003, a constitutional amendment ratified by parliament in joint session formally stipulated that France was a republic whose organization was "decentralized," although

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

it is not entirely clear what this amendment and the ensuing legislation empower local units to do. In any case, decentralization is not federalism, because national government tutelage (*tutelle*) remains. The local units can, however, resort to local referenda and organize mergers of communes. And they have greater fiscal responsibility, which was delegated to them under the slogan of "financial autonomy." In return, these units are receiving less and less money from the national government. This buck-passing has meant, among other things, that the departments have greater responsibility for funding recipients of monthly minimum income support[41] and for maintaining the network of national roads, which has been transferred to the departments. Some communes, especially the less affluent, complain that although the national government imposes mandatory services upon them, it does not provide adequate financial resources for these services. Indeed, local and regional politicians complain that the national government, instead of permitting greater latitude in revenue gathering, has actually imposed limits on local taxes.[42] The most recent instance has involved the *taxe professionnelle*, a tax imposed locally on investments in business. In 2009, the government proposed to abolish it and replace it with a tax on energy consumption (*taxe carbone*), but the move was opposed by mayors (and by many senators who also happened to be mayors) because the *taxe professionnelle* provided about €22.6 billion annually to local communities and constituted a significant part of their revenue.[43]

Complaints have also been heard from the presidents of the regional assemblies, especially Socialist presidents, who have refused to sign proposals for the "transfer of competences."[44] These proposals, or conventions, were based on a law of 2004 on "local responsibilities and liberties." Buck-passing has affected Paris as well, especially since control of that city has passed into the hands of the Socialists. The decentralization reforms have made possible a degree of policy experimentation on various subnational levels, brought government closer to the people, and spawned a variety of approaches to "participatory democracy," but they also have introduced confusion, exacerbated inequalities, and sharpened rivalries among regional, departmental, and local authorities. Although the mayors of the larger towns welcomed decentralization, many have refrained from seeking reelection or have given up their parliamentary mandates because of the increased pressures associated with decentralization. For many small communes, decentralization also has been a handicap, as they are too poor to manage by themselves some of the services that were the responsibility of the national government.[45]

A more complex problem is that of the island of Corsica, which became part of France in the eighteenth century and differs from the mainland in its language, unique social patterns, and growing separatist sentiments. Since the mid-1980s, the island has been given greater autonomy, especially with respect to education and culture, but for many Corsicans such changes have not been enough. A minority of French politicians would like to grant the island complete independence, but because it was Napoleon Bonaparte's birthplace and, more important, because large numbers of mainland French people have settled there, many argue against such an outcome. Macron recognized Corsica's distinctive culture but reaffirmed it as part of the French republic when he met with leaders on a visit there in February 2018. However, as violence erupted among nationalist separatists there during the final weeks of his campaign for a second term in March 2022, Macron's Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin indicated the government was ready to consider Corsican autonomy.[46] For now Corsica remains part of France.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

A major purpose of subnational units is to serve as arenas for citizen involvement in politics and the recruitment of politicians for both national and subnational offices. This is particularly true of communes: the outcome of municipal elections, which occur every six years and produce nearly 500,000 councillors, ultimately affects the composition of the Senate, because the councils are part of the electoral college that chooses senators. Municipal elections also enable the citizens to express their midterm feelings about the performance of the national government and, more specifically, that of the party in power. Given the activist political culture of France, prone to social movements and demonstrations to express the popular will, it stands to reason that France is organized with deliberate detail to institutionalize representation channels all the way through local levels.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

2.3 WHO HAS THE POWER IN FRANCE?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Compare the ideologies of the right, left, and centrist parties in France.
- Discuss the sequence of elections during the course of the Fifth Republic.
- Identify new parties and ideologies that are currently gaining support.
- Identify primary interest groups and their role in relation to the parties.

IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACIES, THE COLLECTIVE POLITICAL WILL is expressed by a variety of institutions, foremost among them political parties and interest groups. They formulate specific demands that reflect both the existing social cleavages and the conflicting conceptions of the role of the state and its relationship to civil society.

POLITICAL PARTIES: TRADITIONAL "POLITICAL FAMILIES"

France has a complex and often confusing system of political parties. At any given time, and especially during elections, more than a dozen parties may be active. Some of these parties can be traced back several generations and have been of national importance; others are of passing interest because of their ephemeral or purely local nature or weak organization; and still others are mere political clubs, composed of small clusters of people more anxious to have a forum for expressing their political views than to achieve power.

The Third and Fourth Republics were marked by a multiplicity of parties ranging from right to left that embraced the following divisions, or "political families," based for the most part on ideology: conservatism, Catholicism, laissez-faire liberalism, socialism, and communism. The ideologies were often associated with class.

These political families, which can be grouped into the right, the center, and the left, still exist. Each of these families—or "political chapels," as they have been called—has tried to represent different views on economic policy, executive-legislative relations, and the place of religion in politics. Their positions, however, have not always been consistent; their traditional ideologies have often not been adjusted in line with changing socioeconomic realities, including the structure of the electorate; politicians elected under the label of one party have sometimes

Do not copy, post, or distribute
Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

shifted to another; and tactical considerations have often forced parliamentary deputies to vote on issues in such a way as to ignore their party platforms.

The Right

Historically, the political right was characterized by its identification with the status quo. It favored monarchism and deplored the Revolutions of 1789 and 1848. Inclined toward authoritarian rule, the right evolved from support of Bourbon kings to that of Napoleon Bonaparte and other "heroic" leaders. It favored an elitist social structure, defined society in organic and hierarchical terms, had contempt for the masses, and invested the state with an aura of sanctity. Traditionally, the right was supported by the established classes: the aristocracy, the landed gentry, the clergy, and the military, and, as the economy developed, big business. After World War I, it allied with fascism. At the end of World War II, fascism was discredited, and monarchism was almost extinct, but a new extreme-right party, the Poujadist movement, made its appearance. That movement, named after its founder, Pierre Poujade, appealed to shopkeepers, farmers, and others who suffered from the consequences of modernization. It had a significant anti-parliamentary and anti-Semitic component.[1]

The dominance of the political right gradually faded during the 1950s with the transformation of the French economy and society—specifically, the decline of those sectors that had been its main electoral base. The extreme right had become unpopular because many of its adherents had been collaborators of the Germans during the war, while the mainstream right had converted to republicanism. A major expression of the postwar right was the National Center of Independents and Peasants (Centre National des Indépendants et Paysans [CNIP]), a group of politicians sometimes also known as moderates. The CNIP (later known simply as the CNI) was weakly represented in the National Assembly, in part because it reflected two conflicting positions: a liberal one—a belief in laissez-faire economics—and a conservative one—a continued commitment to the values of elitism, religion, authority, and family. Another reason for the weakness of the traditional right was that it had to compete with the center parties for voters. Yet another, and most important, reason was the rise of Gaullism, a political movement that drained off many of the right's old supporters, notably the nationalist and populist-authoritarian elements.

Gaullism is a unique phenomenon. Many French citizens shared General Charles de Gaulle's dislike of the Fourth Republic. They objected to its central feature: a parliament that was, in theory, all-powerful but, in practice, was immobilized because it was faction-ridden. They favored a regime with a strong leader who would not be hampered by political parties and interest groups; both were considered particularistic and destructive interpositions between the national leadership and the citizenry. Above all, Gaullists wanted France to reassert its global role and rediscover its grandeur. Many of the early supporters of Gaullism were identified with the general as members of his Free French entourage in London or members of the Resistance. Others had worked with him when he headed the first provisional government after the Liberation, and still others saw in him the embodiment of the hero-savior. Gaullism, therefore, can be described as nationalistic as well as "Caesarist" or "Bonapartist" in the sense that the legitimacy of the national leader was to be based on popular appeal.

Gaullists never put forth a clear domestic policy program, and, at least in the beginning, they did not seem to show great interest in economic reform or social justice and therefore failed

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

to receive significant support from the working class. Yet Gaullists would vehemently reject the label of "right-wing" because, they argued, nationalism is not incompatible with social reform, and because the first Gaullist party, the Rally of the French People (Rassemblement du Peuple Français [RPF]), established in 1947, was intended to be a movement that would appeal to all social classes. The RPF, however, did not become a mass party until the collapse of the Fourth Republic.

The Left

Leftism and socialism have been particularly important in modern French political history because they have stood for progress, equality, and democratic government—themes associated with the Revolution of 1789. In response to the gradual extension of the suffrage and the growing electoral importance of the working class, many parties appropriated the label "socialist." Socialist parties have been inspired by different traditions—utopian, revolutionary, and reformist—some of them dating to the eighteenth century, but all have shared an emphasis on the importance (and claims) of society as a whole and a belief that economic, political, and social structures are intimately related.

The major party of the left is the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste [PS]). Originally formed in 1905 out of small and disparate leftist groups and known until 1969 as the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO), the Socialist Party was inspired by revolutionary Marxism and appealed to the industrial working class. In response to increased parliamentary representation, participation in bourgeois governments, and the takeover of leadership positions by intellectuals and other middle-class elements, the Socialist Party lost its revolutionary dynamism and accepted the idea of gradual, nonviolent reform. The party came to attach as much value to maintaining democratic processes as to advocating redistributive policies. In 1936, Léon Blum, the party's leader, headed a government that, with the support of some of the other leftist parties, instituted far-reaching social reforms. When the party was reconstituted in the Fourth Republic, it continued to promote progressive legislation. But the Socialist Party was hampered in its growth by competition from the Communist Party.

Established in 1920, the French Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français [PCF]) took much of the Socialists' working-class electorate from them. The two parties of the left collaborated on many bills in the legislature, but while the Communists wanted to bring down the Fourth Republic, the Socialists were committed to maintaining it. In 1958, most Socialists voted in favor of the investiture of de Gaulle as prime minister, but the Communists opposed it. Later that year, many Socialist leaders endorsed the Fifth Republic constitution, and the Communists expressed opposition to it. Finally, in the 1960s, the Socialists lost much of their membership, but the Communists were able to retain most of their hard-core adherents. Both leftist parties were consigned to opposition status from which they emerged only in 1981.

The Center

For at least a century, one political family has represented the broad interests of the *petite bourgeoisie*—the shopkeepers, artisans, and certain farmers—as well as portions of the intellectual and free professional classes. It has occupied the "center" position in French politics insofar as

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

it has rejected both the elitism of conservatives and the egalitarianism of the left. It has favored selective social reforms, but it has rejected collectivism. It has been committed to republicanism and to a democratization of political institutions, which has meant, among other things, greater power for parliament and for local authorities. The political center has been difficult to pin down with precision, because many centrists have pretended to adhere to a more fashionable "leftism" and have used misleading labels, and because the center has been fragmented.

There are two basic kinds of centrism: Radical-Socialist and Catholic. Officially founded in 1901, the origins of the Radical-Socialist Party can be traced to the beginning of the Third Republic and, as some would insist, to the French Revolution. During the Third and Fourth Republics—that is, between the 1870s and 1950s—the party was led by local notables. It was "radical" in the sense that it favored—and helped to achieve—the reduction of the Catholic Church's participation in politics and the promotion of a secular school system. It viewed the state as the enemy and argued strongly for civil rights, especially property rights. But this stand did not prevent the Radicals from asking the state to protect that segment of their electorate that felt its livelihood threatened by economic consolidation at home and competition from abroad.

Such attitudes were "leftist" as long as the *petite bourgeoisie* constituted the bulk of the politically underprivileged masses. But with industrialization, a new class became important: that of factory workers. The Socialist ideology—a belief in the class struggle and opposition to private productive property—that this new class embraced rendered the Radicals' leftism increasingly illusory and pushed them into a defensive posture. Nevertheless, the tactical position of the Radical-Socialist Party often made it an indispensable partner in government coalitions and allowed it to play a dominant role in the Third and Fourth Republics and to provide both regimes with numerous prime ministers.

Another orientation that must be classified as centrist is that of Christian (or Catholic) democracy. Originally, Catholicism could not be equated easily with republicanism or social progress; the Popular Party founded toward the end of the Third Republic, which supported the parliamentary system, was insignificant. But political Catholicism gained a new respectability during World War II. After Liberation, devout Catholics who had been active in the Resistance established the Popular Republican Movement (Mouvement Républicain Populaire [MRP]), which, although clericalist in orientation, was committed to civil liberties and social reform in a republican context. In the beginning of the Fourth Republic, the MRP's position was leftist enough, and its parliamentary representation strong enough, to make it a coalition partner with the Socialists and Communists. Moreover, the party competed with the Radicals in its adaptability. Toward the end of the Fourth Republic, the MRP weakened for the same reason as the Radicals. Some of the party's leftist adherents turned with interest to the Socialists, while its conservative ones, who were far more numerous, embraced Gaullism. In 1958 a large proportion of the MRP politicians joined the Gaullist bandwagon (and the pitiful remnant of the MRP dissolved in 1966).

Under the system of proportional representation in use in the Fourth Republic, all these parties were represented in parliament. But no party achieved a majority of seats in the national legislature, leaving unstable government coalitions made up of several parties. With the inauguration of the Fifth Republic, the number of parties was sharply reduced, largely due to changes in the electoral system and the overpowering personality of General de Gaulle. In due course,

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

the number of parties with national significance was further reduced by an evolving consensus about the constitutional system and a growing programmatic convergence between the mainstream right and left. Since the 1980s, the number of parties having realistic prospects of participating in governance has not changed much except for their labels.

ELECTIONS IN THE FIFTH REPUBLIC

The return of de Gaulle to power produced a temporary eclipse of all political parties that the public associated with the discredited Fourth Republic. The virtual guarantee of representation under proportional representation enabled most of the mainstream parties, in particular those located in the center of the spectrum, to turn toward the right or left, or to switch from support of the government to opposition. The system of parliamentary elections instituted in 1958, however, forced parties to make the kind of clear choice they were often unprepared to make. Under that system, which is based on the single-member district, a candidate for the National Assembly must obtain an absolute majority of all votes cast. If no candidate obtains such a majority, a runoff is held one week later, and the winning candidate needs only a plurality of the votes. Only those candidates who received the support of at least 12.5 percent of the registered voters in the first round may run in the second. The system of presidential elections is similar: If an absolute majority is not obtained in the first round, a runoff is held two weeks later between the two candidates who received the largest number of first-round votes. The membership of the Senate is determined not by direct popular vote but by an electoral college composed of delegates of the municipal councils. To what extent these reforms strengthen local political influence is open to question. For many years, the Senate had a right-of-center majority, but in 2004, the Gaullists lost so many seats that the majority could be maintained only with the support of the Union for French Democracy (Union pour la Démocratie Française [UDF]), a right-of-center formation. In 2011, the combined left obtained a bare majority.

The methods of election in subnational races are even more complicated. Members of the general councils, the representative bodies of each of the 96 departments, are chosen for six-year terms by the cantons, which are subdivisions of the departments. Half of the membership of the general councils is renewed every three years. Each canton elects a councillor on the basis of the single-member constituency system in two rounds. If no candidate receives an absolute majority in the first round, the candidate receiving the most votes in the second round is elected. The general councils select their presidents for three- year terms. Members of regional councils are also elected for six-year terms. These councils, in turn, elect their respective presidents for six-year terms.

In France, the details of the electoral system are not fixed by the constitution; rather, they are changed periodically by an organic law, usually based on partisan considerations. In 1986, proportional representation was reintroduced by the Socialists for elections to the National Assembly to minimize the representation of Gaullists and their allies. When the Gaullists captured control of that chamber, they promptly passed a law returning the country to the former single-member constituency system. The most recent changes were related to the method of regional elections: It provided for the mixed use of proportional representation and the single-member constituency system with two rounds, the mixture depending on the size of departments.[2] Under reforms enacted in 2003 and used in 2004, an election is on the basis of party

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

lists (scrutin de liste) in two rounds. In the first round, a party list receiving an absolute majority of the votes receives a quarter of all seats. The other seats are distributed on the basis of proportionality among all the lists receiving at least 5 percent of the votes. If no party achieves an absolute majority, a second round of voting is held a week later in which all parties that received at least 10 percent of the first-round votes can participate. In the second round, these parties can join those that failed to receive 5 percent of the first-round votes. In this round, the party list receiving a plurality of the votes gains a quarter of all seats; the other seats are distributed among the parties that received at least 5 percent of the votes.

How have France's political parties responded to changes in the electoral system over the course of the Fifth Republic? The French are fond of saying that "on the first ballot one votes, and on the second, one eliminates." Electoral realism has dictated that to maximize its chances, a political party must join forces with another party by means of preelection deals and second-round withdrawal, or mutual support, agreements. Such activities have produced polarizing tendencies: fewer political parties, and their grouping into two opposing camps, much as in the United States and Great Britain.

Reduction and Rearrangement

The Gaullist party emerged as the major beneficiary of the electoral system introduced at the outset of the Fifth Republic. Relabeled the Union for the New Republic (Union pour la Nouvelle République [UNR]) and later renamed the Democratic Union for the Republic (Union Démocratique pour la République [UDR]), it achieved a dominant position in the assembly and became relatively institutionalized. Gaullist machines were set up in many localities, and many local notables, drawn by the magnet of power, associated with them. Most of the old centrist formations remained in the opposition, although a large proportion of centrist voters had flocked to the banner of de Gaulle while not necessarily embracing Gaullist ideology. One of the collecting points of the anti-Gaullists was the Democratic Center (Centre Démocrate), which included some of the old MRP politicians who distrusted or detested the general.

Meanwhile, both major parties of the left were reduced to impotence. The Communist Party could count on the support of about 20 percent of the electorate, but it could not win without allies, and the only one possible was the PS. The Socialists had two options: an alliance with the Communist Party or with the opposition centrists. In the presidential elections of 1965, a "united-left" tactic was preferred, but one that implied the co-optation of part of the center. Both major parties of the left agreed on a single presidential candidate, François Mitterrand. The position of Mitterrand was considerably strengthened when he succeeded in forming the Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left (Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique et Socialiste [FGDS]). This alliance grouped around the PS a variety of small leftist clubs as well as the Radical–Socialist Party, which had begun its decline into insignificance. But after various electoral failures, and because of the continued disunity between the Socialists and Communists, the FGDS disintegrated, and in 1969, each component fielded its own presidential candidate.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

The Socialists then decided to restructure their organization, rejuvenate their leadership, alter their platform, and project an image of dynamism. One idea they advocated for years was *autogestion*, a form of self-management of industrial firms by workers. At the same time, the party enrolled many members of the bourgeoisie: shopkeepers, white-collar employees, and even devout Catholics. Encouraged by its new position of strength, the PS rebuilt its alliance with the Communists. In 1972, the two parties signed a joint platform, the "Common Program of the Left," and agreed to support each other in national elections.

The centrists, meanwhile, remained weak. Some politicians of the Democratic Center, already starved for power, used Georges Pompidou's election in 1969 as a rationale for joining the conservative majority. They reasoned that the new president was more inclined to accommodate himself to centrist thinking than de Gaulle had been. Specifically, they hoped that Pompidou would support European unification and grant more power to parliament.

Those centrists who were still unwilling to make peace with Gaullism embraced another option: an electoral alignment with the Radical–Socialists known as the Reformers' Movement. The creation of that movement was a turning point in French politics, because it implied that the Catholic anticlerical discord had been reduced to a manageable scale. But the movement rested on too narrow an electoral base. Moreover, the left wing of the Radical–Socialist Party was offended by this collaboration with "clericalist" forces and wanted no part of the Reformers' experiment. Instead, they formed a party of their own, the Left Radicals' Movement (Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche [MRG]), and joined the Socialists and Communists in the Common Program alliance.

Bipolarization and Fragmentation

By the early 1970s, the French party system appeared to have become permanently bipolarized into a right-wing majority and a left-wing opposition. Yet the presidential elections of 1974, into which France was propelled by the sudden death of Pompidou, began as a three-way race. Mitterrand was again the candidate of a united left. The Gaullist party candidate was Jacques Chaban-Delmas, whose background as a faithful follower of the late general and as a former Radical–Socialist was intended to appeal to a good portion of the hitherto oppositionist centrist electorate. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's candidacy complicated the presidential race. Giscard d'Estaing, a prominent politician since the beginning of the Fifth Republic, had supported de Gaulle's presidency and had served as minister of finance for several years but never joined any Gaullist party. Originally, he had been associated with the conservative CNIP, which had remained a component of the majority. But in the early 1960s, he formed his own political organization with the help of other CNIP members of parliament.

This group, the Independent Republicans, articulated a pragmatic approach to a policy of industrial modernization and a reorientation toward free-market economics as distinct from the Gaullist emphasis on the directing hand of the state. Giscard d'Estaing also differed from the Gaullists in taking a stronger stand in favor of an enlarged role for parliament. Finally, he opposed the Gaullist-sponsored referendum of 1969 for the restructuring of the Senate, and he was instrumental in its defeat, thereby bringing about de Gaulle's resignation. Giscard

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

d'Estaing's background, his youthful image (he was born in 1926), his selective non-Gaullist policy positions, his promises of social reform, and his apparent sympathy for close intra-European cooperation—all these factors secured for him the support of most Democratic Centrists and most Radicals. They were persuaded that Giscard d'Estaing was a centrist himself and that he would pursue policies that would be neither Gaullist nor collectivist.

Giscard d'Estaing's election to the presidency in 1974 (with the support of the Gaullists in the second round) raised the questions of whether the old polarization of French politics was ending and whether France was in the process of becoming "post-Gaullist." A year before the parliamentary elections of 1978, it appeared that bipolar confrontation would continue. On the left, the parties adhering to the Common Program pledged to support each other electorally. On the right, a similar alliance, known as "the presidential majority," was formed; it included many Gaullists, the Independent Republicans (now known as the Parti Républicain), the Radicals, and the Democratic Center, restructured since 1976 and relabeled the Center of Social Democrats (Centre des Démocrates Sociaux [CDS]).

Unfortunately, the internal cohesion of both camps was short-lived. Within the left, a bitter quarrel had broken out between the Communists and the Socialists over the meaning of the Common Program, particularly the extent to which industries would be nationalized and wages would be equalized, and how cabinet seats would be allocated in the event of a victory of the left. The Communist Party accused the Socialist Party of not really wanting a genuine restructuring of the economy and of using the Communists to gain power. The Socialists, now the senior partner of the left alliance, accused the Communists of not having "de-Stalinized" themselves sufficiently and of hoping to destroy democratic institutions. In the end, the left failed, by a few percentage points, to gain a parliamentary majority—a result widely attributed to the refusal of the left-wing parties in many constituencies to support each other in the second round.

Within the majority there were similar problems. Upon assuming the presidency, Giscard d'Estaing had co-opted the Gaullists—they had no place else to go—by giving them a few cabinet posts and by retaining the essentials of Gaullist foreign policy: hostility to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the development of an independent nuclear strike force, and a show of independence in relation to the United States. Giscard d'Estaing's first prime minister, Jacques Chirac, was a Gaullist, but he resigned his post in 1976 after disagreements with Giscard d'Estaing. Later, Chirac became the leader of the Gaullist party—by then renamed Rally for the Republic (Rassemblement pour la République [RPR])—as well as mayor of Paris, and he made no secret of his ambition to run for the presidency in 1981. Giscard d'Estaing, who intended to run for a second term, still needed the support of the Gaullists, the largest party in the National Assembly, but he wanted to reduce this dependence. Shortly before the 1978 parliamentary elections, he encouraged the creation of the UDF, an electoral federation of all non-Gaullist elements of the presidential majority: the Independent Republicans, the CDS, the Radicals, and a few smaller groups. The UDF decided to put up single first-round candidates in many districts and to support Gaullist candidates only if necessary in the second round. One result of this tactic was a realignment within the majority: an impressive expansion of the number of Giscardist deputies at the expense of the Gaullist parliamentary party.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Socialists Surge Into Power: The Elections of 1981

Early in 1981, as the presidential election approached, the Common Program had been shelved, the unity of the left was near collapse, and the Socialist and Communist Parties each ran its own candidate, Mitterrand and Georges Marchais, respectively. Before the first round of balloting in April, Marchais was almost as critical of Mitterrand as of Giscard d'Estaing, but after obtaining only 15 percent of the popular vote (the lowest for the Communist Party since the end of World War II) compared with Mitterrand's more than 26 percent, Marchais endorsed Mitterrand in the second round. The mutual support agreement between the Socialist and Communist candidates also held in the second round of the parliamentary elections that followed Mitterrand's accession to the presidency, and Socialist candidates were the principal beneficiaries.

While the Socialist Party emerged with an absolute assembly majority for the first time since 1936, the Communist Party, with barely 9 percent of the seats, was reduced to a marginal status receiving several lower-level ministerial posts in exchange for the conditions imposed on it by Mitterrand: condemnation of Soviet actions in Afghanistan and Poland, commitment to the Western alliance, respect for public liberties, and adherence to a policy of gradually transforming the economy by means of democratic methods.

Within the camp of the Gaullist and centrist-conservative alliance, the complications were far greater. In the first round of presidential balloting, both Giscard d'Estaing and Chirac found themselves competing for the same bourgeois and right-of-center electorate. While criticizing each other's personalities and policy preferences, both candidates stressed the disastrous consequences for France of a victory for the left.

During the parliamentary elections, the erstwhile majority of Gaullists (RPR) and Giscardists (UDF) reestablished an uneasy electoral alliance. Still the alliance was virtually buried by a Socialist landslide, which significantly altered the complexion of the parliament and, indeed, of the whole political party system for the first time since the founding of the Fifth Republic.

The Socialist majority in the 1981 assembly was so overwhelming that Mitterrand and his government were able to put into effect an ambitious program of reforms. Among the most important reforms were enhancement of civil liberties, an expanded budget for education, liberalization of the penal code, and an ambitious program of administrative decentralization. In addition, the government nationalized some industries and undertook a redistribution of income by means of more steeply progressive taxation, higher minimum wages, and expanded social benefits. These policies corresponded to elements of the Common Program, and the Communists supported them. By 1983, however, the Socialists' reforming zeal had begun to cool. As the budget deficit grew, the cost of nationalizing proved too high and its benefits doubtful. Production slumped and unemployment, higher than 10 percent, persisted. In response to these developments, the government abruptly changed course and embraced an austerity program aimed at keeping wages under control and encouraging economic growth. The new strategy alienated the Communist Party, whose ministers opted out of the government.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

The Rise of Marginal Parties: The National Front and the Greens

Founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, the NF began as a conglomerate of fascists, Pétainists, right-wing Catholics, ultranationalists, erstwhile supporters of Algérie Française, former Poujadists, anti-Semites, racists, and opponents of parliamentary democracy. It burst onto the French political scene in the municipal elections of 1983, when it captured 17 percent of the vote in an industrial town near Paris heavily settled by immigrants, and in the elections to the European Parliament a year later, when it won 10.5 percent of the popular vote.

The rise of the NF was balanced to some extent by that of another political grouping, the ecologists—especially the Green Party (Verts). That party grew out of environmentalist interest groups, which made their appearance in the 1970s. But their attempts to sponsor candidates at the national level were unsuccessful for several reasons: The public was paying little attention to environmental problems; the mainstream parties—notably the Socialists—had environmentalist planks in their programs; and the electoral system did not favor small parties. In the presidential elections of 1981, the Green Party received only 3.9 percent of the first-round votes, and in the parliamentary elections that followed, it obtained even less support and failed to get any seats in the National Assembly.

Both parties emerged as a wave of "New Politics" brought nationalist-populist and environmental parties into the political arena across western democracies. The idea of a New Politics suggested that postwar wealth allowed for public demands to shift from material well-being to postmaterialism. This created a path for new political parties that talked less about the right/left economic divide regarding the degree of governmental intervention in the economy and more about rights, value propositions, and identity.

The First "Cohabitation" Interlude

The results of the parliamentary elections of March 1986 proved the wisdom of the Socialists' electoral stratagem. The RPR and UDF together obtained a bare majority (291 out of 577 seats) in the National Assembly, not enough to undertake policy changes without the support of the NF, which managed to seat 32 deputies. But it was enough to enable them to insist on the appointment of a politically compatible (i.e., Gaullist–Giscardist) government. The new government embarked on an unprecedented experiment in power sharing, as described earlier. Its head, Gaullist leader Chirac, was forced to cohabit with a Socialist president. During the early phases of cohabitation, France appeared to undergo a process of "de-presidentialization" as Prime Minister Chirac asserted his (and the government's) leadership in the formulation and implementation of internal policies, particularly those related to privatizing public enterprises. President Mitterrand confined himself largely to foreign policy pronouncements and selective criticism of Chirac's domestic measures.

Chirac's power to govern turned out to be less than absolute. It was limited by the need of the Gaullists to collaborate with the Giscardists, who were not always in a cooperative mood. Both sides contemplated whether to strategically embrace or reject the NF.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Consensus and Convergence: The Elections of 1988

The presidential elections of April and May 1988 pitted Mitterrand against three major rivals on the right: Chirac (RPR), former Prime Minister Raymond Barre (UDF), and Le Pen (NF). Several months before the elections, cohabitation, at first welcomed by most French citizens, appeared to be of dubious worth as the president and the prime minister sought to draw electoral advantage by discrediting each other. The reelection of Mitterrand suggested that he had succeeded better than his rival. But his impressive margin of victory must also be attributed to the disunity among the right.

Mitterrand's decision just after the presidential election to dissolve the National Assembly and to call for new elections was made in the hope that the delicate power-sharing pattern of the previous two years would be replaced by a more normal relationship between president and parliament. The result of the parliamentary elections, however, was ambiguous. Although the RPR and UDF, which put up joint candidates in most constituencies, lost control of the assembly, the Socialists failed to get an absolute majority. Several explanations account for the outcome of that election in which the abstention rate (more than 34 percent) was the highest since 1962. Some traditional Socialist voters had abstained because Mitterrand, running as a statesman above parties rather than as a Socialist, had not made great efforts to appeal to them or even to mobilize the party activists. Others had been so sure of a Socialist victory that they believed their votes to be unnecessary. And still others were tired of voting so often. Under the pressures of electoral reality and, later, of government responsibility, the PS under Prime Minister Michel Rocard put together a pragmatic center-left government composed of 25 Socialists, 24 non-socialists, and 14 nonparty people. The party had given up most of its Marxism and had transformed itself into a moderate party resembling the social democratic parties of Scandinavia or Germany. During the 1988 election campaigns, it presented a minimum platform whose planks—social justice, productivity, solidarity among various segments of French society, and the construction of Europe—did not differ sharply from the equally vague generalities of the RPR/UDF about liberty, economic progress, and patriotism.

The Communist Party, too, was divided. In 1987, the Communists who rejected the rigid Stalinism of the party and held that outlook—and its leader, Georges Marchais—responsible for its steep electoral decline set up a rival party of "Renovators," and in 1988, they put up their own presidential candidate. After the elections, the Communist Party alternated between a desire to remain in opposition and a readiness to support the government on specific issues. How much the Communist leadership would be influenced by perestroika in the Soviet Union remained to be seen.

The RPR was torn between the nationalism and populist statism of the disciples of de Gaulle, on the one hand, and a pro-European neoliberalism, on the other. Moreover, although some Gaullist politicians were still considering rapprochement with the NF, most of the Gaullist leadership had come to reject collaboration with that party on any level. The UDF (from which the RPR had copied much of its neoliberalism) was divided between the elitism of the Republican Party, its largest component, and the moderate progressivism of some Christian Democratic (CDS) and Radical–Socialist politicians. In a confusion of strategies,

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

some Giscardists wanted to align themselves closely with the RPR and harden their opposition to the new government; others, including Giscard d'Estaing himself, who had become the official leader of the UDF, wanted to signal that party's centrist views by a "constructive opposition." Still others, including Barre, held out the possibility of an eventual power sharing with the Socialist-led government.

The NF, which was responsible for some of the problems of the RPR and UDF, was itself torn; it alternated between the bourgeois and respectable behavior of some of its politicians and the provocative pronouncements of others, notably of Jean-Marie Le Pen himself. One was reflected in an emphasis on the neoliberal segments of the party's platform such as the free market and individual rights, the other in the promotion of nationalist and racist themes. Some regarded the NF as a genuine alternative to the "gang of four"—the PCF, PS, UDF, and RPR—but many more voters were turned off from the party by Le Pen's irrepressible penchant for demagogy and came to consider him a danger to democracy.

As the credibility of the NF as a democratic alternative party weakened, that of another party, the Greens, assumed increased importance. Formed in the early 1980s out of a number of environmental associations, the Greens opposed the construction of nuclear reactors. Although officially aligned with neither the right nor the left, the Greens advocated policies often associated with the left, such as reducing the workweek, strengthening local government, and pursuing a foreign policy more sympathetic to developing countries. The Greens did surprisingly well in the first round of the presidential elections but achieved insignificant scores in the parliamentary elections.

By the early 1990s, the popularity of the Socialists was beginning to decline. This decline was evident in the regional and cantonal elections of 1992, in which less than 20 percent of the electorate voted for that party. The Socialist Party was held responsible for various problems and failures: persistent unemployment, crime and urban violence, and financial scandals involving Socialist politicians.

The other major parties did not fare much better; the RPR and UDF together gained only 33 percent of the votes in the 1992 cantonal elections. The two right-wing parties suffered from internal divisions and a lack of credibility. The major gainers were the NF and the environmentalist parties, which made significant inroads into regional councils. But the ecologists were hurt by a division of this movement into two parties, the Greens and the Ecology Generation (Génération Écologie), whose leaders sniped at one another while proclaiming a desire for unity.

Punishing the Incumbents: Elections in the 1990s

The results of the elections just described signaled a disenchantment with the political class that continues through the populist backlash against governmental elites today. This disenchantment at the time was reflected in the steeply falling approval ratings not only of Prime Ministers Cresson and Bérégovoy but also of President Mitterrand. Public impatience with the government was starkly manifested in the results of the 1993 parliamentary elections, which constituted a virtual rout of the Socialist Party and its allies, the Left Radicals. Gaining only 57 seats, compared with the 472 seats obtained by the RPR and UDF combined, the Socialists were left with the lowest National Assembly representation since 1968.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

The new right-of-center government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur began with high popular opinion ratings and a parliamentary majority of more than 80 percent—the largest enjoyed by any group in more than a century. These ratings, which held for several months, reflected the public's perception of Balladur as a calm and reasonable political leader, and they improved as Balladur's government chalked up some policy successes, among them the international trade negotiations of 1994.

As the 1995 election approached, voters had reservations about both the Gaullists and the Socialists. In previous years, they had tended to opt for one or another of these formations on the basis of where they usually placed themselves along the right-left continuum. But the distinctions between right and left had gradually been moderated by a growing programmatic convergence on several issues such as decentralization, the need to check the growth of welfare state expenditures, and, above all, the institutions of the Fifth Republic. On other issues, such as education, tax policy, and the development of the European Union, there was an overlap of opinions.

These uncertainties explain why 20 percent of the electorate was still undecided just two weeks before the first round. Compounding the problem was the voters' difficulty in detecting differences among leading candidates, Jospin on the left, plus Chirac and Balladur on the right. All three seemed to favor measures to reduce unemployment, improve the system of justice, and further European integration. If there was a difference, it revolved around the presidency. Jospin advocated reducing the presidential term of office to five years, Balladur favored the existing seven-year term but wanted to eliminate the possibility of reelection, and Chirac preferred the status quo. In addition, Jospin favored reducing the workweek from 39 to 37 hours, and Chirac and Balladur wanted to leave that matter to the marketplace and to collective contract negotiations.

The result signaled public frustration with the mainstream parties and politicians, as more than 35 percent of voters cast ballots for candidates of minor or marginal parties. In doing so, they had a wide choice among nine candidates: two Gaullists, a Socialist, a Communist, a Trotskyist radical, the leader of the Green Party, a right-wing nationalist running under the label of the Movement for France (Mouvement pour la France [MPF]), an extreme-rightist (Le Pen), and a right-wing political newcomer running under a nondescript label (Jacques Cheminade).

The second round produced a kind of electoral recomposition: Jospin secured the support of most of the left-of-center to extreme-left electorate, while Chirac reassembled most of the right-of-center electorate. Exit polls, however, indicated that more than 40 percent of the 4.6 million citizens who had voted for extreme-rightist Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round abstained or cast blank ballots in the second round. Chirac's second-round victory could not be interpreted as a victory for the Gaullist Party (the Socialist Party did almost equally well in terms of popular votes) but rather as that of a person who had not been a national decision maker for several years and could not be blamed for recent policy failings.

The election results indicated that the right-left distinction in French politics retained some meaning and that more than 50 percent of the working-class electorate had opted for one of the parties of the left. Nevertheless, about one-third of the various parts of the population classified as underprivileged had voted for Le Pen in the first round. The results also showed that Chirac

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

had transcended the limitations of previous Gaullist presidential candidates by broadening his electoral base. In the second round, Chirac had captured the votes of 43 percent of workers, 54 percent of students, 60 percent of the retired, and half of 18- to 21-year-olds. According to an exit poll, 68 percent of voters interpreted the election of Chirac as the electorate's desire for change and reform, and only 26 percent saw it as a victory of the left over the right.[3]

The election results also suggested that the NF had achieved sufficient respectability to be seen by many as having entered the mainstream of French politics. It had attracted members of the urban working class who had traditionally supported left-wing parties and had increased its appeal to the educated electorate. Conversely, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and a change in the party leadership, the Communist Party, although not able to widen its appeal beyond the working class, was no longer feared as the tool of a foreign power.

Chirac's victory proved to be short-lived, however; it was abruptly undermined by the unexpected victory of the Socialists and their left-wing allies in the National Assembly elections of 1997.[4] As noted earlier, that election was a needless miscalculation. It discredited not only Prime Minister Alain Juppé but President Chirac as well, and it weakened the authority of both within the Gaullist Party. That party was thrown into disarray as internecine conflicts broke out not only about the leadership but also about the party's future direction and its relationship with other right-wing parties. Factions emerged favoring market liberalism, European integration with the euro as a common European currency, traditional statism in defense of national sovereignty, or adoption of a more "social" orientation.

The Socialist Party, by contrast, conveyed the impression of being more united than ever, because the authority of Jospin had silenced its traditional internal factions. Moreover, Jospin had succeeded in reestablishing an alliance with most of the other left-wing formations, including the Communist Party, and they were rewarded for their cooperative attitudes with cabinet positions. In the afterglow of the left's election victory, there seemed to be considerable coherence in government policy as most left-wing politicians rallied around Jospin's leadership. The Communist Party had become more moderate, except for a small group among the rank and file that retained its radicalism, but the Greens were increasingly articulating policy differences.

The parties outside the mainstream had their own problems. In 1998, the NF split into two rival factions because of personal conflicts between Le Pen and Bruno Mégret, leader of the National Republican Movement (Mouvement National Républicain [MNR]). Le Pen, the more charismatic figure, appealed largely to the electorate, while Mégret's support came from the party apparatus.

A Political Earthquake: The Elections of 2002

A stark illustration of the bipolarization that had overtaken elections was provided by the 2002 national elections. The two rounds of the presidential election were scheduled for April 21 and May 5, to be followed in June by two rounds of voting for the National Assembly. Sixteen candidates competed in the presidential election, more than in any previous presidential election in the Fifth Republic. They ranged from Le Pen on the extreme right to nominees of three different extreme-left (Trotskyist) parties—the Workers' Struggle (Lutte Ouvrière), the Communist Revolutionary League (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire), and the Workers' Party (Parti des

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Travailleurs). During the campaign, it was widely assumed (and predicted by public opinion polls) that Chirac, the incumbent president, and Jospin, the incumbent prime minister, would emerge as the two top vote- getters and would confront each other in the second round.[5]

The first-round result, however, was an unexpected upset: Chirac came in first, and Le Pen came in second after edging out Jospin by less than one percentage point. This result appeared to further underscore a mood of public rejection of mainstream parties and politicians with Chirac regarded as a politician without a clear program and interested in political power for its own sake and Jospin lacking charisma in a party riven by disagreements between with its coalition partners as well as by rivalries within the party. The dissatisfaction with both major candidates was attested by the low voter turnout, by the electoral indecision—more than 40 percent of the electorate remained undecided two weeks before the election—and by both Chirac and Jospin garnering fewer popular votes than they had received in 1995.

The unusually high vote for marginal parties as well as the high abstention rate reflected a widespread belief that the mainstream parties were not responding to the needs of the people.[6] Moreover, the poor performance of the Socialist Party and the fact that all the left-wing parties together got only 43 percent of the working-class vote in the first round (compared with 63 percent in the presidential elections of 1988) seemed to confirm the thesis that "the privileged relationship of a century between the world of the worker and the parties of the left" had ended.[7]

Most of the supporters of left and left-of-center parties found it unpleasant to have to choose between Chirac and Le Pen in the second round. Le Pen represented too great a risk; given his reputation and program, his election could endanger democracy. Against a backdrop of slogans such as "Vote for the crook, not the fascist," Chirac won the runoff easily. He had the overwhelming support of the left, who voted for him not because they endorsed him or his program but because they rejected Le Pen in the name of "republican defense."

In the ensuing National Assembly elections, voters provided Chirac with a clear majority (see Table 2.6). Most voters were pressing for parliamentary action and did not want to continue the power sharing of cohabitation with a president belonging to one party and an assembly controlled by an opposing party. A victory for the political right ensued, empowering the Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire [UMP]), an umbrella alliance for right-of-center parties and factions. A rump of the UDF, led by François Bayrou, held out for independence, but because the UMP had gained an absolute majority of seats in the National Assembly, UDF influence in that chamber would amount to little if anything.

A Post-Gaullist Rupture? The Elections of 2007

In many respects, the presidential election of 2007 resembled earlier contests between the right and the left. It revolved around the issues of the cost of living, unemployment, taxation, and education, and it engaged the usual contestants on both sides of the political spectrum. A dozen candidates competed in the first round, and the second round was a runoff between Nicolas Sarkozy, the candidate of the UMP, and Socialist Ségolène Royal. Both candidates had been chosen in primary elections in which active members of their respective parties had taken part. As the leader of his party, Sarkozy was certain to be the nominee. The only credible rival was Dominique de Villepin, Chirac's last prime minister, but he had lost popularity because of his

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

TABLE 2.6 ■ Composition of the National Assembly: France, 1956–2022

Parliamentary Elections	Communists	Socialists and Allies		Radicals and Allies	Centrists	Conservatives, Moderates, Independents		Gaullists	Miscellaneous and Unaffiliated	Total Seats
1956	150	99		94	84	97		22	50	596
1958	10	47		40	56	129		206	64	552
1962	41	66		43	55			268	9	482
1967	73		121		41			242	10	487
1968	34		57		34		344		18	487
1973	73		100	34			270		13	490
1978	86	105	10		123	9	153		5	491
1981	44	286			62			88	11	491
1986	35	214			132			158	38	577
1988	27	277			130			129	14	577
1993	23	70			213			247	24	577
1997	36	250		33	113			140	5	577
2002	22	141			29			365	20	577
2007	24	204			26			320	3	577
2012	10	333			22			209	3	577
2017	10	68			350			137	12	577
2022		163			249			75	90	577

Source: Compiled by the author.

Note: the parties and party families associated with each ideological label have changed over time and author-discretion has been applied to classify them for the purpose of illustrating shifts and changes in the political composition of the legislature. Greens / Environmentalists have typically been classified as "Allies" to the Socialists in the same column. The surge of centrists in recent years can be attributed to Renaissance (RE, formerly known as En Marche REM).

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

haughty behavior toward parliament and his mishandling of an employment bill. The choice of a Socialist candidate was more problematic. There were three major contenders for the nomination: Laurent Fabius, a former prime minister (leftist); Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a former finance minister (social democratic); and Ségolène Royal, a former minister for the environment (a compromise choice).

Sarkozy waged an aggressive campaign in which he portrayed himself as both a loyal Gaullist and an innovator who was prepared to "rupture" the status quo in order to achieve much-needed reforms.[8] In several respects, Sarkozy's presidential nomination was a break with the past: He had originally not been considered suitable for the presidency because he was not a graduate of ENA or any of the other grandes écoles, he was the son and grandson of immigrants, and he was short of stature. But he had held important cabinet posts; and, as minister of the interior, he had developed a reputation as being tough on criminals. His hard-line position during the rioting of October and November 2005 sharply increased his popularity within the party, which had gained many new adherents, in part because it was seen as a credible alternative to the NF on issues of law and order.

A complicating factor was the candidacy of François Bayrou, the president of the UDF, who had served as a minister in the conservative governments of Juppé and Balladur. But during the second term of the Chirac presidency, he had selectively distanced himself from the UMP. In the end, Bayrou came in third in the first round, and in the second round, Sarkozy won the presidency. Bayrou used his strong first-round performance to create a new party, the Democratic Movement (Mouvement Démocrate [MoDem]), which would field "centrist" candidates in the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

The parliamentary elections of June 2007 produced a solid majority for the UMP. At the same time, they confirmed the bipolar thrust of French electoral politics. The dominance of the two major mainstream parties and the continuance of the traditional right–left division were also attested in a number of subnational elections, although local issues often prevailed, and many parties fielded candidates.

Socialist Reemergence Amid Crisis and Pessimism: The Elections of 2012

More than a year before the presidential elections of 2012, the Socialist Party had reason to be optimistic about its prospects. President Sarkozy had become increasingly unpopular because of his "unpresidential" behavior, impulsive public statements, lack of policy action, pro-Americanism, and admiration for Angela Merkel, the German chancellor. Above all, there was the global financial crisis, which contributed to France's indebtedness, due in large measure to the country's generous social disbursements and inflated public sector; and there was a continuing loss of jobs due to delocalization of industries, a consequence of excessive labor costs.

To confront France's challenges, Sarkozy had stressed competitiveness—by working harder and reducing labor costs; in contrast, Socialist challenger François Hollande advocated economic growth (by means not entirely clear), while François Bayrou, the candidate of the political center, focused on the reduction of the budget deficit as a priority. Despite favorable polls, Hollande's victory was not a foregone conclusion: On the one hand, he was faced with a loss of working-class support to Marine Le Pen, the candidate of the NF, who had embraced a populist

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

(or "welfare-chauvinist"[9]) rhetoric and (in contrast to her father) had become respectably "republican"[10]; on the other hand, he had to reckon with competition from Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former left-wing Socialist who formed the Party of the Left (Parti de Gauche [PG]) in 2008 and united with communists and leftists.

Hollande defeated Sarkozy for the presidency. The parliamentary elections that followed in June resulted in a clear victory for the left. The mainstream right received only one-third of the votes; and the NF did poorly, despite the support of several smaller nationalist and extreme-right formations.[11] The Socialists had an absolute majority in the National Assembly and no longer needed to propitiate other left-wing parties, notably the FDG. It enabled Hollande and his government to pass a number of bills without difficulty. But despite its parliamentary strength, the PS found itself beset by political paralysis. It was unable to resolve economic problems, notably unemployment, in part due to loss of competitiveness related to a rigid labor market and the ballooning deficit of social security funds, which threatened the future of the French social model.

Parties had scrambled to define or reinvent themselves ahead of the elections of 2012. Various mainstream party politicians had tried to opportunistically distance themselves from their parties and looked toward small parties for possible alliances and to define their platforms. Socialist politicians had tried to construct rival parties or create possible electoral coalitions by appealing to an assortment of small parties. For instance, Royal, who suffered electoral defeat in 2007 as a candidate of the PS, had looked to reinvent herself in 2012 through a broad coalition with small, centrist market-liberal parties ranging from Olivier Besancenot, the leader of the New Anticapitalist Party (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste [NPA]) to Bayrou's MoDem—in other words, she attempted a move from the extreme left to the center. On the political right, some bridges with the center parties had been burned, and allies emerged further to the right with the Hunters' Party (Chasse, Pêche, Nature et Traditions [CPNT]) and the nationalist MPF. Traditional disagreements within the UMP had persisted—between Gaullists and post-Gaullists, statists and market liberals, nationalists and Europeanists—but they were kept under control while that party was in power. As soon as Sarkozy left the political scene, the fight for the shape, orientation, and leadership of the UMP had begun. The major controversy had pitted the "social liberals" against the "nationalist conservatives," whose negative positions on national identity, immigrants, Muslims, and same-sex marriage had closely resembled those of the NF, and who had been open to a rapprochement with that party.

Reshuffling the Deck or Changing the System? The Elections of 2017 and 2022

The presidential elections of April 23 and May 7, 2017, occurred once again in a punitive political context. No mainstream left or right candidate was able to unite their party, let alone the country. This context presented opportunities for small party candidates to play defining roles in the election outcome. Ultimately, the winner emerged from a third party. The strategic resignation of Emmanuel Macron from the Hollande Cabinet nine months before national elections were held, coupled with the strong lead in the polls held by the far-right NF's Marine Le Pen throughout the course of the campaign cycle, set the stage for the remarkable 2017 elections and a likely realignment of the French party system.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Candidates put forward by the mainstream parties failed to entice French voters and instead bore the brunt of their festering frustrations with the political establishment. On the mainstream right, François Fillon, who defeated Alain Juppé, the mayor of Bordeaux, in the LR (Republican) primary, was a nationalist and a devout Catholic; he was hostile to abortion and same-sex marriage, reserved about immigrants, and unsympathetic to minorities and cultural pluralism. He favored an austerity policy, consisting of a reduction of €100 billion in public expenditure, the elimination of 500,000 civil service jobs, and a modification of the French social model, including the privatization of part of the system of medical insurance. On the mainstream left, the PS and its allies[12] campaigned jointly under the label The Good Popular Alliance (*La Belle Alliance Populaire*). It was led by Benoît Hamon after he defeated Manuel Valls in the PS primaries. Hamon had been minister of education in the Valls cabinet but resigned in protest against Valls's "neoliberal" orientation. He advocated a minimum monthly government allocation of €750 for everyone regardless of income. Valls himself had a more prominent stature, but he was regarded as a reminder of Hollande, and as not authentically leftist. Neither candidate would overcome the transpartisan range of support of Le Pen, Macron, or even Fillon, who had a reputation for honesty and political probity. In the end, there was increasing uncertainty whether Fillon would figure in these calculations. *Le Canard Enchâiné*, a satirical magazine, revealed that for a number of years he had embezzled public funds to pay his wife and two sons for fictitious parliamentary jobs.

Emmanuel Macron, a political novice, redefined national French politics by beating back a right-wing challenger and easily defeating other candidates in his election to the presidency in May 2017. Macron is known for his centrist-liberal views and his support for the European Union.

Cuneyt Karadag/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

For a country that is often considered exceptional for its "*sinistrisme*," a widely diffused leftist political culture, it was a shock to witness the disintegration of the PS. That party, which Mitterrand had rebuilt in the 1970s, had ceased to be firmly on the left and had seen much of its working-class electorate desert to the NF. While continuing to be the major party of the left, it was fragmented into Marxist, insurrectionist reformist, ecological, centrist, and neo-liberal components, and between utopian-idealist and pragmatic-government orientations. In short, the distinction between left and right was no longer clear—at least in terms of policy.

The most radically leftist candidate was Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Pursuing his candidacy under a new formation, France Unbowed (La France Insoumise [FI]) as the most leftist party with a realistic electoral prospect, FI remarkably shared a number of orientations with the extreme-right NF: its anti-system, anti-European Union, anti-globalization, antiliberal, and pro-working class attitudes; its hostility to ethnic identity and cultural pluralism; and its discomfort with institutional elements of the Fifth Republic.

The radical right and Marine Le Pen's NF appeared to be doing the best job throughout the campaign of finding lines of appeal to a transpartisan base of supporters. Winning over the working class with her position against the European Union and through welfare protectionist position advocacy, she also appealed to environmentalists in January pledging to take on multinational corporations using pesticides and genetically modified crops and advocated a zero-carbon policy initiative for France. She was all the while securing votes from nativists and nationalists on the ideological right with an anti-immigrant message of preserving cultural distinctiveness, and national sovereignty. Still, she was self-destructive in her presidential debate performances and had her thunder stolen as the candidate for the frustrated French when Macron defined his appeal to them as an antiestablishment option in the center.

Macron's appeal was based on several factors. As a person not clearly linked to any traditional party and as a relative newcomer to politics, Macron was welcomed by an electorate disillusioned with political parties. He referred to himself, and to On the Move! (En Marche!), his movement, as "neither right nor left," as embodying hope and optimism, and as calling for liberated energy, pride in France's history, and a reenergized Europe, while promising protection of the weakest elements in society.

The disaffection with the two mainstream parties was clearly reflected in the outcome of the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2017. Macron won the presidency 65 to 35 percent against Le Pen. His decisive victory was followed by an equally impressive performance in the parliamentary elections in June. It produced a National Assembly dominated by a centrist "presidential majority" consisting of REM, MoDem, and pro-Macron members of LR. The PS as such ended up without representation in the assembly and although Marine Le Pen was elected to the National Assembly for the first time, the NF, with only eight seats, was unable to form a parliamentary group.

The country at large experienced a feeling of relief and optimism—at least compared to the mood of the preceding decade. The elections of 2017 reminded many of the events of 1958 that brought General de Gaulle to power with the help of a transpartisan movement that became a "catchall" political party. The election of Macron, like that of de Gaulle, signaled a restoration of the authoritative position and mystique of the president—and of the presidency—which had

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

been desacralized by Sarkozy and Hollande. But the comparison is not quite justified. Macron favored reforming the existing republic, not creating a new one. And whereas de Gaulle had entered politics as a towering figure, Macron was viewed by many as an inexperienced new presence whose programmatic orientation was yet to be revealed, a mere best option among the finalists.

Macron's honeymoon period was short-lived, and his approval ratings declined dramatically from 62 percent in May 2017 to 36 percent in August 2017 according to IFOP polls prompting the moniker "Monsieur Unpopular."[13] The decline reflected the French tendency to not remain enamored with any leader for very long and also impatience with Macron's campaign promises of large-scale changes and a political revolution. Macron's neither-left-nor-right positioning represented a gamble that skeptics believed might quickly unravel, still the mainstream left and right parties proved unable to reinvent themselves in the opposition. In 2022, albeit by a less decisive margin, Macron won reelection and his REM party aligned with other centrists as *Ensemble!* to claim 42 percent of the seats in the National Assembly.

Macron became the first French president in twenty years to win reelection, but voter turnout was its lowest in fifty years at 72 percent.[14] Top issues for REM included pension reform, expanding job training and education to boost the French workforce, energy independence, and economic sovereignty—a topic heightened given the Russian invasion in Ukraine in February 2022. Macron staunchly supports a key role for the European Union and also a leading role for France in it. While the 2022 election kept Macron in the Élysée Palace, the official residence of French presidents, the cracks in his "neither left nor right" centrist party were evident. His rival in the second round, far right National Rally (NR, formerly National Front -NF) candidate Marine Le Pen improved her vote share to 41.5 percent up from 33.9 percent in 2017. His party lost its former outright majority of seats in the National Assembly and needed to form *Ensemble*, a coalition government with other centrists. The NR gained the most seats in parliament with 81 more than in 2017 for a total of 89 seats, however a united left parliamentary group labeled the New Ecological and Social People's Union (NUPES) capturing 131 seats, second only the Ensemble's 245 seats, may be the most notable change in 2022. NUPES includes the mainstream left PS, ecologists, communists, and other leftists. This is the first wide left-wing political alliance since the Plural Left in the 1997 French legislative election. Time will tell whether this marks a return of a united left, meanwhile the French right appears to remain fairly factionalized and in pursuit of its best strategy for competing with the NR.

Bipolarity and Multiplicity in Subnational Elections

Other elective bodies in France at the regional, departmental, and municipal council levels, and also the national Senate, have tended to manifest subnational partisan realities where bipartisanship has never been the norm. Furthermore, the names of the parties or alliances in these bodies may differ from those in the National Assembly. The use of proportional representation in subnational and supranational elections, such as for regional councils, the Senate, and the European Parliament, explains why there are many more parties in the game, including those of purely local interest, and why alliances are more diverse and unpredictable (Table 2.7).

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

TABLE 2.7 ■ Comparison of Regional and Other Election Results 2010–2017 (Metropolitan France)

	Regional 2010	Presidential 2012	Legislative 2012	County 2015	Regional 2015	Presidential 2017	Legislative 2017
Registered Voters (Votants)	46.3/51.1	81.4/81.9	58.7	50.3	50.1/58.5	77.7/74.6	48.7/42.6
Valid Votes (Exprimés)	44.6/48.7	79.9/77.1	57.9	47.9	48.1/55.7	75.7/66	47.6/38.4
Extreme Left	3.6	0.7	1	–	1.6	1.9	0.8
Communist Party, Left Front	6.1/0.3	11.3	7.1	8.3	4.9	19.6	13.8/6.1
Europe Ecology—The Greens	12.5/1	2.3	5.5	4.2	6	–	–
Socialist Party, Radical Party of the Left	29.5/50.5	28.1/51.3	31.2	20.4	23.5/29.7	6.4	7.9/6.1
Miscellaneous Left	1.9/2.4	–	2.9	3.8	1.3/1.6	–	1.6/1.5
Ecologists and Miscellaneous	1.8/0.2	0.3	1.7	0.5	1.6/0.2	–	6.4/0.7
REM						24/66.1	28.2/43.1
MoDem	4.3/0.9	9.2	1.7	–	–	–	4.1/6.1
New Center/Union of Democrats and Independents	–	–	3.5	–	–	1.2	3.0/3.0
UMP/The Republicans	26.2/35.4	27/48.7	27.5	29.8	27.1/40.7	20	15.8/22.2
Miscellaneous Right	1.5	–	3.1	7.2	0.6	0.9	2.8/1.7
France Stand Up/Popular Republican Union	–	1.8	–	–	4.8	4.7	1.17/0.1
Extreme Right	0.9	–	0.2	0.1	0.2	–	0.3/0.1
National Front	11.7/9.4	18.3	14	25.7	28.4/27.9	21.3/33.9	13.2/8.8
Total left	53.6/54.1	43.4/51.3	47.8	36.7	37.3/31.3	27.9/0	24.1/13.7
Total right	44.6/45.7	56.3/48.7	50.5	62.8	61.1/68.5	48.1/100	40.4/42

Note: Total left is calculated as Miscellaneous Left and all parties above it in column 1. Total right is calculated as MoDem and all parties below it in column 1.

Source: Adapted from Pierre Martin, "Les élections régionales de décembre 2015: vers le tripartisme," *Commentaire*, 2016 (1) no. 153, pp. 89–96.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Subnational systems of election are frequently subjected to reforms by ordinary acts of parliament. Normally, such reforms are designed to favor the party in power and reduce the chances of the opposition. Partisanship, however, does not usually enter into the redrawing of assembly electoral constituency boundaries, as this is done by bipartisan committees that take into account population shifts.

As Table 2.8 indicates, multipolarity—specifically, a significant representation of the left, the center, Gaullists, and the traditional right—can still be seen in the Senate, the general (departmental) councils chosen in cantonal elections, and the regional councils. Regional and local elections correspond to parliamentary elections neither in form nor alliance-building.

The behavior of voters in subnational elections often echoes their general political mood and their views of presidential and governmental performance. For instance, the outcome of the municipal elections of 1983, in which many Socialist and Communist councillors (and, indirectly, mayors) were replaced by Gaullist or Giscardo-centrist ones, was viewed as an expression of voters' impatience with the record of the Mitterrand presidency and the Socialist government after two years in office. Conversely, the outcome of the municipal elections of 1989, in which many Gaullists were ousted, was interpreted as a sign of a relative satisfaction with the performance of the Socialist government led by Rocard.

Political mood resonated through the regional elections of 2015. Held in December of that year in the wake of the November 13 terrorist attacks, which included four suicide bombings and mass shootings at multiple locations in Paris, these elections were marked by a continuing decline of participation—from 78.9 percent in 1977 to 63.5 percent in 2015.[15] They also showcased the third-party challenge of the NF and signaled popular frustrations with the political establishment and mainstream parties. Finally, they alerted the mainstream parties to the dangers inherent in the divisions within the traditional right and left camps that could undermine them in upcoming national elections. In the first round of the regional elections, the NF garnered approximately 28 percent of the vote and led in six of France's 13 regions. By comparison, the Republicans along with centrist allies had the lead in just four regions, and the PS took a devastating hit by finishing first in (only) two regions compared to their previous control of all regions but one. At the national level, party organizations began to strategize ways to defeat the NF in round two of regional elections. Prime Minister Valls had stated before round one that the Socialist Party and the Republicans should create a list of candidates to merge for round two if needed to block the NF. After the first-round vote, the PS withdrew candidates from round two in regions where they finished third and asked voters to support conservative candidates. On the right, however, Sarkozy had adamantly refused to work with other parties. He reasoned that the NF's Le Pen had run on the position that there is no difference between the traditional left and right and had referred to the UMP and PS, the two mainstream parties, as "the 'UMPS.'"[16] If he allowed his party to combine with the left, it will merely validate her point and undermine his appeal to right- leaning voters. In round two, as it turned out, the PS won five regions, the NF did not win a single region, and the Republicans won seven regions.

More recently in 2021, regional elections gave a misleading forecast for those who might have viewed these as a bellwether for the national elections of 2022. Regional results showed neither the party of Macron REM nor the party of Le Pen National Rally winning a single

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

TABLE 2.8 ■ Composition of the Senate: France, 1959–2017 (Selected Years)

	Communists	Socialists	Democratic Left	Democratic Center	MRP / Independents	Gaullists	Unaffiliated	Total
1959	14	51	64	34	92	41	11	307
1965	14	52	50	38	79	30	11	274
1968	17	54	50	40	80	29	13	283
1981	23	63	38	67	51	41	15	298
1989	16	66	23	68	52	91	5	321
1992	15	70	23	66	47	90	10	321
1998	16	78	22	52	47	99	7	321
2004	23	97	15	33	0	156	7	331
2008	23	116	17	29	0	151	7	343
2011	21	131	10	31	17	132	7	348
2017	15	78		70	21	157	5	348

Note: the parties and party families associated with each ideological label have changed over time and author discretion has been applied to classify them for the purpose of illustrating shifts and changes in the political composition of the Senate.

Source: L'Année politique, 1959–2004; Le Monde, various issues; and Regards sur l'Actualité, various issues. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_French_Senate_election

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

region. Instead, the regional winners were the traditional mainstream left and right parties, the Socialists and Republicans respectively. However, to those who would have read these tea leaves as a warning sign to the Macron government, the historically low voter turnout of 1 in 3 eligible voters told a different story suggestive of apathy and general frustration. While mainstream left and party loyalists voted, the frustrated masses stayed home for the regional elections. When 74 percent and then 72 percent turned out to vote in the two rounds of the 2022 presidential elections, and 48 then 46 percent in national parliamentary elections, the message was once again a resounding rejection of the traditional mainstream left and right parties.

THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL PARTIES: RIVALRIES, DIVISIONS, AND UNCERTAINTIES

Whether centrism endures, bipolarity returns, or quadripolarity is revived whereby center right and left are flanked by extreme right and left parties or groups remains to be seen. In speculating about the longevity of Macron's REM, known as Renaissance (RE) after September 2022, consideration must be given to whether RE exhibits programmatic consistency or opportunism, how other parties react, regroup, and reposition themselves, and how all parties adapt to a changing electoral base. The 2022 elections suggest that traditional mainstream parties of both left and right have so far not been able to win back all of their former supporters who shifted to REM with the 2017 elections. The far-right populist National Rally seemed to gain the most ground with second place in both rounds of presidential voting and the most seats gained of any party. In future elections, the NR is likely to continue to play a role for the following reasons: a widespread belief that the two mainstream parties have lost interest in ordinary citizens and are incapable of retrieving political power from the financial market, the belief that the NR no longer represents a danger for the republic,[17] and the fact that the NR is the only party with electoral prospects that expresses public concerns about the growth of Islam and the crime and urban violence that are often associated with it. Still another reason is the lack of unity within LR, which is marked by the existence of six factions (*courants*), some of them organized into informal parliamentary groups such as Union of the Right and Centre (UDC). Other similarly nationalist, anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, and law and order parties on the right include Reconquest (R!), to some extent France Arise (DLF Debout la France), and the Popular Right (la Droite populaire—disbanded in 2019). As a consequence, the NR will either be maintaining itself in three-party contests, as a deal-maker (for the most part with LR candidates), or winning seats outright in the second round. The NR will be supported by other extreme-right parties, who share the NR agenda but who are unlikely to run their own candidates.[18] Marine Le Pen has become a popular political figure as pension reform plagues Macron, and polls suggest that were the two had competed on a second-round ballot one year later in 2023, she would have been victorious.[19]

Since the founding of the Fifth Republic, many marginal parties have appeared over the political spectrum. France has no shortage of distinctive political parties, with typically 10 to 15 parties represented in national elections and many more at regional and local levels. The robustness of political parties in France results from both the two-ballot electoral system allowing for

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

voting one's mind before one's strategy and also from a civic culture favoring local activism and engagement. Few parties can actually run in presidential elections or even participate in primaries, given the required sponsorship of a combination of 500 national and subnational elected officials for each candidate. Some marginal parties have been created as vehicles for personal advancement and others as a means of exerting influence on a mainstream party. Their electoral successes have tended to be limited and temporary, but they have sometimes functioned as spoilers. A notable example has been that of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, leader of the MDC,[20] whose candidacy prevented Jospin from competing with Chirac in the second round of the 2002 presidential elections. Also, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of LF has routinely taken votes from the mainstream left in recent elections.

The rising fortunes of the Europe-Green formation and the continued existence of MoDem raise the question whether the traditional ideological divide between right and left is still relevant. By and large, these distinctions continue to have meaning—the conservative right stressing authority and traditional social distinctions and the left favoring equality and the collectivity. But convergence among the traditional rival sides of the aisle has been growing as well. The mainstream right has accepted the welfare state; and Socialist party and other democratic left groups no longer advocate the class struggle, the blanket nationalization of industries, or the abolition of capitalism, and do not seriously fight religion.[21] The ideological divide is often eclipsed by issues on which there is an overlap, such as Europe, decentralization, multiculturalism, and the reform of the electoral system. In addition, there are new divisions, such as environmentalism versus productivity and protectionism versus globalization.[22] Equally important, policy issues are often subordinated to the personal ambitions of politicians who shift from one party to another. In short, small parties will continue to play a role in shaping the electoral system, as there are issues that cause disagreements *within* both traditional mainstream parties of the left and right, that has allowed particularly centrists, and populists to capitalize.

INTEREST GROUPS

French citizens who become disillusioned with political parties, finding them confusing or doubting their effectiveness, can voice their demands more directly through interest groups. Originally, French political thinkers with centralizing perspectives were as suspicious of economic and professional associations as of political parties. After the Revolution of 1789, organized groups were banned for nearly a century. A law enacted in 1901 permitted the creation of interest groups without prior official authorization; nevertheless, a tradition of distrust of interest groups persisted, and lobbying was seen as incompatible with the public interest. In recent years, lobbying has come to be regarded just as normal as the work of political parties.[23] Today, France's many interest groups are freely organized, and they play a significant role in the country's political life. On a national level, groups represent every conceivable sector and interest: labor, business, agriculture, the free professions, teachers, and proponents of diverse outlooks or policies such as Catholicism, antiracism, women's rights, and environmental protection. Interest groups in France participate in the political process in much the same way they do in the United States. They lobby with the executive, the leadership of political parties, and (to

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

a limited extent) individual members of parliament[24]; they participate in electoral campaigns, and they seek to influence the higher civil service. They engage in collective bargaining, in tripartite negotiations at the national level, in social administration and adjudication, and in numerous permanent as well as ad hoc consultative committees, appointed both by the government and parliament. These activities have focused on a variety of subjects, among them the media, retired persons, highway safety, and pollution.

The number of national, regional, and local voluntary associations has grown incessantly, reaching more than 30,000 and attesting to the growth of pluralism rather than to a decline of state authority.[25] The state is involved in regulating, legitimating, and sometimes subsidizing interest groups and delegating public-administrative tasks to them.[26]

Two of the more important characteristics of French interest groups are their ideological fragmentation and their linkage to political parties. These characteristics are clearly evident in the several competing organizations that represent labor. The oldest, and once the largest, is the General Federation of Labor (Confédération Générale du Travail [CGT]). Essentially a federation of constituent unions such as the automobile, chemical, metal, and transport workers' unions, it has had a revolutionary ideology—that is, the conviction that the interests of the working class can best be promoted through direct political action. In its belief in the class struggle and its opposition to the capitalist system, the CGT has shown a clear affinity for the Communist Party. Many of the CGT's members, which today number about 710,000,[27] in the past voted Communist, and a significant proportion of its leaders were prominent in the Communist Party hierarchy. Indeed, the relationship between the CGT and the Communist Party was sometimes so close that the union was described as a "transmission belt" of the party. In that role, the CGT frequently engaged in strikes and other political action for the Communists' political purposes, such as opposition to NATO, to French policy in Algeria, to German rearmament, and, more recently, to the Socialist government's overall socioeconomic policies. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the dramatic weakening of the Communist Party, the CGT began to assume a more autonomous and somewhat more moderate stance. Another labor union is the French Confederation of Labor (Confédération Française Démocratique de Travail [CFDT]), which has about 800,000 members. Originally inspired by Catholicism, it split in the mid-1960s from the French Confederation of Christian Workers (Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens [CFTC]), which continues to exist, and "deconfessionalized" itself. One of the most dynamic trade unions, it is closely related to, though not formally affiliated with, the Socialist Party. An important idea of the CFDT, the promotion of self-management (autogestion), was incorporated into the Socialist platform in the 1970s.

The Workers' Force (Force Ouvrière [FO]) and the General Confederation of "Cadres" (Confédération Générale des Cadres [CGC]) are two other unions of some importance. The FO, with its about 1.1 million members, is an industrial workers' federation noted for its preference for union autonomy in relation to political parties, for its staunch anticommunism, and for its emphasis on U.S.-style collective bargaining. In recent years, the FO has hardened its position vis-à-vis employers, in part in competition with the CGT. The CGC, which has about 450,000 members, is not very ideological in orientation; it represents supervisory,

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

middle-echelon technical, and other white-collar employees. Finally, there are several teachers' unions, which are fragmented by professional level or ideology.[28]

This fragmentation, coupled with the relatively feeble extent of unionization—fewer than 9 percent of French workers are unionized today[29]—has added to the predicament of organized labor. Traditionally, unions have been at a disadvantage whenever their "patron" parties, notably the Communists and Socialists, were in the opposition. To overcome that disadvantage, unions learned to cooperate in practical matters. They often present common demands to employers and the government and join in demonstrations and strikes. During the Socialist government of 1981–1986, trade unions gained important concessions under legislation (the Auroux laws) that strengthened their right to organize and bargain collectively at plant levels. But these concessions have in part been nullified by developments that weakened the position of unions: the "scab" effect of immigrant workers, the growth of the tertiary sector in which unionization has been weak, and the decline of traditional "smokestack" industries and the concomitant reduction in total union membership. Finally, the bargaining power of unions has been dramatically reduced by the privatization of industries, mandated by EU rules, and delocalization, a consequence of globalization. Yet unions are able to disrupt economic life by short nationwide strikes, especially in large cities.

Divisions among trade unions persist, although the ideologies that differentiated them have become less relevant and their former linkages to political parties have loosened. Various unions have evolved ideologically: The FO has become more radical, and the CGT has become more moderate and has even accepted capitalism, although with reservations. The CGT's once close relationship with the PCF has largely disappeared. Bernard Thibault, who headed the CGT until 2013, had a fairly reasonable approach to economic policy, and his relationship with Sarkozy was friendly.[30] For that reason, Thibault was criticized by the more radical rank and file who remain committed to the class struggle and who often challenged his leadership. The position of the CGT hardened under Sophie Binet, the current leader, elected in 2023. Soon after assuming leadership, he began to arm-wrestle with the government, organizing strikes in response to the labor bill of Myriam El Khomri, the minister of labor in 2016, which was aimed at making layoffs easier, and securing FO support against the bill. (One reason for the opposition was the relocation of the power to negotiate collective contracts from the national union headquarters to the individual union.) Despite the reduced relevance of ideological divisions between trade unions, they compete with one another for representation on enterprise and national levels.

Organized business is much more unified than organized labor. The major business association is the Movement of French Enterprises (Mouvement des Entreprises de France [MEDEF]). This umbrella organization of more than 80 manufacturing, banking, and commercial associations represents more than 800,000 firms. In its lobbying efforts, this employers' group has been fairly effective. Many of its leaders have old-school ties with the government's administrative elite, it is well-heeled financially, it has provided ideas and other kinds of assistance to the right-of-center parties that have ruled France intermittently since 1958, and it has been an important partner of the government in the push toward economic modernization. At the same time, there are internal disagreements among leaders of business regarding wage structures, government subsidies, and, more recently, the size of bankers' bonuses.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Shopkeepers, artisans, and small- and medium-size manufacturing firms have their own organizations, such as the General Federation of Small and Medium Enterprises (Confédération des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises [CPME]), which represents 1.5 million firms. These groups have lobbied separately to fight economic consolidation policies that have posed a threat to them, including the growth of supermarkets, but their success has been mixed.

The greatest organizational complexity is found in agriculture, where associations speak for different kinds of farms, product specialization, ideology, and even relationships to the government. There are associations of beet growers, wine producers, cattle raisers, young farmers, Catholic farmers, agricultural laborers, and so on. The most important of them in terms of inclusiveness and access to decision makers has been the National Federation of Agricultural Enterprises (Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Expoitants Agricoles [FNSEA]), an umbrella organization with about 400,000 members. In the past, farmers' interests were well represented by centrist and conservative parties, but the decline of these parties has been associated with the decline in the number of farmers and the diminishing importance of agriculture in the French economy because of industrialization and urbanization.

Farmers once constituted an important source of political power, but with the constraints of the European Union and the decline of the agricultural sector to 2.51 percent of the active workforce in 2021.[31] A rapid fall off occurred in recent decades as there were around 957,400 people working in the agricultural sector in 2000, while in 2020, only about 678,700 workers remained.[32] As a result, farmers have continued to lose their political clout. Although they retain a measure of support in the Senate, it does not help solve the problems they have been facing, many of them due to competition from other EU countries in the production of meat and milk and the pressure from supermarkets. Their periodic calls for government subsidies are punctuated by mass demonstrations, roadblocks, pitchfork battles, and the dumping of produce.

Farmers cannot be totally neglected, if only for social and cultural reasons, and they often find a receptive ear among the political elite. In recent years, farmers' associations have cooperated with the government in shaping policies that encourage land consolidation, mechanization, retraining of redundant farmers, and the promotion of agricultural exports, especially in the context of the European Union and its supranational Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

One of the important features of French interest group politics is the institutionalized relationship that most groups have with government authorities. Numerous advisory councils—on education, immigration, the environment, highway safety, and so on—are attached to ministries. These councils, composed largely of representatives of interest groups, furnish data that may influence policy suggestions and regulations that emanate from ministries. Similarly composed councils are attached to the highly differentiated national and regional organisms that administer statutory health care, unemployment insurance, pension schemes, and family subsidy programs. The implementation of pricing policies takes place with the participation of farmers' groups (within the limits imposed by EU rules); the application of rules on apprenticeships involves employers' associations; and the adjudication of labor disputes takes place in specialized tribunals (*conseils de prud' hommes*), which include trade union and business representatives, the major "social partners." Interest group delegates to these bodies and to regional professional, agricultural, and commercial chambers, and factory councils are elected by the

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

groups' rank-and-file members without the mediation of political parties. On occasion, interest groups "colonize" parliament in the sense of having their officials elected (via a sympathetic party) to the National Assembly. Finally, interest group leaders may be co-opted into official positions in a ministry with which they have clientelistic relations.

Such institutional involvement has given rise to a debate over pluralism and corporatism. If corporatism implies that the state ultimately wins in contests with the private sector, and especially interest groups, then why does the state often capitulate in the face of strong action by organized interest groups such as transport workers, teachers' unions, farmers, and truck drivers, who engage in social movements (*mouvements sociaux*) such as strikes and other forms of protest?[33] In the end, pluralism prevails, especially when freedom of group action or rivalry between interest groups is the issue. Still, the government is involved in legitimating specific interest groups that seek consultations with the public authorities and participation in elections to social security boards and labor relations tribunals.[34]

Whether the institutionalization of relations enhances or reduces the power of groups is a matter of controversy. In the first place, not all interests are sufficiently important or well enough organized to benefit from reliable patterns of relationships with the government—for example, foreign workers, ethnic minorities, domestics, and certain categories of small business owners. Second, although a formalized network of involvement, sometimes labeled "neocorporatism," guarantees group access to public authorities, such access does not by itself ensure that the views of a particular group will prevail. Furthermore, highly formalized relationships with the government may weaken the will of a group to bargain collectively or to resort to more traditional means of pressure such as strikes.

To many observers, the events from May to June 1968 suggested that the access of interest groups to the authorities was too underdeveloped and inadequate to influence political decisions. Students and workers, in a rare display of unity, engaged in a massive general strike that paralyzed the country for two weeks and threatened to bring down the government and endanger the republic itself. These events had several causes: for workers, dissatisfaction with de Gaulle's economic and social policy that seemed to favor big business and permitted wages to lag woefully behind prices; for students, disgruntlement over the government's failure to modernize a university system whose curriculum was antiquated and not relevant to the labor market, whose physical facilities were cramped, and whose administration was too rigid. The general strike, an example of anomic political behavior, achieved certain reforms that formalized interest group relations with the government had failed to achieve: the partial democratization of university governance, enormous wage increases for workers, improved trade union rights, and a loosening of relations between social classes. In the process, however, de Gaulle's leadership was discredited and his image severely tarnished. Similarly, the massive strikes of public transport workers in 1995 and of the private truckers in 1996, while not directly bringing down the government, succeeded in derailing Prime Minister Juppé's attempts to reform the social security system and ultimately weakened his authority. Recent examples of the effectiveness of mass action, and of the power of labor unions despite their numerical weakness, were the teachers' strikes in 2004 that forced the government to abandon its educational reform proposals; the maritime workers' strike in 2005 that resulted in a modification of proposals to privatize

Do not copy, post, or distribute
Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

passenger traffic between the mainland and Corsica; and the repeated strikes of railroad workers in 2004 and 2005 that prompted President Chirac to promise that the national railway system would never be privatized. Examples of mass action sponsored by trade unions and student organizations were the countrywide strikes in 2006 to force Prime Minister Villepin to withdraw a bill that would make it easier for employers to lay off young entrants into the labor force. Finally, the CGT played a major role in organizing the massive nationwide strikes against the El Khomri bill. These successes must be attributed in part to the support of many other sectors of the general public, which, although inconvenienced, expressed solidarity with the strikers because they feared that their own entitlements might be endangered.

Most interest groups have been complaining about loss of power—a loss they attribute to globalization and the growth of transnational controls over economic processes, especially those of the European Union. This is especially true of the trade unions, whose total membership accounts for less than 10 percent of the labor force and whose influence over political parties has weakened. Nevertheless, interest groups, and in particular labor unions and employers' associations, have continued to play important roles in social administration and the adjudication of labor disputes. Such disputes are addressed in the *conseils de prud' hommes*, the labor tribunals, in which they are formally represented. In 2010 alone, the 209 councils took up more than 200,000 cases and made 11,522 final decisions.[35] The tribunals have not been as effective as expected, and there are discussions within the government about abolishing them.[36]

One of the most important arenas for a formal presence of interest groups is the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council (Conseil Économique, Social, et Environnemental [CESE]),[37] which must be consulted on all pending socioeconomic legislation. Under a constitutional law enacted in 2009 and implemented in 2010, its size of 233 members remains the same as before, but the minimum age is reduced from 25 to 18 and their mandate limited to two terms of five years each. The representation of labor, business, agriculture, professional, and other interests is internally distributed around three "poles" or domains—economic and social dialogue (including workers, white-collar, private enterprise, artisans, and free professions, each union or sector being assigned a specific number of places), 140; environment (including associations and foundations), 33; and "social and territorial cohesion" and miscellaneous associational groups (mutual societies, family association, youth and students, and overseas interests), 60. The representation is to include 40 "qualified individuals" distributed among the three poles (among them 15 who are particularly competent in environmental matters).[38] Under the previously mentioned reforms, the CESE may be convoked by the public with a petition of 500,000 signatures. The effectiveness of the CESE has fallen short of expectations.

The role of a host of noneconomic interests or sectors, such as women, ethnic minorities, and environmentalists, must not be neglected. France has several national women's associations. These groups may not be as large or as well organized as their U.S. counterparts, but since the mid- to late 1960s they have successfully pressured the authorities to abolish legal disabilities based on gender (such as inheritance, adoption, and property ownership), to legalize birth control and abortion, and to make the initiation of divorce easier for women. A major and more recent political victory for women has been legislation providing for gender parity: the requirement that 50 percent of the candidates in parliamentary elections be women.[39] Environmental

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

groups have grown rapidly during the same period. In all parliamentary elections since 1978, and in the presidential elections of 1981, 1988, 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2022 ecologists running under various labels have fielded their own candidates.[40] Indeed, today the Green Party (EELV) has several deputies in the National Assembly; several of its former leaders have held cabinet positions in coalition governments. Antiracist groups such as SOS-Racisme have developed rapidly since the early 1980s to fight for the rights of ethnic and racial minorities, particularly immigrants. At the same time, the government has made it legal for immigrants to form their own associations and sometimes encouraged them to do so. These associations have become increasingly important lobbies, as have ethnoreligious organizations such as those of Muslims and Jews.[41]

Strikes by nurses, teachers, physicians, investigating magistrates, air controllers, and municipal bus and tram drivers, some of them spontaneous in nature rather than organized by their respective associations, have taken place largely to promote economic as well as noneconomic demands—for example, for more staff or better protection against violence. One development of increasing importance, and a cause of increasing violence, has been the anomic street action of poorly organized categories, such as undocumented immigrants, the homeless, and the unemployed.[42] Of growing importance have been Jewish and Muslim religious and cultural associations, civil rights organizations, consumers' associations, organizations promoting *laïcité* (secularism), and feminist groups. One of the latter, "Neither prostitutes nor doormats" (*Ni putes ni soumises*), founded in 2003, is fighting for gender equality for Muslim women. In addition to lobbying, interest groups play an important role in sponsoring petitions to the government; organizing mass demonstrations, marches, strikes, and road blockages to protest against threats to the network of entitlements; the imposition of carbon taxes on trucks; and the legalization of same-sex marriage. In fact, the "politics of the street"—the mobilization of collective rage by events such as *Nuit debout, Bonnets rouges, Mariage pour tous,* anti-Muslim *Porc pour tous; Manif contre tous*—is so institutionalized that it has become a virtual branch of government Clearly, a defining aspect of how the French behave politically involves grassroots mobilization and organization to articulate interests.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

2.4 HOW IS POWER USED IN FRANCE?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Compare the roles of deputies and senators in implementing policy decisions.
- Describe the role of bureaucratic administrators in decision making and policy implementation.
- Explain France's approach to strategic planning on a national scale.
- Identify sources of internal conflict within the French political system.

A MERE OUTLINE OF THE POWERS OF THE PRINCIPAL INSTITUTIONS—the executive, the legislature, and the civil service—enumerated in the constitution and the laws cannot adequately convey how policies in France are decided and implemented. The distinction between what the French have called "the legal country" and "the real country" are evident in the tendency of Fifth Republic presidents to interpret the constitution in such a way as to increase their power at the expense of that of their prime ministers. This tendency has applied not only to cabinet appointments, in which most presidents have had an almost free hand (except during "cohabitation" episodes), but also, and most important, to the content of policy decisions. President Charles de Gaulle, who took little interest in economics, and President Georges Pompidou allowed their prime ministers a great deal of discretion except in the areas of foreign and defense policies, but President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, an *Enarque* (graduate of the National School of Administration [Ecole Nationale d'Administration, or ENA]), who specialized in economic matters, took an active lead in almost all aspects of domestic policy even while his government was headed by Raymond Barre, a professor of economics. Giscard d'Estaing even "meddled" in the drafting of the language of government bills. The problem with President Hollande (an *Enarque* as well) had less to do with his intervention as such, but more to do with the contradictory, confusing, and zigzag nature of his policies. Macron, a former investment banker and finance minister, has taken an active role in driving policy direction. In short, the president's domain, as distinct from that of the government, has been stretched almost at will.

Under de Gaulle, presidential decisions included blackballing Great Britain's entry into the Common Market, raising the minimum wage of industrial workers, and vetoing an appointment to the prestigious Académie Française. Pompidou devalued the franc, lowered the value-added taxes (VATs) on foodstuffs, and modified the rules on the maximum height of buildings

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.
Do not copy, post, or distribute

in Paris. Giscard d'Estaing oversaw hundreds of intrusions into matters affecting taxes, wages, social security, and interest rates. François Mitterrand (before and after the cohabitation interludes) personally decided on the construction of a series of grandiose public buildings and even interfered in the appointment of the director of an opera house. Most recently, Macron has remained staunchly committed to his pension reform with the proposed increase of the retirement age from 62 to 64, and despite persistent yellow vest (*gilets jaunes*) protests.

In promoting his policies, the president uses his ministers to transform his ideas into concrete legislative proposals, to defend them in parliament, and to take the blame for them when they prove unpopular or unsuccessful. The distance the president thereby establishes in the public mind between himself and his ministers is a political convenience. For example, although the austerity policies adopted between 1976 and 1980 were largely inspired by Giscard d'Estaing, public opinion surveys showed that the president was less unpopular than Prime Minister Barre. Even during the cohabitation period of 1986 to 1988, President Mitterrand was able to veto Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's original choices for several cabinet posts, including that of foreign minister. Moreover, although Mitterrand could not interfere effectively in the government's domestic policy decisions, he was able to prevent some measures from being enacted by decree. Yet the president was sufficiently removed from the daily operations of government that his popularity rose while that of Chirac declined.

During the second cohabitation period, Mitterrand left virtually all aspects of domestic policy to the discretion of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, because the control of the National Assembly by the Rally for the Republic (Rassemblement pour la République [RPR]) and the Union for French Democracy (Union pour la Démocratie Française [UDF]) was so overwhelming and the degree of cohesion between these parties so significant that Mitterrand was unable to exploit internal political differences. Furthermore, Mitterrand had a terminal illness (he died in 1996), and he wished to devote his remaining energies to symbolic acts and safeguarding his positive leadership image for future historians.[1] Whatever the reason, his withdrawal from an active decision-making role contributed to his relatively amicable relationship with his prime minister.

Some observers suggest that in calling for an early and unnecessary parliamentary election in 1997 in which his party was defeated, Chirac so undermined his presidential authority that he transformed himself into a lame-duck president even though five years remained in his presidential term. Others, however, argue that Chirac retained significant presidential power, including the power to dissolve the National Assembly again should Lionel Jospin's government become unpopular. The relationship between Chirac and Jospin was tense, oscillating between cooperation on selective policy issues, such as expanding the membership of the European Union, reducing the presidential term to five years—a change realized by constitutional referendum in 2000—reforming the judiciary, and having a competition in appealing to public opinion. In this contest, Jospin initially seemed to have the advantage; his popularity rating was uncharacteristically high for a prime minister after nearly four years in office. He used this situation to his advantage. He had a fairly free hand in reshuffling his cabinet, and he increasingly concerned himself with foreign policy, a matter that was hitherto considered an almost exclusively presidential domain. Conversely, Chirac had difficulty recovering from his ill-advised dissolution of the National Assembly, and his relationships with his own Gaullist party and with other right-of-center forces were frequently less than cordial. Chirac again miscalculated

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

in 2005 when he put his authority on the line in campaigning publicly in favor of the EU constitution. But when he lost on that issue and replaced the prime minister, he did not regain authority; rather, that authority was shifted to the new prime minister.

Emmanuel Macron seemingly wanted the credit for government successes without sharing the limelight with his prime minister. When his publicly popular former prime minister Edouard Philippe was given credit for creating 800,000 French jobs, he was asked to resign presumably in favor of a more "malleable and managerial" prime minister.[2] Macron also made his former interior minister Christopher Castaner a scapegoat for the prolonged yellow vest (gilets jaunes) protests. Since the public perceived government handling to be inept, Macron strategically swapped Castaner with Gérald Darmanin and replaced several other key ministers in July 2020 to signal a change in direction.[3] This maneuver was designed to reset his image and restore public confidence in his leadership and vision as he prepared to campaign for reelection.

Normally, and to a limited extent even during cohabitation, presidents make use of the cabinet, but they do not rely on it alone. They appoint, and preside over, "restricted" committees composed of selected ministers, higher civil servants, and whatever additional personalities they may co-opt. Furthermore, there is a growing staff of presidential experts, who, like the White House staff in the United States, often function as a supplementary cabinet.

DEPUTIES, SENATORS, AND DECISIONS

In a formal sense, the French Parliament has been weakened by the constitution as well as by the legislature's own standing orders. Nevertheless, that institution is not intrinsically so weak as to be dismissed. Although for most domestic policy decisions—and certainly in all budget matters—the initiative belongs to the government, deputies have succeeded in significantly modifying government bills through amendments on matters such as abortion, unemployment, farm credits, education, the reorganization of the television networks, and the reform of local fiscal administration.

Nuclear reactors in the French countryside.
iStock/Gregory_DUBUS

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Sometimes, the government abandons a legislative project to which it is ostensibly committed if support for the project is insufficient among deputies belonging to the majority. This situation occurred in 1976 for capital gains taxation and in 1993 and 1994 for Balladur's proposals related to the employment of young people at wages below the minimum and a variety of educational reforms. Similarly, it occurred in 2012 when Hollande had to drop his reform of the system of multiple electoral mandates (cumul) because the majority of deputies in his own party opposed it.[4] In other cases, the government permits, or encourages, leaders of a parliamentary group belonging to the majority to introduce legislation. In 1980, the Gaullists sponsored a bill on "participation"—the distribution of industrial shares to workers in given companies. The government itself lacked enthusiasm for the policy, but it did not wish to needlessly antagonize the Gaullist party, whose support would be needed for other matters. In still other cases, public opposition to a project may be strong enough to pose political risks for its supporters, thereby inciting deputies to abandon their endorsement of it and the government to abandon it. This situation arose in 1983 for a bill to bring private schools under greater control of the Ministry of National Education and for a bill introduced in 1986 to reform the citizenship and naturalization laws. Yet government bills affecting labor, social security, and the naturalization of immigrants have been significantly modified by parliamentary input. One government bill, the Civil Solidarity Pact (Pacte civil de solidarité), which legalized the cohabitation of unmarried couples, was extensively altered by the parliament, especially the senate.[5]

A lack of evidence of open conflict over policy between majority deputies and the government does not necessarily mean that deputies have resigned themselves to inaction. Instead, it may indicate that they made their influence felt during the drafting phase of the bill through backstage negotiations with ministers or higher civil servants. Frequently, too, a government bill reflects the pressures of interest groups. Watered-down tax bills, softer price controls, and the government's failure to institute the genuine participation of workers in industrial decisions within firms have all stemmed largely from the successful lobbying of business associations. Similarly, the government's acquiescence on wage demands and retirement benefits must be attributed to the pressure of labor unions, especially those representing transport workers. Such pressure is not U.S.-style lobbying by means of appearances before legislative committees; instead, lobbying is carried out through frequent contacts between leaders of big business and higher civil servants. In this respect, trade unions have been at a disadvantage because the personal links of their leaders to upper-echelon bureaucrats are weak. In the past, unions compensated for this weakness by threatening strikes and unrest, and they succeeded in pushing the government into making periodic wage adjustments in their favor, particularly during election years. But in view of the continuing moderation and the increasingly "centrist" orientation of the socialist leadership under Prime Minister Jospin from 1997 to 2002, through the center-left triumvirate of prime ministers under the Hollande presidency from 2012 to 2017 including Jean-Marc Ayrault, Manuel Valls, and Bernard Cazeneuve, such methods were likely to bear less fruit than they had in previous years, even when the Socialist Party was in power. The Jospin government had been so dependent on the support of communist and other leftist deputies, some of them close to the unions, that it had to initiate various policies favored by organized labor. These policies included reducing the workweek to 35 hours, raising corporate

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

taxes, and modifying some privatization attempts. When the right controls the government, as it did from 1993 to 1997 and 2002 to 2012, the unions are in an even weaker position. Macron's centrist governments of 2017 and 2022 have not won favor from unions either, as 3.3 million French people amounting to 12.4 percent of the workforce worked in low-security jobs in 2020.[6] As a result of 2017, at-will employment became more common in France as employers gained more discretion in termination decisions.

Parliamentarians who are unhappy with government bills have a juridical weapon at their disposal: the Constitutional Council. That body is not a judicial review organ in the sense of the U.S. Supreme Court; it is not a court of appeals to which citizens' complaints about constitutional violations may be brought; and it does not have the authority to nullify laws already in effect. Its major legislative function used to be simply examining organic bills (which could also include the budget) *before* they were passed by parliament and before they were signed into law. (For these reasons, many observers have regarded the council as a supplementary branch of the legislature rather than a court.) However, the council has widened its scope considerably, beginning with a ruling in 1971 by which it forced the government to withdraw a bill that would have given prefects the power to forbid or cancel public meetings. In this case, the council acted on the grounds that the bill violated freedom of association.[7] In 1977, the council nullified a bill that would have allowed the police, without a warrant, to search parked cars, because the bill violated a constitutional provision (Art. 66) on judicial safeguards of individual liberties. In 1980, the council nullified a bill aimed at special surveillance of foreign workers on the grounds that it violated the principle of equality before the law. Then, in 1982, the council voided parts of the socialist government's nationalization legislation dealing with compensation to private shareholders on the grounds that it amounted to an unconstitutional deprivation of property.

Earlier in the Fifth Republic, during the tenures of Presidents de Gaulle and Pompidou, the council, which was heavily Gaullist in composition, tended not to take issue with decisions by the executive. Since then, and in large part because it has been increasingly called on by opposition deputies, it has taken a very independent position. In 2005, Pierre Mazeaud, then president of the Constitutional Council, condemned the politically motivated practice of opposition deputies referring laws to the council for review. Still, the volume of work for the council has increased dramatically with the 2008 amendment of Article 61 allowing review of laws already enacted and enabling ordinary citizen litigants in a dispute before judicial or administrative courts to challenge the constitutionality of laws by appealing to the council.[8]

In 2023, opponents of the government's policy increasing the retirement age to 64 petitioned the council twice to put the matter to a public referendum asking voters if they wanted to cap retirement age at 62. The council rejected this request, which had been brought by a group of about 250 deputies of the National Assembly and Senators from the left-wing and centrist parties. The first rejection by the council came on grounds that criteria set forth in the constitutional related to their purview had not been met, since the pension reform policy had not yet been signed into law. When petitioned after the law passed, the council articulated in their second decision that the criteria for a referendum had not been met. Notably, cases can also be brought to the Constitutional Council by ministers of government. The council struck down part of a 2021 regional language protections law passed by parliament indicating that a provision for

Do not copy, post, or distribute
Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

language immersion programs was unconstitutional.[9] Pointing to Article 2 of the constitution, which stipulated the language of the country as French, the ruling prohibits teaching school curriculum with full delivery in Basque, Breton, and Corsican, and other regional languages.

If parliament's contributions to the legislative process have amounted to less than many had hoped, it reflects not only the "rationalized" legislative process but also the condition and behavior of the deputies themselves. Parliamentarians have often lacked the expertise of the administrative professionals who draft government bills. Furthermore, deputies' absenteeism has made it difficult for them to acquire mastery over a subject or to participate in parliamentary debates with consistency. Absenteeism has continued to be a problem despite sanctions, which are seldom enforced, and despite recent limitations of the number of additional elective offices a deputy might hold.

Even if such problems were overcome completely, deputies would still be unable to make their wills prevail as individuals. Under Gaullist presidents and under Giscard d'Estaing, the deputies belonging to parties of the left lacked unity and voting strength, and the Gaullist or Giscardo-centrist deputies hesitated to confront the government in open parliamentary sessions, for they, too, were divided between enthusiastic and reluctant supporters of the government.

After the elections of 1981, the tables were turned: The right-of-center parties were too small and fragmented to fight the executive, whereas the socialist deputies became part of an obedient machine for endorsing presidential wishes. After the parliamentary elections of 1993, the tables were turned again. The conservative control of the National Assembly and the internal cohesion of the RPR and UDF strengthened the position of the prime minister in relation to the president, but it also strengthened the position of the conservative parliamentary parties in relation to the prime minister. Further changes were made by Jean-Louis Debré, who became Speaker in 2002. Debré asserted that he "act[ed] neither [in behalf of] the right or the left, but for this chamber."[10] He increased the number of parliamentary committees and expressed his desire to have some of them chaired by the opposition as well as to have commissions of inquiry cochaired by majority and opposition. Yet he was torn between his desire to project the power of parliament and his firm loyalty to Chirac.

Among the additional constraints on the actions of parliament are the occasionally strained relations between the National Assembly and the Senate, which are not always in agreement. Party discipline is a factor as well. Moreover, majority deputies do not wish to endanger their prospects for political advancement (such as appointment to ministerial posts) or their pork barrel favors to their constituents. Overall, the lack of seriousness with which deputies have often viewed their own efforts can be attributed in part to their realization that much of the work carried out in parliament does not necessarily have permanent value: The decisions that count are made elsewhere, including by the bureaucracy.

BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS

In theory, civil servants do not make policy; they only carry out the research and prepare the groundwork for policy and then implement it at various levels. But in effect, career administrators are co-decision makers. During the Fourth Republic, the political executive was subject

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

to such frequent change and was therefore so unstable and weak that the French government depended on the permanent, professional civil service for decisional continuity and even initiative. In the Fifth Republic, the distinction between the political decision- making elite and the higher bureaucracy has been obscured by the tendency of presidents to recruit (or to persuade the prime minister to recruit) a large portion of their cabinets from the administrative corps. In addition, civil servants frequently dominate interministerial committees as well as the *cabinets ministériels*, the staffs of collaborators appointed by each minister. In principle, the members of these cabinets are responsible to the minister whom they serve, but because they understand the technicalities of a dossier better than the minister, they often act according to their own discretion, sometimes in concert with the staffs of other ministries.

During the Fifth Republic, the size of the staffs of the individual ministers has grown steadily, from an average of about 10 per minister, or about 300 for the ministries collectively, during the 1960s and 1970s, to 12.5 per minister, for a total of 580 under Prime Minister Chirac (1987) and more than 600 under his successor, Prime Minister Michel Rocard. This growth of what has been called a "parallel administration"[11] reflects in part the growth in the number of ministries, but it is also a manifestation of a spoils system in which jobs are given to more people. Yet money is saved because a smaller proportion of the appointees (e.g., 22 percent under Rocard as compared with 36 percent under Chirac) are the more highly paid professional civil servants who graduated from the ENA. More recently, this growth has been kept under control. The staff of the ministers in Fillon's cabinet numbered 517 when he took office in 2007, but was subsequently increased to 626.

The position of the *Enarchie* in the French political system can be appreciated from the fact that during the Fifth Republic, four presidents, seven prime ministers, and five of the 12 candidates in the 2002 presidential election were graduates of that institution. But some important politicians such as Nicolas Sarkozy and Jean-Pierre Raffarin have not been part of this "old boy" network. In recent years, there have been a spate of arguments about the continued utility of the ENA, as well as suggestions about rethinking the structure and recruitment basis of that institution. In December 2021, ENA was dissolved and replaced by the Institut National du Service Public (INSP) in an effort to reform and democratize civil service training to be more inclusive in recruitment.

As for the size of the national bureaucracy (*fonction publique*), the government periodically proposes some pruning, in part because a growing number of sectors that were once part of the state have been privatized. Yet the national bureaucracy, with its nearly 2.49 million employees in 2019,[12] continues to be important. At its pinnacle is the Council of State (*Conseil d'Etat*), which is heavily involved in the drafting of government bills and is the ultimate source of appeal by citizens for administrative malfeasance.

Other participants in the decision-making process are the study commissions, *comités de sages*, whose appointment is from time to time encouraged by the president, the prime minister, or individual ministers. These commissions, which are roughly comparable to the Royal Commissions in Great Britain, may include academicians, managers of public enterprises, military officers, and politicians, but they have tended to be dominated by civil servants. Examples of some of the many study commissions convened during the Fifth Republic are the Toutée

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.
Do not copy, post, or distribute

Commission on wage negotiations in nationalized industries (1967), the Sudreau Commission on workers' participation in industrial management (1974), the Nora Commission on the impact of computer technology (1978), the Giraudet Commission on the reduction of the workweek (1980), the Long Commission on the reform of citizenship and naturalization laws (1987), the Stasi Commission on secularism in the republic (2003), the Camdessus Commission on the reform of labor laws (2004), the Burqa Commission on the wearing of the full Muslim veil (2009), and the Jopsin Commission on ethics in public life (2012). In 2023, the French Senate opened a commission of inquiry into the Chinese social media platform Tik Tok to examine use in France, strategy of influence, and personal data management.[13] practices. The commissions' reports to the government, which reflect the input of interest group representatives and miscellaneous experts, may be used by the government as a basis for legislative proposals, or, if the government does not agree with the reports' conclusions, they may be ignored. Several reasons explain the proliferation of commissions: the need to circumvent a parliament that might make proposals that would be unwelcome to the government or, conversely, to supplant a parliament that has been unwilling to make decisions (and failed to use the power to set up its own special study or investigation committees); the desire of the government to "pass the buck" for politically risky policies; and—on a more positive note—the quest for a policy based on a broad consensus.

Once the parliamentarians have passed a bill, it gains substance only when it is enforced. But governments (and higher civil servants) may demonstrate their reservations about a bill by failing to produce the necessary implementing regulations or ordinances. The government has "denatured" acts of parliament by delaying, or omitting, follow-up regulations on bills dealing with educational reforms, birth control, prison reform, and the financing of local government. Occasionally, the administrative bureaucracy may, at the behest of a minister, produce regulations that contravene the intent of the law passed by parliament. In the 1980s, after parliament passed a bill requiring equal treatment of immigrant workers, administrative regulations subjected them to special restrictions. Similarly, an act of parliament forbidding discrimination on the basis of religion or race aimed at businesses engaged in international trade was followed by a government regulation permitting such discrimination. The Council of State may nullify such regulations after a legal challenge, but litigation is selective and may take several years.

The interplay between bureaucratic and legislative actions illustrates the complexity and pluralism of the decision-making process. In this pluralism, the public at large plays a role inside as well as outside the formal institutional framework. Indeed, it was "the street" that incited the government to abandon bills on educational reform,[14] agriculture, and social security reform. During massive public demonstrations to keep the 35-hour workweek, one demonstrator declared, "If the government doesn't give in to these public demonstrations, it isn't a democracy."[15] Such an attitude reflects widely prevailing doubts about the efficacy of "normal" political institutions.

DELEGATING RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS

At times, the executive and its administrators may resort to various forms of buck-passing to weaken the effects of long-established legislation. To avoid using public monies to keep the government-controlled health insurance funds solvent, the government has occasionally permitted

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

the funds to raise the social security contributions of the insured. Similarly, the autonomous public corporation that runs the Paris transport system has contracted with private firms to clean the metro stations instead of employing its own workers and paying them the minimum wage generally granted by legislation to public employees. Finally, although all subnational administrative activities are ultimately subject to the supervision or "guardianship" (*tutelle*) of the national government, the latter has saved itself trouble and money by permitting considerable local variations in the implementation of primary school curriculums and vacation policies, public health standards, and social services for the aged. The decentralization measures begun in 1982 and continued in 1983 institutionalized that approach and at the same time provided for greater local autonomy and grassroots participation. In order to save money, the national government has in recent years shifted the burden to subnational units. Beginning with responsibility for maintaining public schools by local authorities, the government gradually extended to departments the task of funding the provision of minimum monthly income (RSA [*Revenu de solidarité active*]), public housing, care for the handicapped, and other social services. These measures have created deficits for local authorities and forced them to cut costs by ending a variety of local functions and selling publicly-owned real estate and other property.

Since the early days of the Fourth Republic, governments have been committed to a form of capitalist national planning. Four-year economic modernization plans were prepared through complex procedures involving the cabinet (notably the Ministry of Finance), government statistics offices, and several hundred technocrats working in a National Planning Commission and tripartite subcommittees (*groupes de projet*) dealing with themes such as growth, employment, and regional development, and composed of representatives of the government, the "social partners," and independent experts. This harmonizing of conflicting class interests was supposed to result in a fair macroeconomic plan that represented a fine balance between a productivity orientation and a social one. The plan, therefore, was invested with a certain moral authority, and, with that in mind, the government and parliament processed specific pieces of legislation that were consistent with the plan, such as bills on public works investments, social welfare, wages, employment, and housing. For both President de Gaulle and President Pompidou, the plan was an "ardent obligation." Under President Giscard d'Estaing and his prime ministers, the planning institutions were retained, but planners did little more than prepare position papers and statistical forecasts, and the government ignored many of their policy recommendations.

After the election of Mitterrand to the presidency in 1981 (and the appointment of Rocard as minister of planning), the economic plan was to be not only revived, geared to the production of social goods, and made more redistributive in orientation but also given extra weaponry with a larger number of nationalized industries and a plethora of economic regulations. Yet the Ninth Development Plan, theoretically in effect in 1983, became in practice a dead letter, because it was "displaced" by an interim plan conforming to the austerity policy to which the government had committed itself. Moreover, part of the plan was replaced by piecemeal economic policy contracts with individual regions (*contrats Etat-région*). Under the Chirac government that began in 1986, not much remained of the plan except its name and its institutions. Whatever economic policy there was to be was confined to the cabinet and, more specifically,

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

to the Ministry of Finance. Indeed, in view of its program of reprivatizing a variety of industries and banks, its commitment to deregulation and "degovernmentalization," and its reliance on market forces, the government would have little if any room for planning. With the installation of the Rocard government in 1988, the Tenth Development Plan (1989–1992) was adopted, but only a junior minister was in charge of it, and planning in a meaningful sense was not revived. Under Rocard's successors, planning has fared no better: Plans are still made, but because of the increasing role of the market and the relocation of certain aspects of economic decision making and monetary policy to the transnational levels of the European Union, the policy impacts of plans are open to question. In 2005, Villepin fired the national planning commissioner who had been appointed by Raffarin, Villepin's predecessor; he abolished the Planning Commission; and he replaced it with data-gathering agencies under the direct authority of the prime minister.[16] Villepin finished the job by dismissing the last of France's planning commissioners and abolishing the position.

The General Planning Commission produced multi-year plans for France until 2006, when it was replaced with the Strategic Analysis Center (*Centre D'analyse Stratégique*) for seven years, followed by the current planning unit France Strategy (*France Stratégie*). Sarkozy utilized the Strategic Analysis Center to guide economic agenda items and policy directions based on their research with planning recommendations. For instance, in 2009, Sarkozy co-hosted a conference in France with British Prime Minister Tony Blair world leaders from five continents, Nobel Prize winners, and economic policy experts to discuss strategies for economic competitiveness in an age of globalization.[17] Macron has relied heavily on France Strategy to develop recommendations for how to implement economic reform alongside environmental reform with an eye toward social and democratic norms. France Strategy started working on a report with recommendations for action on this topic in 2019, finalizing its 250-page report to the government in 2022.[18] Even though France no longer produces rigid Development Plans with a capital "d," it certainly has continued to conduct economic planning across multi-year increments based upon data-gathering. France Strategy intricately coordinates with ministries of government such as the Finance Ministry prompting it to be relocated in 2017 to the Paris office complex known as the *Ensemble Fontenoy-Ségur* where other services of the Office of the French Prime Minister are located.

CONFLICTS WITHIN THE SYSTEM

The analysis that was previously presented suggests that the government's attitudes are not monolithic. Occasionally, the national administration is hampered by internal conflicts as well as conflicts with parliamentary and local politicians. For example, the ministers in charge of labor (especially unskilled labor) and social affairs have sought to raise minimum wages and upgrade working conditions, but the ministers of finance have interfered with such policies to save money both for the Treasury and for the influential business sector whose profits are maximized by cheap labor. The minister of the interior, who is in charge of the police, has been concerned with internal order and security, whereas the minister of justice has sought to protect the rights of citizens.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Some of these conflicts are resolved in response to political considerations rather than merely administrative ones. Administrative institutions are not immune to political influence; moreover, National Assembly deputies may serve on the boards of nationalized industries, on regional bodies, and in agencies involved in economic policymaking. Such deputies may be trained technocrats or civil servants and therefore professionally concerned with "objective" approaches to problem-solving. Yet at the same time they are politicians responsive to local electorates.

The conflict between administration and politics is seen most clearly in the relationship between the mayor and the prefect. The prefect, who is legally responsible to the national government, has the power to nullify acts of a city council; to veto the budget adopted by the general council; and even, under certain circumstances, to depose a mayor. A prefect takes such action rarely, however, because a mayor may be more powerful than a prefect, especially if the mayor heads a large city and is simultaneously a member of parliament or, even better, is a cabinet minister. A large number of ministers, including most of the prime ministers, continued to function as mayors of towns while exercising their national functions until the law changed in 2014 requiring them to resign one position within thirty days of taking office.[19] Sometimes a mayor may be too political and too powerful to suit the taste of the national government. In 1978, Chirac, the mayor of Paris, was "punished" for his presidential ambitions and his unreliable support of President Valéry Giscard D'Estaing. Chirac, at the president's instigation, failed to obtain a national financial supplement for maintenance of the municipal police force—a situation that forced Chirac to increase local tax assessments and threatened to reduce his popularity.

This description of the French political system is not intended to suggest that France has a mixed system in which various institutions and individuals filling a variety of different political positions play equally significant roles. Still, the fact that the constitution has given presidents vast powers to make decisions and that they have added to these powers by one-sided interpretation does not mean that they always make use of these powers. In a television debate with Jospin during the presidential election campaign of 1995, Chirac deplored the "monarchical drift" of French decision-making patterns and contended that presidents were increasingly behaving like "super prime ministers" instead of confining themselves to articulating grand visions and providing general impulses to political actions. He argued that the French regime was basically parliamentary rather than presidential, and he called for an increase in the power of the parliament to legislate and control the actions of the government.[20]

Almost immediately after he assumed the presidency and appointed his ministers, Sarkozy announced that he was "the decider," that he was given a mandate to act, and that he would make every effort to promote the policies to which he had committed himself during the election campaign. As president he proved true to his promises. His style of leadership was that of a hyper-president, engaged in what his critics regarded as a solitary exercise of power: He made all major decisions, and Prime Minister François Fillon, a personal friend, played a clearly secondary role. The composition of the government, which was entirely determined by Sarkozy, was the most diverse of the Fifth Republic (at least until the Macron presidency): It included women, several of them Muslim, in important cabinet posts; and he also named a number of socialists

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

to official positions in an attempt to show that he was not bound by traditional ideological constraints. There were occasional differences of opinion with the prime minister, disagreements within the cabinet, and challenges to some of Sarkozy's policies within his own parliamentary majority, especially in the Senate. He was also constrained by public opinion and by external pressures. Hollande had been subjected to even greater constraints: opposition to his policy of austerity by members of his own cabinet and open disagreement on the part of the Speaker of the assembly. Macron has been a strong president in terms of assuming clear leadership and having prime ministers and cabinets in subordinate roles, yet the public scrutiny and outspoken resentment of some of his policies may have shaped his decisions about which initiatives to pursue and when.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

2.5 WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF FRENCH POLITICS?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define the key accomplishments of the Fifth Republic.
- Identify challenges to the administrative and judicial systems.
- Name the top three concerns that threaten the future of France.
- Explain how welfare policies and neoliberalism challenge France's economic future.
- Define the key societal and systemic issues faced by France.
- Explain the driving forces behind France's foreign policy in the Fifth Republic.

IF INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS ARE USED AS the principal criteria for judging a political system, the Fifth Republic is a success. Six and a half decades after its inauguration, the regime has amply reflected the themes of "change within continuity" articulated by Presidents Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. A remarkable balance has been achieved between French traditionalism and the spirit of innovation; the old institutions have been retained, but their functional relationships have been rationalized. The executive has sufficient unity and power to make decisions, and it has used this power fairly effectively.

STABILITY, MODERNIZATION, AND DEMOCRACY

In the Fifth Republic, the political party system has been simplified, and political conflicts have been reduced, in part by the deliberate design of the system of elections, but more important, by socioeconomic changes and a clear popular consensus about the legitimacy of the constitutional system. As a result of the decentralization reforms that began in the early 1980s and are still continuing, subnational (i.e., regional, district, and municipal) administration has been adapted to respond to new realities, and local communities have been given significantly greater powers of decision and revenue gathering. The voting age has been lowered to 18, and great progress has been made toward legal equality for minorities, homosexuals, children born out of wedlock, and for women in regard to wages and political representation. Institutions have been created to

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

make the bureaucracy more accountable. Apart from occasional lapses, freedom of association, including the rights of workers to organize in factories, has been made more secure, although it has not given them more job security. There is ongoing experimentation aimed at modernizing and democratizing the educational system and adapting it to the requirements of the job market. The networks of national and urban mass transport have been modernized and are among the finest in existence. The social security system has responded fairly well to the needs of the majority, and it is holding its own in the struggle to maintain robust welfare state provisions despite the pressures imposed by the European Union and by globalization.

ADMINISTRATION AND JUSTICE: DEVELOPMENTS AND REFORMS

To many of the French, especially Gaullists, the "administrative state" has been preferable to the "regime of parties" because civil servants have been viewed as more professional, less ideology-ridden, and less particularistic than party politicians. Being less influenced by electoral pressures, the administrative bureaucracy is supposed to be better at making long- term policy in the public interest.

It is true that most upper-echelon civil servants are highly cultivated and public-spirited; moreover, the social esteem and excellent pay they have received have made them, by and large, immune to corruption (at least in comparison with elected politicians). But because of their bourgeois or upper-class origins, they have tended to be elitist and paternalistic. They are often too far removed from the people, and their actions are not subjected to adequate parliamentary surveillance. Citizens' means of redress against bureaucratic misbehavior are unreliable, despite institutions such as the administrative courts, topped by the Council of State and newer institutions such as the mediator.

The judicial system, whose essential features date to Napoleon Bonaparte's rule, needs liberalization. The network of courts is large; the appeals echelons are well distributed geographically; and most Western-type due process criteria are followed. Although Anglo- American–style habeas corpus provisions are omitted in the constitution, they have been introduced gradually by means of ordinary legislation. Yet elements of class justice persist; pretrial detention is often still too long, especially for suspects belonging to the working class, agricultural laborers and the poor. The police, the prosecuting attorneys, and the courts have dealt particularly harshly with immigrants from developing countries. For many years, the government hesitated to liberalize the penal code, a hesitancy attributed in part to continued fear (shared by large segments of the population) of disorder and violence.

In recent decades, the judicial system has become overloaded because of increasing lawlessness, which has been reflected in the overcrowding of prisons.[1] Among the responses have been premature releases, suspended sentences, and the appointment of volunteer neighborhood judges (*juges de proximité*) to judge petty infractions and small claims of less than €4,000.[2] There also have been changes in due process, and, to lighten the load of the courts, steps have been taken toward simplifying penalties for traffic offenses. Christine Taubira, the minister of justice from May 2012 to January 2016, actively promoted alternatives to detention especially for juvenile offenders.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Conversely, the judicial establishment has been more lenient in prosecuting and convicting members of the political elite, especially high government officials. Chirac was not subject to prosecution during the exercise of his presidency for corrupt behavior while he was mayor of Paris. Former prime minister Alain Juppé, while mayor of Bordeaux, was convicted for corrupt acts he had committed as deputy mayor of Paris, but he was handed an unusually lenient sentence, which would permit him to seek candidacy for political office after only a year's interruption. More recently, however, the judiciary has behaved in a more independent manner, even vis-à-vis prominent politicians. In 2009, Jean Tibéri, a former mayor of Paris, was convicted for the creation of phantom positions at city hall used to finance the Gaullist political party; and even Chirac, after the expiration of his presidential term, was asked to testify for the same malfeasance. That same year, Charles Pasqua, a former minister of the interior, was sentenced to a year in prison for arms trafficking, and in 2010, Dominique de Villepin faced charges of attempting to frame Sarkozy by implicating him in illegal transactions with a foreign country.[3] Late in 2016, Jérôme Cahuzac, Hollande's finance minister, was sentenced to three years in jail for tax fraud.[4] One month later, Claude Guéant, the minister of interior under the Sarkozy government, was sentenced to two years in prison early in 2017 for embezzling up to an estimated €15,000 monthly in government money including a police benevolent fund between 2002 and 2004.[5] Guéant kept about half of the money for himself but also dispensed cash bonuses to Sarkozy cabinet ministers. Three months before the presidential elections of 2017, François Fillon, the presidential candidate of the Republican Party, was charged with misuse of public funds of more than €900,000 paid to his wife and two sons for phantom parliamentary jobs. The corruption and differential treatment of elites has likely contributed to the populist backlash against them.

The greatest challenge to due process and to public liberties has come from the threat of terrorism and domestic disorder. In the 1990s, the government instituted the so-called *vigipirate* program, which has given the police greater leeway to make identity checks, often based on racial profiling, and Sarkozy, who was minister of the interior, proposed increasing surveillance of telephones and e-mail. These and other approaches have met with a reserved reaction on the part of the Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés (CNIL), the major civil liberties watchdog. In response to massive violence by young slum dwellers of Arab and African origin in November 2005 that spread to many cities in France, the government, invoking a law passed in 1955, declared a state of emergency, which permitted departments and communes to institute curfews, conduct searches, ban open rallies, and detain suspects.[6]

Under the presidencies of de Gaulle, Pompidou, and Giscard d'Estaing, some constraints were placed on the expression of opinion in the mass media. Before the 1980s, the television networks and most radio stations, which were public monopolies, were often used by the government to distort the news. The press was free and pluralistic, but governments would occasionally confiscate issues of periodicals that had published articles critical of the president, and in one case (under Giscard d'Estaing) even instituted legal proceedings against a newspaper. Under Mitterrand, such practices ceased; moreover, private radio stations were permitted, and the television networks were put under autonomous management and partly privatized. The content of news, especially relating to international issues, continues to be heavily influenced by the government (especially the Foreign Office) via Agence France-Presse, the major semigovernmental

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

news agency. But in the electronic mass media, there is now competition not only from private channels within France but also from abroad. Yet freedom of speech and press are not unlimited. A series of laws enacted between the 1970s and 2004 provide penalties for public speech disseminating ethnic, religious, or race hatred, or denying the historicity of the Holocaust.

Some of the impetus for improvement in the domain of human rights has come from the European Union. The constitutional amendment to grant alien residents the right to vote in municipal elections, passed in 2001, brought France in line with a supranational European standard (with some exceptions).[7] The same is true of gender equality with respect to working conditions.[8] Other pressures have come from the Council of Europe. In 1999, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) censured France for the use of torture.[9] In 2020 the ECHR called France to correct prison living conditions found to violate the European Convention on Human Rights. There is European pressure on France regarding the expulsion of Romany (Gypsy) settlers in squatter camps and shantytowns without due process. Finally, France continues to be under pressure to conform to European norms regarding the support of minority languages.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR FRANCE

The problems that lie ahead for France are likely to fall into three areas. The first concerns the economic challenges of dealing with the welfare state that has been evolving since the Third Republic and the "neoliberalism" that took root in the 1980s. The second relates to societal and systemic issues, among which the presence of several million immigrants and their impact on French society ranks high and populism has moved from the margins into the masses. The third is foreign policy, which continues to center on Europe.

THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGE: WELFARE STATISM AND "NEOLIBERALISM"

For many years, most French citizens accepted their country's version of the "mixed economy" under which a large and pluralistic private sector coexisted with a significant array of nationalized industries. In addition, France has had a highly developed welfare state, reflected in a complex of redistributive policies that evolved gradually from the end of the Third Republic through the first years of the Mitterrand presidency. These policies include a progressive income tax; income supplements to families with several children; low- and moderate-rent housing; state-subsidized (and virtually tuition-free) higher education; and generous retirement, unemployment, maternity, and medical benefits and paid vacations (of five weeks) financed in large part by employers. In addition, there are government-imposed minimum wages (which are higher than in the United States), complemented, until recently, by a system of semiautomatic wage increases pegged to the cost-of-living index.

Although most citizens accepted these features as inalienable rights, they were not regarded as solutions to some persistent problems such as the inequality of incomes, housing shortages, unemployment, and large-scale tax fraud—compensated only in part by the more or less automatic (but regressive) system of value-added taxes required for all members of the European

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Union. Moreover, the government's heavy involvement in social and economic matters was thought to have a stifling effect on private initiative in general and industrial (and employment-creating) investment in particular, and the existence of a large nationalized sector was held responsible for impeding productivity and competition. French governments, especially under Prime Ministers Barre, Fabius, and Chirac, discovered the virtues of the marketplace and promoted policies of selective denationalization and deregulation. Since then, there has been a push and pull between pro-market and pro-statist economic tendencies in France that endures, with period of popular pushback common whenever efficiencies encroach on welfare state provisions.

After the 2008 global financial crisis, significant economic reforms initiated by President Sarkozy with a mixture of welfare state and market-oriented policies—what has been called "buttressed liberalization"[10]—began to set the stage for the backlash inherited by Macron. These included tax concessions to small business and the gradual abandonment of the 35-hour workweek, which would allow greater flexibility to enterprises and unions in collective contract negotiations. It would enable more individuals to work overtime, in conformity with Sarkozy's call to individuals to "work harder to earn more." Early in 2016, Myriam El Khomri, the minister of labor in the Valls government under President Hollande, introduced a bill to simplify the labor market by allowing modifications in the 35-hour workweek, providing for collective contract approval by worker referendum (even against the position of national unions), and making layoffs easier. The CGT and FO opposed any revision or abridgment of the 4,000-page labor code. A petition initiated signed by more than a million opposing the bill was presented to the government, and mass demonstrations took place in many cities. In the end the bill was passed, but with significant modifications and the use of extraordinary parliamentary procedures (Article 49-3).

Because of France's aging population, both its medical insurance funds and retirement pension funds are threatened with depletion—indeed, the medical insurance funds are running a deficit of more than €10 billion—but it is not certain that recent government measures[11] will be sufficient. The pension funds are in even worse shape because of the average retirement age, which at age 62 until 2023 put France in a tie for the lowest in the European Union.[12]

From Pension Reform to Yellow Vests: Macron's Economic Policies

Raising the retirement age to 64 in 2023 was a bold move by Macron amidst public furor, requiring the full force of the Presidency through Article 49.3,[13] The increase aimed to keep French workers paying into the pension system longer thereby growing the amount available to pay out as workers retire. Macron has focused his two-term policy agenda on economic reform, which seems to align with demands of French voters.[14] Perhaps not surprising, since his expertise prior to the presidency came from a civil service career in financial policy and private sector work as an investment banker at Rothschild & Co. He has made tackling the key concerns of the French people related to economics the priority of his government. However, the tensions inherent in running a competitive globalized economy while maintaining a substantial welfare state have never been greater in France.

Economic protests erupted in November 2018, known as the yellow vest movement (*gilets jaunes*) because the protesters put on the yellow reflective vest kept in all motor vehicles in case of emergency as required by French law. Widespread protests have continued routinely since then.[15]

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

The grassroots demonstrations blocking traffic circles started when a group of French motorists from rural parts of France organized to signal their frustration with the rise in fuel taxes. Rising prices for fuel were a focus initially, along with a July 2017 reduction in the rural speed limit from 90 to 80 km/h (50 mph).[16] Social media platforms proved pivotal to spreading the word across the country, with most accounts pointing to an initial Facebook post to "block all roads" in a show of resentment. It drew more than 300,000 demonstrators, and they kept coming by the tens and hundreds of thousands, week by week for years. They marched in rural areas and urban towns including Paris. Some protesters became rioters, known as "block blocs," because they typically wore all black and covered their faces to avoid prosecution for violence and property destruction.

Protesters in signature yellow vests march in frustration over government policies.

Samuel Boivin/NurPhoto via Getty Images

What started as a rural transit complaint quickly broadened in issue scope to include cost of living and rising prices more generally. From there, economic inequality and social justice became topics of protesters. They claimed to be pro-climate favoring environmental protection, able to accept the personal pocketbook impact of the second Philippe government's carbon tax on one level, while raging against tax exemptions for big businesses with the greatest carbon footprint. Attacks on big business turned to populist-style attacks on political elites and "the establishment" generally in both private and public sectors. Demands swelled to reduce salaries for politicians while raising the minimum wage for workers, and other redistributive justice measures.

SOCIETAL AND SYSTEMIC ISSUES

As the yellow vest and pension reform protests illustrate, the French streets are known for a tradition of people taking to them. French workers as well as everyday citizens tend to demonstrate and protest with hallmark vigor.[17] Social activism provides a reliable barometer, therefore, of

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

how the French feel about the array of issues of the day. Dubbed as "perhaps the least-governable large country in the Western world,"[18] France embraces its reputation for contentious politics as a particular democratic norm.

While purchasing power or the value of money relative to the cost of goods and services was a leading concern of fifty-three percent of French people, the candidates for president in 2022 shifted the campaign conversation largely away from the economy and toward cultural and identity issues along with the war in Ukraine that started just months before.[19] While the Russian attack on the Ukraine certainly prompted Europeans, including the French, to discuss military security and national sovereignty with a sense of urgency, it was the threat to French sovereignty from within that has been a recurring theme in French elections for more than three decades now.

Populism and the Politics of National Identity in France

Populists and other nationalists have positioned the presence of several million immigrants living in France as a cultural threat to the French identity. As a result, the politics surrounding immigration has pressed French political party platforms and candidates successively farther to the right. Making a scapegoat of the immigrant population for a wide array of social problems, populist candidates have advocated for strict restrictions on immigration and an elevation of traditional French values.

Progressive elements, led by moderate Socialists and some progressive centrists, have long tried to fight racism and speed the process of integration and cultural assimilation of immigrants. But opponents fear that easy acquisition of French citizenship would hamper the assimilation process and that ultimately French society would be changed beyond recognition. There has been a growing sensitivity evinced toward both internal ethnoregional minorities such as Bretons, Alsatians, and Basques, and those of immigrant origin, including Arab Muslims and Southeast Asians. This has been reflected in decentralization policies, a greater tolerance of cultural diversity, and the grants of autonomy to Corsica and some overseas territories, including New Caledonia. Nevertheless, some observers fear that excessive attention to the claims of minorities might weaken France's cultural and political unity and undermine its national identity.

Governmental and public responses to the problem of national identity have been ambiguous—in particular to the question of how it relates to racial, religious, and ethnic minorities. In the early 1980s, socialist governments accorded de facto legitimation of ethnoregional languages by subsidizing their teaching, but this policy was followed in 1992 by a constitutional amendment inserting the statement that "the language of the Republic shall be French" and the continued refusal to ratify the European Charter on minority languages. In 2008, however, a constitutional amendment specifically acknowledged that regional languages are part of "the patrimony of France." Then in 2021, the constitutional council ruled that public schools cannot teach curriculum entirely in a language other than French.

Laws exist to protect minorities against discrimination in employment and housing, but they are difficult to enforce. Political leaders have made numerous commitments to reduce continuing inequalities between "visible minorities," such as Beurs (North African Muslims) and blacks, and the rest of the population, but no precise statistical data have been gathered on

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.
Do not copy, post, or distribute

these groups for more than a century. Some have suggested listing questions on race, religion, and ethnicity in the census (in addition to currently permitted data on country of birth), but the Council of State has opposed this idea on the grounds that it would violate the principle of equality of individuals, and others (especially socialists) have argued against it for fear that it would "ethnify" social policy.[20] The growing sensitivity toward minorities and provincial aspirations constitutes evidence that the traditional Jacobin ideology of republican regimes—the idea of France as a culturally homogeneous and centralized nation-state—which has been an important aspect of French exceptionalism, is being called into question and that pluralisms of all kinds are developing.

Societal Challenges, Erosion of Public Trust, and Durability of the Republic

The social problems faced by France today are plentiful: overcrowded and often unsafe secondary schools and an insufficient number of teachers, environmental pollution, the persistence of inflation with unemployment and its corollary, the risk of depleted social security funds. Finally, there is widespread recognition of the need for strong measures to curb delinquency, urban violence, and terrorism and to protect society from the spread of disease, but without infringing on civil liberties.

In recent years, citizens' loss of interest in traditional forms of political participation has raised concerns. Greater numbers of citizens are abstaining from voting. The abstention rates were 52.49 percent in the first round and 53.77 percent in the second round of the 2022 National Assembly elections, prompting *Le Monde* newspaper to call "Abstention" the winning party in the French elections.[21] These numbers compared with abstention rates of 22.8 percent in the first round and 25.2 percent in the second round of the assembly elections of 1958. In the crucial referendum of 2000 to reduce the president's term of office, the abstention rate was nearly 70 percent.[22] In presidential elections, however, abstention rates have been consistently lower; thus in 2012, they were 20.5 percent in the first round and 19.7 percent in the second round.[23] Ten years later in 2022, the abstention rate in the presidential election reached 26.31 and 28.01 respectively in the first and then second rounds of voting. Nevertheless, citizens' identification with political parties has declined steadily, as reflected in the loss of dues-paying membership in all the major parties. This situation is only partly compensated by the growing memberships of interest groups, especially on the local level.

These phenomena attest to impatience with mainstream political parties and distrust of politicians. However, this does not mean that the French want to replace the existing democratic system with another one. On the contrary, there is a widespread consensus about the regime itself. To be sure, disagreements continue on the best ways to reduce the budgetary deficit and to administer the welfare state, about how to reform the educational system, and about how to stem the delocalization of industries.

Still, some have argued that the Fifth Republic is worn out and should be reformed.[24] There are even proposals to replace the existing constitutional system with a new one, a Sixth Republic.[25] But there is little doubt that the political system as a whole is sound and well enough designed to meet France's future challenges.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

FOREIGN POLICY: EUROPE AND BEYOND

At the end of World War II, France, one of the victor nations, was no longer a major actor on the world stage. During the 1950s and 1960s, it achieved decolonization without undue bloodshed (except for Indochina and, later, Algeria) and without tearing French society apart, and the North African "repatriates" were, for the most part, successfully integrated. The French economy adapted with remarkable success to the challenges of the European Union, and France reached the status of the world's fifth-largest industrial power.

Dreams of Grandeur

At the beginning of the Fifth Republic under Charles de Gaulle, France's foreign policy was inspired by dreams of grandeur. Because of the limitations of the country's economic and military power, however, these dreams could not be realized. Unable to be influential in the international system, de Gaulle instead pursued a policy of symbolism and rhetoric that expressed itself in hostility to the two superpowers, in opposition to the institutional development of a supranational Europe, in futile attempts to interfere in regional disputes outside Europe such as in the Middle East, and in efforts to mediate relationships between industrialized Europe and the developing countries, notably in Africa. An important element of de Gaulle's policy was his resentment of the "Anglo-Americans," reflected in his hostility to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Such attitudes were in part determined by fears of U.S. economic domination and of U.S. cultural hegemony and by doubts about the reliability of the U.S. commitment to defend Europe in the face of Soviet aggression.

Macron and his colleagues represent a younger and more dynamic group of European leaders.

Dursun Aydemir/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Responding to the pressures of the Gaullist party and reflecting the outlook of much of the French intellectual elite, Pompidou and (to a lesser extent) Giscard d'Estaing continued the main lines of de Gaulle's foreign policy but with considerably less hostility to the United States or to the development of European unity. Under Mitterrand, France continued to develop its national nuclear deterrent and, on a cultural level, to foster as much as was still possible cultivation of the French language abroad. At the same time, the country abandoned the Gaullist illusions about its international power and became more favorably inclined toward NATO. Henceforth, France's foreign policy was increasingly marked by concern with its economic aspect, such as global and regional competitiveness. This aspect, however, could not be separated from France's role in Europe. As of the early 1970s, it had become clear that Germany was the economic powerhouse of Europe.

As long as Germany was divided, however, France retained a degree of political dominance on the continent. With the reunification of Germany, French fears of that country were revived, mixed with resentment and admiration. To compensate for their reduced weight in Europe, the French have utilized various opportunities for asserting their role in world affairs, whether military (such as peacekeeping in Lebanon, the Central African Republic, and Mali),[26] economic (aid to developing countries), humanitarian (such as medical missions around the globe), and symbolic (such as participation in the Gulf War). Furthermore, France has continued to maintain a presence in francophone sub-Saharan Africa, especially in its former colonies, which are considered by many as the country's "backyard." It has exerted its influence by means of banking services, technical assistance, a military presence in selected countries, and occasional political interference.

Relationships With Key Countries

Some of France's foreign policy moves have been indicative of a hard-nosed realism tinged with cynicism. These moves have included, in particular, the country's dealings with tin-pot dictators and an almost automatic pro-Arab position, especially with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, longtime Arab leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat took refuge several times in France up to his death there in 2004. This has led to speculation that France leans pro-Arab or pro-Muslim, particularly when compared with the foreign policy posture of other western nations. Still France has ties dating back to its former rule of various Muslim countries including Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and others. France has presented an often-sympathetic post-colonial stance offering to provide third party mediation in disputes, between Muslim and western powers.[27] The highest number of Muslims living in the western world live in France.[28] Its post-colonial policies offered opportunities for citizenship to those born in France of parents from a former French colony who were born prior to independence from France. Still despite any pro-Muslim inclinations, contemporary France has struggled with how to deal with Islamist terrorist attacks on French soil alongside ongoing political debates about laïcité and Muslim assimilation (or the lack thereof). With tensions rising, concerns have grown about how the French are relating to Muslims domestically and internationally in terms of foreign policy.

The common enemy the Islamic State (ISIS) and Muslim extremism presented an opportunity for Hollande, the French president preceding Macron, to try and rekindle a long dormant Franco-Russian alliance.[29] Both countries had domestic terror attacks where ISIS claimed

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

responsibility in the middle 2010s, and Hollande talked with Putin about joint military bombings of ISIS targets. However, Russian support of the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad tested the limits of the alliance. France has been the country of Europe perhaps most inclined to extend an overt olive branch to Russia in the post-Cold War era, as the four French presidents serving in office since Putin came to lead Russia in 1999 have seen value in coordinating the leadership of Europe at its two poles—one eastern and the other western.[30] Still Russian actions such as the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prove difficult for France to ultimately ignore causing strains and provoking disapproval from Paris.[31] Macron spent years cultivating a special connection with Russian President Vladimir Putin, only to find himself uncomfortably outside of a European consensus on condemnation with a need to establish some distance from Russia.

French relations with the United States have tended to be somewhat cool and most French Presidents have been appropriately diplomatic though somewhat distant toward their American counterparts.[32] France works well with the United States diplomatically and on international issues, as two western countries embracing a mutual liberal democratic worldview. However, France may not trust its position as an equal partner. France sees itself in a leading role in global politics, and as a G7 member country it stands shoulder to shoulder with key world leaders in annual summit meetings to discuss approaches to contemporary issues of common concern.

G7 Leaders joined Presidents of the European Council and European Commission for a summit meeting in Hiroshima, Japan.

Franck Robichon - Pool/Getty Images

The major focus of French policy beyond its borders continues to be Europe. Seeing a strong Europe as the best way to promote and preserve French sovereignty, France had long been a major proponent of European integration, from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the early 1950s to the adoption of the Maastricht treaty in 1992, which established the European

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Union. It is under EU auspices, and, more specifically, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), that France has enjoyed a strong system of protection and subsidy for its farm products.

France had been one of the major promoters of a common currency, and it replaced the franc with the euro without problems. But soon thereafter, France, like Germany, ignored the mandatory limit of 3 percent on deficit spending. Moreover, French governments have had difficulties in adhering to EU rules providing for cross-border competition in transport, telecommunication, and other sectors. The national deficit forced the government to get quick money by selling nationally held properties to the private sector, including châteaux and airports.

The transnationalization, privatization, and delocalization of industries in conformity with EU rules have been opposed especially by the trade unions, which fear competition from cheap labor.[33] This fear, as well as a widespread worry about a threat to the French model of social protection, was one reason for the rejection of the EU constitution in the May 2005 referendum.[34] Europe continues to have an important place in the consciousness of the French, even as their faith in it declines: in 1987, 74 percent thought that EU membership was a good idea but only 47 percent in 2008. In 2016, only 38 percent of French people indicated that they have a favorable attitude toward the European Union.[35] The 2016 French sentiment is notably six percentage points lower than the response among British people who voted by national referendum to exit the European Union that year in what was called the Brexit or British Exit. In 2022, 53 percent of French indicated feeling "attachment" to Europe, however 65 percent viewed the EU as ineffective.[36]

When Emmanuel Macron takes to the world stage as he did in 2022 following the World Cup finals, he stands tall with an air of prominence if not superiority. He embodies aspects of French exceptionalism and the perception of the special role that France plays geopolitically and particularly across continental Europe. France expects to lead within the European Union, after all the two working languages of the European Union are French and English, with Frenchman Jean Monnet considered its founder. Nevertheless, the "Jupiter" as he has been nicknamed, suffered a public image problem with comparisons to the Roman god of gods and the implication of being hierarchical and distant from regular people.[37] Macron took office in 2017 with grandiose plans to modernize and reform the French economy, reduce unemployment, deepen the role of the European Union, address social inequality, streamline to open up the bureaucracy, and position France for energy independence and sustainability.[38] His domestic and international policy goals sometimes clash with a populist backlash against experts and elites and a widespread frustration with government. At its core, the Macron agenda entails a grand vision for France, preserving its role and identity. His parliamentary majority was lost in 2022, while the left opposition has reorganized and united as the far right continues to mobilize active supporters. Both groups in opposition have benefitted from populist themes with French identity remaining central to current discourse.

FOR FURTHER READING

Aldrich, Robert, and John Connell, eds. *France in World Politics*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Boy, Daniel, and Nonna Mayer, eds. *The French Voter Decides*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Brouard, Sylvain, Andrew Appleton, and Amy G. Mazur, eds. *The French Republic at Fifty*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Chabal, Emile. *A Divided Republic: Nation, State, and Citizenship in Contemporary France*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Cole, Alistair, Patrick le_Galés, and Jonah Levy, eds. *Developments in French Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Converse, Philip E., and Roy Pierce. *Political Representation in France*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Elgie, Robert. *The Changing French Political System*. London: Frank Cass, 2000.

Elgie, Robert, and Steven Griggs. *French Politics: Debates and Controversies*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Evans, Jocelyn, ed. *The French Party System*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Feldblum, Miriam. *Reconstructing Citizenship*: *The Politics of Nationality Reform and Immigration in Contemporary France*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Fenby, Jonathan. *France on the Brink*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999.

Flynn, Gregory, ed. *Remaking the Hexagon: The New France in the New Europe*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.

Friend, Julius W. *Seven Years in France: François Mitterrand and the Unintended Revolution, 1981–1988*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989.

Genieys, William. *The New Custodians of the State: Programmatic Elites in French Society*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010.

Godt, Paul, ed. *Policy-Making in France From de Gaulle to Mitterrand*. London: Pinter, 1989.

Goodliffe, Gabriel. *The Resurgence of the Radical Right in France: From Boulanger to the Front National*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Guyomarch, Alain, Howard Machin, and Ella Ritchie, eds. *France in the European Union*. London: Macmillan, 1998.

Hauss, Charles. *Politics in Gaullist France: Coping With Chaos*. New York: Praeger, 1991.

Hazareesingh, Sudhir. *How the French Think: An Affectionate Portrait of an Intellectual People*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

Hazareesingh, Sudhir. *Political Traditions in Modern France*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Hollifield, James F., and George Ross, eds. *Searching for the New France*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Keeler, John T. S., and Martin A. Schain, eds. *Chirac's Challenge: Liberalization, Europeanization and Malaise in France*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Knapp, Andrew. *Parties and the Party System in France*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Laurence, Jonathan. *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Laurence, Jonathan and Justin Vaisse. *Integrating Islam in France: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006.

Lewis-Beck, Michael, ed. *The French Voter: Before and After the 2002 Elections*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

_______. *How France Votes*. New York: Chatham House, 2000.

Mandel, Maud S. *Muslims and Jews in France*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Murray, Rainbow. *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Raymond, Gino G., ed. *Structures of Power in Modern France*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Rohr, John A. *Founding Republics in France and America*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995.

Saadah, Anne. *Contemporary France: A Democratic Education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Safran, William. *The French Polity*. 7th ed. New York: Longman, 2009.

Schain, Martin. *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Schmidt, Vivien A. *From State to Market? The Transformation of French Business and Government*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Smith, Paul. *The Senate of the Fifth French Republic*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Thody, Philip. *The Fifth French Republic: Presidents, Politics, and Personalities*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Thomas, Elaine R. *Immigration, Islam and the Politics of Belonging in France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Tiersky, Ronald. *France in the New Europe: Changing Yet Steadfast*. Belmond, CA: Wadsworth, 1994.

Waters, Sarah. *Between Republic and Market. Globalization and Identity in Contemporary France*. New York: Continuum, 2012.

Weber, Eugen. *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976.

Wilson, Frank L. *Interest-Group Politics in France*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Wright, Julian, and H. S. Jones. *Pluralism and the Idea of the Republic in France*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Copyright ©2024 by Sage.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.