
International boundaries
Region boundaries
Department boundaries
National capital
Region capitals
Department capitals
0 30 60 90 120 150 Miles
0 30 90 150 Kilometers
UNITED KINGDOM
NORTH SEA
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM
GERMANY
LUX.
CHANNEL ISLANDS (U.K.)
FRANCE
SPAIN
ANDORRA
SWITZERLAND
ITALY
MONACO
Bay of Biscay
Gulf of Lion
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
PAS DE CALAIS
NORD-PAS-DE-CALAIS
Lille
Arras
NORD
SOMME
Amiens
AISNE
Metz
ARDENNES
SEINE-MARITIME
Rouen
PICARDIE
Beauvais
Laon
OISE
HAUTE-NORMANDIE
MANCHE
Caen
Saint-Lô
CALVADOS
Évreux
Pontoise
BASSE-NORMANDIE
EURE
Nanterre
PARIS
Créteil
Versailles
Évry
ÎLE-DE-FRANCE
Melun
Châlons-sur-Marne
Bar-le-Duc
MARNE
MEUSE
MOSELLE
LORRAINE
BAS-RHIN
Nancy
Strasbourg
FINISTÈRE
Saint-Brieuc
CÔTES-DU-NORD
ORNE
Alençon
Chartres
EURE-ET-LOIR
CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE
MEURTHE-ET-MOSELLE
ALSACE
BRETAGNE
Quimper
Rennes
MAYENNE
SARTHE
Troyes
AUBE
HAUTE-MARNE
Épinal
Colmar
ILLE-ET-VILAINE
Laval
Le Mans
Chaumont
VOSGES
HAUT-RHIN
MORBIHAN
Vannes
Orléans
YONNE
LOIRET
HAUTE-SAÔNE
Belfort
BELFORT
PAYS DE LA LOIRE
LOIR-ET-CHER
Auxerre
Vesoul
LOIRE-ATLANTIQUE
Angers
Tours
Blois
CÔTE-D'OR
Dijon
Besançon
DOUBS
Nantes
MAINE-ET-LOIRE
CENTRE
BOURGOGNE
FRANCHE-COMTÉ
INDRE-ET-LOIRE
Bourges
Nevers
CHER
NIÈVRE
La Roche-sur-Yon
VENDÉE
DEUX-SÈVRES
INDRE
Châteauroux
Moulins
SAÔNE-ET-LOIRE
Lons-le-Saunier
JURA
Poitiers
VIENNE
ALLIER
Mâcon
Niort
La Rochelle
Guéret
Bourg-en-Bresse
AIN
HAUTE SAVOIE
POITOU-CHARENTES
HAUTE-VIENNE
CREUSE
LIMOUSIN
Limoges
Clermont-Ferrand
RHÔNE
LOIRE
Annecy
CHARENTE-MARITIME
CHARENTE
Angoulême
PUY-DE-DÔME
Lyon
Chambéry
Saint-Étienne
RHÔNE-ALPES
SAVOIE
Périgueux
CORRÈZE
AUVERGNE
Grenoble
Tulle
HAUTE-LOIRE
CANTAL
Aurillac
Le Puy
ISÈRE
DORDOGNE
Bordeaux
Privas
Valence
HAUTES-ALPES
GIRONDE
LOT
Mende
ARDÈCHE
DRÔME
Gap
LOT-ET-GARONNE
Cahors
Rodez
LOZÈRE
AQUITAINE
Agen
TARN-ET-GARONNE
AVEYRON
Digne
Mont-de-Marsan
LANDES
Albi
GARD
VAUCLUSE
Avignon
ALPES-MARITIMES
Montauban
ALPES-DE-HAUTE PROVENCE
Nîmes
Nice
GERS
MIDI-PYRÉNÉES
Montpellier
PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR
BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE
Auch
TARN
Toulouse
HÉRAULT
VAR
Pau
LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON
Marseille
Tarbes
HAUTE-GARONNE
Toulon
PYRÉNÉES-ATLANTIQUES
Carcassonne
Foix
AUDE
HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES
ARIÈGE
Perpignan
PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES
Île-de-France Departments:
1 VAL-D'OISE
2 YUELINES
3 ESSONNE
4 SEINE-ET-MARNE
5 SEINE-SAINT-DENIS
6 HAUTS-DE-SEINE
7 VAL-DE-MARNE
8 PARIS
Corsica
Bastia
HAUTE-CORSE
CORSE
Ajaccio
CORSE-DU-SUD

Frank Baumgartner is Miller-LaVigne Professor of Political Science at Pennsylvania State University. His research interests center on policy-making and the role of interest groups in French and American politics. His books include *Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking* and, most recently, *The Decline of the Death Penalty and the Discovery of Innocence* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). He is the author of numerous articles on both French and American politics in such journals as *American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, Legislative Studies Quarterly, the Journal of European Public Policy,* and *Comparative Politics*. Since 2005 he has been a regular Visiting Professor at Cevipof-Sciences Po in Paris.

chapter

Politics in France: The Fifth Republic at Fifty

Revised October 2007

Frank R. Baumgartner
Pennsylvania State University

► CHAPTER OUTLINE

► INTRODUCTION

Consider how different societies are organized to govern, how they should be organized, and what historical and cultural patterns help explain how they are organized. In studying the French national government, we shall see that it is organized with a very strong emphasis on rationalism, efficiency, and power for elite state bureaucrats. Popular participation and the representation of individual citizens are, of course, guaranteed: France is a democracy. However, every democracy (indeed, every government, democratic or otherwise) must decide on a trade-off between efficient organization of governmental decision making and the values of democratic participation. After all, the most efficient system would be the philosopher-king or the enlightened despot, but such systems would not allow for popular participation. Even worse, perhaps, there would be no guarantee that an "enlightened" despot might not be replaced with just a plain despot. People have struggled with this trade-off from time immemorial, the French as much as any other culture. In this chapter, we will consider in some detail, therefore, how the French have balanced these goals over time and how the current system of government in France achieves its balance. In 2008 France marks the 50th anniversary of the creation of the current constitutional regime, the Fifth Republic. In contrast to the United States or Great Britain, France has had a great number of constitutional structures since the monarchy was overthrown after the Revolution in 1789. The institutions of the Fifth Republic have placed considerable emphasis on establishing clear

powers for the French president and the executive branch in general, emphasizing efficiency somewhat more than democratic participation, at least compared with the United States, for example. (No one would say that the U.S. government, with its separation of powers and complicated patterns of federalism, is organized for efficiency.) On the other hand, France in the Fifth Republic, nonetheless, offers its citizens many opportunities for spirited participation in politics, and, of course, the French public regularly is involved in political debate.

In considering the structures of French politics, therefore, we will pay close attention to how the government is organized to govern, that is, to make decisions, and at the same time we will question how the people can have a say in public affairs. We will see that, compared with the American system of government, there are many ways in which the French have chosen to tip the balance in favor of efficiency over participation. Before discussing these questions in detail, however, it is important to understand some of the long-term historical bases of French politics that help explain these decisions.

► HISTORY

Long-Term Developments

The long sweep of French history has several important lessons. First, the great monarchs of French history consolidated the realm relatively early, and the stable geographical coverage of France has given the country a strong sense of nationhood. Many countries in western Europe have had their current borders only for a generation or so, and many eastern and central Europe countries have had their borders literally for just a few years, but France has had roughly the same geographical coverage for hundreds of years. (Exceptions to this general rule include the overseas colonies, which were once considerable, and the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, which have been traded between France and Germany several times in the past 140 years.)

Even such stable countries as Italy and Germany were made up of a variety of small local city-states and independent provinces until only about 135 years ago. Poland saw significant changes in its boundaries after World War II. Hungary, Austria—indeed most of the countries of central Europe—followed such a pattern as well. France, like England, has enjoyed hundreds of years with roughly the same boundaries. But France is a part of Europe, and Europe in general has not always been the stable place it was during the years of the Cold War. In any case, the French have a very strong sense of being a single unified nation. Though the French may take this stability and unity for granted, it sets France apart from many other countries—the concept of the nation is not in dispute in France, though we will see that many elements of constitutional design are. The nation is fixed in France; constitutional regimes may come and go, however.

The second element of the long sweep of French history is related to the first: It is the great, almost legendary, centralization of the government. In order to achieve its present boundaries, successive leaders of France over the centuries concentrated power in their own hands, taking it away from the previously independent local nobility. By the time of the Revolution of 1789, this centralization of power was almost complete. Still, Revolutionary leaders, and in particular, Napoleon Bonaparte, consolidated the power of Paris over the provinces. Indeed, the Revolution included tremendous debates about the relative merits of centralization, with the centralizers scoring a clear victory. Many favored solving the problem of the monarchy essentially by giving greater powers to the local communities. This group was called the *Girondins,* since many came from the region of the Gironde, near Bordeaux. Others feared that local autonomy would allow the traditional nobility to retain power and argued for centralized powers to consolidate the gains of the Revolution. These were the *Jacobins* (so called because they had a meeting place on the Rue Jacob, in Paris), and their views prevailed. To this day, Jacobinism and Girondism are the terms used in France to describe the two sides to this debate.

The power of the central government has come with the establishment of a powerful and prestigious bureaucracy. The most powerful government agencies in France trace back their lineage well into the monarchy. (When then-President Mitterrand decided to expand the art museum in the Louvre in the early 1980s, he had to build new offices for the Ministry of Finance—which had traditionally had offices in the palace and did not take kindly to being told to vacate! Only in 1993 was the enlarged museum opened, taking advantage of all the space that the ministry had previously occupied. (You might be walking through the former office of the minister of finance when you visit the Louvre in Paris. If so, you will see that being a high government official in France often comes with some nice perquisites.) The legacies of centralization are many, as we will see in greater detail later in the chapter. One of them is a powerful and efficient bureaucracy. Throughout all the forms of government that France has had, each regime has appreciated the need for a powerful bureaucracy to carry out its wishes.

The third important element of the long sweep of French history is instability. Since 1789, when the Revolution put an end to the monarchy, France has known a great variety of constitutional structures. There have been empires (under Napoleon, from 1804 to 1814, then again under Napoleon's nephew, Louis-Napoleon, or Napoleon III, from 1852 to 1870), five different democratic and republican constitutions (including the present one, aptly termed the *Fifth Republic*), several different forms of monarchies (including the restoration of the Bourbons from 1814 to 1830, under Louis XVIII and Charles X, heirs of the unfortunate Louis XVI who was beheaded in 1793), as well as a variety of other forms of government.

So great has been the French penchant for replacing their system of government over time that it has been said that the French must hold a

world record in constitution writing. Each of these changes in constitutional regimes has come with tremendous social upheaval, many at the cost of civil war or of foreign occupation. In each of them, former leaders were discredited, and in many of them there were purges or executions of the former leaders. The stakes of politics were very high, as entire regimes were occasionally replaced, often violently. The long sweep of French history has left the country with a strong sense of nation, a highly centralized system of government, and a legacy of internal conflicts leading to instability. The period around World War II added substantially to the instability of French governmental structures, but in the past 50 years, since the establishment of the Fifth Republic, much greater stability has ensued. Before focusing on the current period of relative stability, let us look for a moment at the huge upheavals that took place in France during the war and in the early post-war years.

French Politics since World War II

During World War II, France was occupied by the Germans. Because of the tremendous impact of World War II on the French, the period since 1939 is worth considering in more detail. From 1939 to the Liberation of France in 1944, Marshall Philippe Pétain was leader of France, under what is known as the Vichy regime (so named because the capital was moved from Paris to Vichy, a small town in South-Central France also known for the bottled water that comes from there). The Vichy government was voted into power by the legislature of the time, and Marshall Pétain was a hero to the French for his service against the Germans in World War I. In spite of the hopes by many French that the new government would remain independent, the regime soon began to collaborate actively with the occupying Germans. In the waning years of the war (1943–1944), active resistance to the Vichy regime grew. By the time of the Liberation, when the war ended, one could say that France was virtually engaged in a civil war. Many Resistance fighters were killed or sent to concentration camps. After the Liberation, of course, the former *résistants* became the leaders of the new government, and many of the leaders of the discredited regime were sentenced to death, as were many collaborators (on Vichy France, see Paxton 1972).

General Charles de Gaulle was the leader of the Resistance movement, and he became president of France from 1958 to 1969. His long-time rival, François Mitterrand, who served as president from 1981 to 1995, also pointed to his Resistance credentials. Though initially a supporter of Vichy, Mitterrand later joined the Resistance and became the leader of a large Resistance group allied with de Gaulle. Until just a few years ago, generations of French politicians marked their political legitimacy partly by what they did in the war. (In this sense, France is like many other countries, where a single historical period defined politics for a generation: In China it was the Long March of 1934–1935 and the Communist Revolution of 1949.) The current president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, like Jacques Chirac before him, is of a younger generation and was not an adult during

the wartime period. The current generation of European leaders, therefore, mark the first group not to have been personally involved in World War II. Until 1995, fifty years after the end of the war, France's leaders were personally marked by their wartime behavior and attitude.

After the Liberation of France, a provisional government ruled from 1944 to 1946, at which time a new constitution was ratified, and the Fourth Republic came into existence. The Fourth Republic featured heated battles between conservative Gaullists (supporters of General de Gaulle) and leftist Communists (who had been the traditional enemy of the supporters of the Vichy regime and who emerged from the Occupation with a strong favorable reputation for their underground activities). A variety of center-right and center-left parties occupied the terrain between these powerful forces. Political conflicts were so deep that no prime minister was able to hold onto power for long, and a variety of weak governments came and went in succession. The Fourth Republic lasted only twelve years. In 1958, supporters of General de Gaulle were successful in their arguments that France needed a new constitutional structure, one that gave greater powers to the president and to the prime minister, one that could put an end to the years of partisan bickering that they felt had been the hallmark of the Fourth Republic. The Fifth Republic continues as the constitutional structure of France today, but it dates only to 1958.

A Historical Legacy of Instability but a Strong Sense of Nationhood

Throughout French history, whether in the long run or considering only the post–1939 period, there have been some pretty regular swings in who has been in power. Indeed, since the Revolution the average length of time that a given constitutional structure has remained in force has been only about fifteen years or so. The longest-lasting regime, the Third Republic, lasted only about seventy years, or roughly the normal life span of a person. The shortest, the First Republic, was never even implemented. Overall, in the past 200 years, while Americans have been ruled by a single set of institutions and have grown to assume that we always will be, almost every generation of French citizens has seen at least one change in constitutional structure, and often several. A French person in retirement today might have been born in the 1930s, under the Third Republic. That individual would have been a youngster of about six when the Popular Front government of Leon Blum governed the country, and a child of about nine when the Germans invaded and when the Third Republic gave way to the Vichy regime. Since then, that generation of French men and women has watched several more regimes come and go: the Provisional Government (1944–1946), the Fourth Republic (1946–1958), and the Fifth Republic (1958–present). While the Fifth Republic seems to be firmly rooted and secure, French history tells us that regimes, and not only governments, are fleeting. A seventy-year-old French person would have lived under four different constitutional regimes. Not a single living American has seen even one such change.

Dorothy Pickles (1962) analyzed the comings and goings of the regimes of France and noticed an interesting pattern. She noted that almost every constitutional structure since the monarchy has tended to be a reaction to the one that came before it. In the pendulum swings that are French history, she argued, supporters of the left and the right in politics have succeeded each other in establishing their preferred governments. Whereas an American or a Canadian might consider this kind of alternation in power to be a normal part of politics, there is an important difference in what Pickles noted. In France these changes of regime have often involved wars (either civil or foreign, as when the Vichy regime was instituted during the occupation of France by Germany), and have tended to involve dramatic changes in public policies. A change in government is one thing; a change in regime is something else entirely. Whereas a supporter of an opposition party in a democracy has complete legitimacy, a supporter of a new form of government can often be charged with treason. Historically, the stakes of French politics have been high, as left and right have alternated in power.

Is France unusual in its history of constitutional instability? Compared with the United States or to Great Britain, it would seem so. The "effervescence" of French political history certainly contrasts with the placidity of our own history. However, many of France's continental neighbors have also been unstable (see Pierce 1973). In Germany, for example, the country was not unified into a single state until the Second Empire, beginning in 1870. This regime lasted only until the end of World War I, when it was replaced by the Weimar Republic (1919–1933). The Weimar Republic was then scuttled in the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. Their regime (1933–1945), however, also fell in war. An Allied occupation ensued (1945–1949), followed by the establishment of the current Federal Republic (1949–present). However, even this regime cannot be considered completely stable because of the separation of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the country in 1989. The boundaries of Germany have also been altered periodically during the century: Alsace and Lorraine have been traded back and forth with France; the eastern part of the country was lost to Soviet domination during the entire period of the Cold War; and significant lands were ceded to Poland at the end of World War II. Clearly, German history has been no example of stability.

The Italians have known instability as well. Like Germany, Italy was unified into a single country only in 1870 under the Constitutional Monarchy (1870–1922). Mussolini and the Fascists rose to power from 1922 to 1943, when World War II again put an end to a continental regime. A provisional government ruled Italy from 1943 to 1946, when the current Italian Republic (1946–present) was established. In sum, France presents a stark contrast to the United States or to Great Britain, but its history of instability, especially during the period from 1870 to 1950, is similar to that of some of its neighbors. Spain, Portugal, Greece—not to mention the countries of central and eastern Europe—saw dramatic changes in their constitutional

regimes over the last 100 years, including movement from nondemocratic to democratic forms of government. Europe as a whole, and not only France, was an unstable place during recent generations.

While instability of constitutional structures has been the rule in France, some things have not changed: France basically has always existed in its present form. The French have been very divided among themselves, and their history has made these divisions hard to forget, but there has rarely been any question about the national identity. The nation has been constant even while the state structures have changed.

The current political system of France may constitute a break from the historical patterns of instability. The Fifth Republic has shown its ability to survive repeated changes in control from right to left, and back again. The first instance of *alternance* came in 1981 when the leader of the Socialist Party, François Mitterrand, won the presidency. Since 1946, no leftist had led the French government (or held a ministerial position of any kind), so this first victory for the left was surprising in many ways; an entire generation had known only governments of the right. The 1986 elections brought a conservative majority to Parliament, however, so France experienced a second change in power, though Mitterrand remained as president. When Mitterrand stepped down after two terms as president in 1995, Gaullist Jacques Chirac was elected, and he ruled with a conservative majority in Parliament; two years later new parliamentary elections brought a left majority in the National Assembly, so Chirac shared power for five years with Lionel Jospin, his Socialist prime minister. This, of course, was extremely awkward since both were candidates for the presidency in 2002. Chirac narrowly beat Jospin for the job, partly because there were many other opposition candidates; Jospin received slightly fewer votes than Jean-Marie Le Pen, a far-right nationalist candidate running largely on an anti-immigration platform. Political leaders of all stripes, including Jospin, campaigned for a Chirac victory against Le Pen in the second round of the 2002 election. From 2002 until the end of his term in 2007, Chirac governed again with a Parliamentary majority of the right, ending a long period of *cohabitation;* in 2007 Nicolas Sarkozy was elected president, with legislative elections in June that again provided him with a majority in Parliament, so there is no cohabitation at the moment. But the French are accustomed to cohabitation as well as to alternation in power; but this was not always the case.

France was once governed by a stable succession of conservative governments, but changes in power have become commonplace. The first time that alternation in power occurred, after a generation of leftist opposition, it was quite a shock. Those in favor of the new president had utopian dreams; those opposed to him had nightmarish visions. (One cartoon at the time showed a wealthy Parisian looking out her apartment window on May 11, 1981, and expressing surprise that the Eiffel Tower was still standing even though the president was a Socialist.) Today, there is a sense that leaders of all the major parties have much more in common. In fact,

Sarkozy, the new president, named a former Socialist finance minister, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, to be the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) shortly after winning the presidency in the summer of 2007. This was a significant sign that he could voice support for a French leader of a different political persuasion to represent France positively in an international body. Now after twenty years of periodically shifting powers, political alternation is taken for granted in France (and the hopes and fears of what new leaders can do are much diminished). The Fifth Republic is much stronger for it, since people recognize that the institutions of government work equally well for either the left or the right. Before alternation became common, there was a suspicion among many that the institutions designed by de Gaulle and other conservatives in 1958 had somehow a conservative bias. Few believe any more that there is an ideological bias to the constitutional structures of the Fifth Republic, so support for the regime is more broadly rooted in all segments of French society.

France has had a great number of tumultuous and often bloody changes in regime, as discussed above. It is important to distinguish between a change in constitutional regime and a change in government. The United States has had regular changes in government over its entire history, but never a change in regime since our Constitution was ratified in 1789. France has had many changes of regime. Under the Fifth Republic of France, however, the public is becoming accustomed to regular, orderly, and routine changes in government. This "routinization" of alternation in power may be the greatest constitutional legacy of François Mitterrand, the first Socialist president of the Fifth Republic. (It will be ironic, since Mitterrand was a vociferous critic of the constitution that he felt gave too much power to the conservative presidents of the 1960s and 1970s, when he was a leader of the opposition. Once in power, of course, he found those same powers much to his liking.) France at the beginning of the twenty-first century finds itself with a more stable constitutional structure than it had for the bulk of the twentieth century.

► POLITICAL CULTURE

Political Legitimacy

There are four different sources of legitimacy for a state: legitimacy by *results;* by *habit;* by historical, religious, or ethnic *identity;* and by *procedures.* The French state enjoys each of these, especially the first three. Because the nation and the state have been so well intertwined throughout French history, it is difficult to disentangle the legitimacy that comes from historical, religious, and ethnic (one might say, cultural) identity from that which comes from habit. From the French point of view, the state has always been there. While particular regimes have come and gone, the schools, the post office, the army, the civil engineers, the police, all those things that the French associate with the state, have been constant. Not only is the state

legitimated by habit, but it also has many accomplishments. Indeed, the French state has been central to a great number of achievements of French culture and history, from the establishment of the empire to supporting the arts and to the building of the high-speed railways. The French state has produced results of which the people are proud.

Results and habit certainly confer legitimacy to the French state, but cultural identity plays an important role as well. The French expect the leaders of the state to be the leaders of the nation, of the culture, and to uphold the historical traditions of which they are proud. France has a minister of culture, and the French take seriously matters such as promoting the use of the French language, French cinema, and French culture in general. They expect the state to be actively involved in this effort. For the French, there is little disentangling the state from the nation, and the nation has a proud cultural heritage. This produces a great deal of legitimacy for the state, since it is seen as the guardian of the culture. (The insistence of French government leaders on protecting and on promoting the French language and culture sometimes makes others quite upset. In the recent negotiations surrounding global trade, French negotiators insisted on continued protection for French films and on limiting the percentage of imported—that is, American—films shown on European television. While Americans, and Hollywood executives in particular, found this irritating, the French public was not surprised to see the state acting to protect the culture. It has done so throughout French history.)

While the French state is very well accepted by the French people, particular constitutional structures, or "regimes," often are not. That is, legitimacy by *procedures* is not as strong as the legitimacies by results, habit, and identity. Whereas in the United States it is almost impossible for us to imagine accepting the "government" but not the "Constitution," it is quite common in France to see disagreements about the constitutional structure. After all, the constitution of the Fifth Republic dates only from 1958. Before that, the 1946 constitution of the Fourth Republic differed in important ways in such matters as the electoral system (proportional representation was used in the Fourth; single-member districts are the current law), the power of the legislature (very powerful in the Fourth Republic; greatly reduced in the Fifth), or the role of the president (a figurehead in the Fourth Republic; his power is paramount in the Fifth). Similarly, throughout each of the changes in regime, the constitutional structures of the French government have changed. So while virtually all French citizens support their state and consider themselves to be patriots, significant debates go on concerning the proper organization of the institutions of government.

We can see some indication of the differences in the levels of legitimacy of the French state versus the regime of the Fifth Republic by looking at some opinion poll results. While certain institutions are revered by all, other parts of the constitutional structure are not.

TABLE 1
Support for Constitution of the Fifth Republic

"This year, the Constitution of the 5th Republic reaches its 25th anniversary. If you had to make a judgment about the functioning of the institutions during these past 25 years, would you say that they have worked very well, well enough, not very well, or not very well at all?"

		Partisan preference			
	Total	**PC**	**PS**	**UDF**	**RPR**
Very well or well enough	57	40	61	74	65
Not very well or not very well at all	25	49	26	15	18
No opinion	18	11	13	11	17
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Notes: PC = Communist Party; PS = Socialist Party; UDF = Conservatives; RPR = Gaullists.

Source: Olivier Duhamel, 1984, 104. The survey was conducted in September 1983. (© Editions Gallimard, 1984, used with permission.)

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the constitution of the Fifth Republic in 1983, a series of polls was conducted, and Table 1 presents some of the results. While the French agree in general that the constitution has worked generally well, there is not an overwhelming consensus across party lines, and all parts of the constitution are not equally appreciated. Indeed, when asked about particular elements of the Fifth Republic constitution and whether they approved or disapproved of them, 86 percent approved of the direct election of the president, but only 57 percent approved of the authority, granted in the constitution, for the president to dissolve Parliament, and only 49 percent approved of the emergency powers clause (Article 16) of the constitution, granting the president extraordinary powers in case of crisis (Duhamel 1984, 105).

These debates in France are clearly related to partisan preferences and apparently to an idea of whether the powers will be used to help or hurt one's own political group. We can see this by noting, for example, that 82 percent of Conservative Party voters supported the emergency powers clause when asked in 1978 (under Conservative President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing), but only 47 percent supported the clause when asked the same question in the 1983 poll after Giscard had been replaced by Socialist François Mitterrand. Among Socialist voters, by contrast, support increased from 42 to 62 percent in the same period (Duhamel 1984, 106). When asked whether they thought the institutions of the Fifth Republic had been functioning well since the arrival to power of the left two years earlier, 46 percent of the French said not very well or not very well at all as compared to only 40 percent who thought they had been working either very well or well enough. Partisan differences were again apparent, however, as 57 and 61 percent of the Communist and Socialist supporters thought that they had been working either well enough or very well, as compared to only 29 and 22 percent of the Conservatives and Gaullists (Duhamel 1984, 107). Clearly, where you stand on the French constitutional structure depends on whether you think those in power are on your side.

The structures of the Fifth Republic were quite controversial when they were first introduced, especially by those on the political left, who considered the powers of the president to be too great and those of the Parliament too diluted. Indeed, former President Mitterrand even published a book entitled *The Permanent Coup d'Etat* in 1964 as he prepared his campaign against General de Gaulle in the 1965 presidential election. (Mitterrand surprised many, including de Gaulle, by getting 45 percent of the vote.) As the title suggests, this book was critical of the constitution of the Fifth Republic, and in that sense the views of the author were typical of those of many on the left, who felt that the new constitution was overly autocratic, with too many powers vested in the executive and too few guarantees of legislative influence or of judicial independence. Over the generations, especially after Mitterrand himself assumed the presidency in 1981, the structures of the Fifth Republic have become better appreciated by the French, and there is a consensus that the regime functions well. Still, it is important to note that the state is legitimate in France, but many elements of the regime are not. Table 1 shows that the consensus in favor of the institutions of the Fifth Republic is not overwhelming and that partisan differences still cloud people's perceptions of those institutions. We saw at the beginning of this chapter that the French have often put the emphasis more on efficiency over representation, and of course this choice is controversial. It was especially controversial when the left felt that it was in "permanent" opposition status during the 1960s and 1970s. As alternation in power has become more common, the sense of political bias in the powers of the French state has declined. But the state remains very powerful and compared with the United States, the parties in opposition have little to do to thwart the will of a president backed by a majority in Parliament; the system is designed to make the president quite powerful in this situation.

An example of the types of constitutional issues that can sometimes be part of the political debate in France comes from the spring and summer of 2000. In May 2000 former President Giscard d'Estaing issued a statement in which he declared that the presidential term of seven years was too long and should be reduced to five. With the legislature elected for five years, some felt that electing the president for a similar term would minimize the chances of cohabitation, or split control of the dual executive. Other politicians, including the leaders of all the major parties, the prime minister, and the president himself, weighed in on the possible constitutional reform, including such questions as whether or not the revised office of the president should retain the authority to dissolve Parliament. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin declared his intention to introduce legislation in Parliament to shorten the presidential term. Finally, President Jacques Chirac announced that he, too, favored the change. A bill to revise Article 6 of the French constitution was submitted on June 7, 2000, and the French voted by referendum on September 24, 2000, to accept the five-year term, and the constitution was thus revised. French presidents now serve only five years

(with the possibility of being reelected, of course); since 1873 the norm had been seven-year terms. In fact, since 1958, the French constitution has been revised or amended many times, usually about once per year, in fact. The U.S. constitution, by contrast, has only 27 amendments, and has been amended only six times since World War II.

Political consensus is not always so strong concerning such constitutional issues. When the 1993 elections brought a conservative majority to Parliament against the wishes of President Mitterrand, several prominent conservative politicians, including later President Jacques Chirac, declared that the president had been discredited and should resign from office (Bréhier 1993). Of course, this plea had no grounds in the constitution and was ignored by President Mitterrand. Still, in France's first experiences with cohabitation in the 1980s and 1990, it is interesting to note that respected political leaders were willing to call for extraordinary and certainly unconstitutional steps. Today, after several experiences with alternation, cohabitation, and electoral uncertainty, there is more of a shared expectation and understanding of how the political institutions will work. If anything, there is a strange consensus that the reduction of the term of the president from seven to five years will actually accomplish much. Most of the justification for it seemed to be in the hopes that it will do away with periods of cohabitation, since a new president will presumably call for new legislative elections and then find a legislature of his liking for the remaining five years of his term. Nothing would stop the voters from returning a legislature against the will of the president, however, as they did in 1997 when President Chirac called for new legislative elections leading to a Socialist victory. Cohabitation seems to be more popular among the French public, who do not mind that the politicians are required to get along with each other, than with the politicians themselves, each of whom would prefer to be in complete control. In fact, after the current President Nicolas Sarkozy won his substantial victory in May 2007, polls indicated a likely huge legislative majority in the subsequent legislative elections, held in June. However, the Socialist Party and others on the left campaigned hard on the theme that the nation needed a strong and vocal opposition, one better able to keep the executive branch in check. Voters apparently took this to heart, as the Socialist Party actually gained 40 seats in the June 17, 2007, elections, though the parties of the right retained their overall majority. In sum, whereas the logic of the Fifth Republic points toward shared executive dominance, and the constitutional revision shortening the president's term so that it would correspond with that of the Parliament was designed to lessen the likelihood of cohabitation, voters showed a willingness to split their vote, not wanting to provide an overwhelming majority in Parliament to the president they had just elected a few weeks earlier.

Cultural Expectations

To discuss political culture is always to risk overgeneralization. When we consider Americans, we know that they are not all identical, and of course

the same is true of the citizens of every other country. However, after having reviewed some salient elements of French history, one would be surprised if all these events had not affected the population in some important ways—in spite of their many differences the French have a lot in common because of their shared history. In this section, therefore, we will consider some cultural elements of the ways the French have come to relate to their system of government.

There are two contrasting cultural expectations common in France that we may use to organize our consideration of the impact of culture on government. These are equality and authority. Throughout French history, these concepts have been central to what the French expect out of their system of government: either to guarantee equality to all French citizens or to use the powers of the state to move society in certain directions. For both these goals, the centralization of power in a strong central government is important. The cultural homogeneity of France is important here as well. French culture is varied and diverse; however, there is a shared understanding about the glories of French history and culture that is remarkably homogeneous. France has long accepted foreigners, for example, but it expects them to adapt to a "French way of life" rather quickly. Further, there are political differences in these cultural expectations. The French have come to expect that the power of the state be used to ensure the equality of citizens before the law (this especially is the cultural expectation of those on the political left), and to promote active social changes, such as enhancing France's position in the world (this has been shared by those on the left and the right—but especially among those on the right). The relative importance that French people place on these two values—equality and authority—helps distinguish those on the cultural and political left from those on the right, even though these differences are not absolute and even though the vast majority of the French accept both as legitimate goals. The emphasis that French people of all types have placed on equality of treatment and of integration into French political norms also helps explain the terrible difficulties France is currently experiencing with large numbers of immigrants from Arab and Muslim countries—immigrants who do not share the same religion, for example, as did previous generations of immigrants who came from Italy, Poland, Spain, or Portugal.

French people develop their cultural expectations about government early, through the family and through the schools. The educational system plays an especially important role here. In France, unlike the United States, there is a single bureaucratic structure for all of education. While we have thousands of local school districts, France has its Ministry of National Education. The ministry operates all the public schools in the nation, from nursery schools through the universities (there are private schools as well, of course, but over 80 percent of French schoolchildren attend public schools). It hires the teachers, assigns them around the country, and determines the curriculum. While there have been efforts to increase the power

of local school directors in recent years, the centralization of power in the Ministry of National Education is remarkable. A single national calendar determines when classes will be in session, a single committee decides on which textbooks will be recommended, and a single set of exams and a single pay scale fix the conditions of employment for teachers across the country. Thus, the French are accustomed from an early age to two elements of the French political system: centralization and equality.

There are drawbacks to the rigid centralization of the French system, but there are remarkable advantages as well. One such advantage is the equality of school financing and support. While American courts have been forcing states to reallocate tax dollars to alleviate disparities between rich and poor school districts, this problem is nonexistent in France. In fact, the ministry allocates extra money to those schools in difficult neighborhoods (called *Priority Education Zones*). Of course, it would be impossible to make quality identical in every school, but there is substantial equality among schools all across the country. (Readers of this chapter may be interested to know that French university diplomas do not even mention the name of the university where the student received the degree. Since all universities are considered to be equal, there is no need to say which one conferred the diploma!)

The French educational system illustrates the importance of equality to the French, but this equality also allows for an elite. That is, there are competitive examinations for entry into the most prestigious institutions of higher education, called the *grandes écoles* (literally, "great schools"). Many of the greatest of the *grandes écoles* date back to the monarchy or to the early days of the Revolution, and they were the training ground for the elite state bureaucrats who staffed the ministries of the king. To this day, students who enter the *Ecole polytechnique* (the prestigious engineering school, founded in 1794) become civil servants upon entry to the school and are expected to staff the higher levels of the state services upon graduation.

At the pinnacle of the French educational system, therefore, are civil service training schools. Thus, a second cultural expectation is established: the smartest students, the greatest minds, the most promising young people in France have long aspired to enter state service. The prestige of the high civil service stems from its long history. It is quite a contrast to the situation in the United States, where employment in the private sector or in the liberal professions such as law or medicine is a more traditional aspiration for the best students. The greater importance of the French state throughout its history in intervening in the economy, in cultural affairs, and in guaranteeing the glory of France can be seen in how it shapes the expectations of generations even today. As a result of these expectations, the higher ranks of the civil service really are staffed with some very impressive individuals, and the French public generally has confidence in them. Historical experiences, cultural expectations, educational opportunities, and the role of the state are all linked in a kind of self-perpetuating system.

The French learn other important lessons in school. One of the first is their great history, beginning with *nos ancêtres les Gaulois* ("our ancestors the Gauls"). France has long been a country of immigration, and the number of people in France today who actually might have descended from the Gauls (who lived in France in Roman times) is probably quite low. Still, French children recite lessons about their ancestors the Gauls, promoting a cherished myth that the French are a homogeneous group, all stemming from common ancestors. (It is worth noting that during the colonial period, millions of African and Asian children also learned French by reciting lessons about *their* ancestors, the Gauls, as well!) Through the study of French history, children learn the glory of the country's past and the efforts of the state to help promote it. These are lessons they rarely forget.

Equality plays a fundamental role in the French conception of the state, but there are some remarkable exceptions. Particularly striking is the limited role of women in French politics and public life. Joan of Arc is perhaps the most recognizable symbol of female heroism in France, and her image is common. One of the most famous and widely known depictions of the Revolution of 1789 is Eugène Delacroix's painting *Liberty Leading the People,* which shows a woman leading the charge. This image was on the front of the 100-franc note (before the Euro replaced the French currency), so it is clearly an important shared element of French iconography. Just as Delacroix used a woman to depict the concept of Liberty, the Republic is often depicted by the mythical Marianne, a woman whose statue is found in many public places. Even though women play an important role in popular and official French culture, sexism is deeply imbued in French culture and is strongly reflected in its politics. In Delacroix's painting, Liberty is bare-breasted. Various movie stars and fashion models have been asked to pose for periodic recastings of the statue of Marianne, a process that led to public complaints and ridicule in 1999 when female elected officials asked why the symbolic representation of the Republic would be chosen in a manner resembling a beauty contest. Embarrassed but undaunted, the 36,000 members of the Association of Mayors of France (95 percent of whom are male) went on to choose Laetitia Casta, a supermodel and movie actress. The finalists, according to *New York Times* reporter Suzanne Daley, included "two supermodels, a game show hostess, a singer, and a TV news anchor" (Daley 1999). Brigitte Bardot and Catherine Deneuve are both former recipients of the same honor; Casta is best known for lingerie ads.

Women received the right to vote in France only in 1945 and have not enjoyed as much visibility in politics as has occurred in the United States. The situation is changing, however. France had its first female prime minister when Edith Cresson held the position from May 1991 to April 1992, though there has not been another woman in that position since. In 2005, the Minister of Defense was Mme Michèle Alliot-Marie, who seriously considered a run for the presidency before bowing out to rival candidate Nicolas Sarkozy, and there were a number of women in the government of

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. In the Sarkozy administration, women play prominent roles, with seven women out of a total of fifteen cabinet officials, and one, Rachida Dati (Minister of Justice), the first woman of North African descent to serve in any French government. In fact, the government of Prime Minister François Fillon includes women in several of the most prominent and important ministries beyond Justice, including Economy and Finance, Interior, Housing, and Culture. Overall, the number of women in politics in France remains quite low, as Tables 2 and 3 indicate. In fact, France has the lowest number of female members of Parliament in Europe, with the exception of Greece.

Table 2 shows the percentage of women members of the National Assembly since the beginning of the Fifth Republic in 1958. The number of women deputies hovered around 1–2 percent until about 1981, then around 5–6 percent, and more recently about 12 percent—a notable increase, but still quite low numbers. Successive prime ministers since 1981 have typically appointed women to between 10 and 15 percent of the cabinet positions (and rarely to the most senior and powerful spots). This changed somewhat with Lionel Jospin's cabinets beginning after the 1997 elections, as shown in Table 3; he appointed women to about one-third of

TABLE 2
Women in Parliament

Year	Size of the National Assembly	Number of women deputies	Percent female deputies
1958	579	8	1
1962	482	8	2
1967	487	11	2
1968	487	8	2
1973	490	8	2
1978	491	20	4
1981	491	26	5
1986	577	34	6
1988	577	33	6
1993	577	35	6
1997	577	63	11
2002	577	71	12

TABLE 3
Women in Government

Year	Government (prime minister)	Number of cabinet positions	Number of women	Percent female ministers
1981	Pierre Mauroy	44	6	14
1984	Laurent Fabius	44	6	14
1986	Jacques Chirac	42	4	10
1988	Michel Rocard	42	6	14
1993	Edouard Balladur	30	3	10
1997	Lionel Jospin	28	10	36
2000	Lionel Jospin	33	11	33
2004	Jean-Paul Raffarin	44	9	20
2007	François Fillon	15	7	47

the cabinet positions, including to several of the top positions. Martine Aubry (Minister of Employment), Elisabeth Guigou (Minister of Justice), Dominique Voynet (Minister of the Environment), and Catharine Trauttman (Minister of Culture, and Government Spokesperson) were often seen in major government roles on television and in the newspapers in France. With the 2002 elections, the right returned to power and there was only one woman, Michèle Alliot-Marie (Minister of Defense), at the very highest levels of the current government, though there are other women in more junior cabinet positions. As noted above, President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Fillon have placed women in nearly half of the cabinet positions in the current (2007–) French government, including many of the most prominent ones. Women now play a more prominent role in French politics than ever before, but it is clear that the French still have a long way to go in promoting complete equality of the sexes.

The equality of the sexes in politics was a major political issue during the late 1990s, in fact. Parliament passed a wide-ranging law in 1999 requiring exact mathematical parity between men and women on all electoral lists. The law actually states that there must be equal numbers of men and women on all party lists in all elections held by proportional representation. Further, the women cannot all be placed at the bottom of the list, where they stand little chance of being elected. For each group of six names on the party lists, there must be three of each sex. In effect, the *Loi sur la Parité* (Law on Parity) creates a numerical quota system, an exact 50 percent requirement for all parties to promote women into elected offices. As mentioned, the law applies only where proportional representation is used, and therefore not to the National Assembly, which is elected by single-member districts. But this means that local elections, regional elections, and elections to the European Parliament are now affected by this law, and the numbers of women holding elected office are likely to increase as a result. This may eventually reach Parliament and the highest levels of the political parties as more women gain electoral and office-holding experience. For the moment, however, the French political establishment has shown itself highly resistant to openness at the highest levels as regards the roles of women in political life. Tables 2 and 3 show, however, some significant gains of women in Parliament, and the current Fillon government has certainly set a new standard for the placement of women in the most prominent positions of the cabinet.

Guaranteeing equality to all French citizens is central to the French conception of the role of the state, but this goal is more perfectly met in some areas than in others. Stereotypes about gender roles remain an important element of French public life, though trends toward reduced sexism are clearly apparent. (One interesting side element to these changes is the Jospin government's 1998 effort officially to create a feminine form of the noun *ministre*. Officially, there was no such thing as *madame la ministre;* women as well as men have been known as *le ministre*.

When the Jospin government proposed this linguistic change, members of the Académie Française protested about impurities in the language of Molière.) Some of this resistance is generational; clearly the future holds greater opportunities for women at all levels of French public life. (One reason for the difficulty of women to break into the highest levels is the tremendous stability among French politicians in general. Recall that the previous president, Jacques Chirac, who served until 2007, was already prime minister in 1974, and has been a major national political figure continuously during this period. With individual politicians staying in office (and in the press), for 30 years at a time, it is hard for new faces to break in. But this has proven especially difficult for women as a group, as the figures above make abundantly clear.) The arrival of Nicolas Sarkozy as president may suggest the beginnings of some dramatic changes on this score.

We will see in later sections that the treatment of immigrants and members of racial minorities is an increasing problem for the French. Clearly, equality is a notion sometimes more cherished in the abstract than in application; however, to anyone who understands the French concept of the state, it is clear that the French expect the state to be the ultimate guarantor of equality.

Centralization and the Power of the State

We have seen that the French, because of their culture and history, have come to expect a powerful state and that they expect it to use its powers to promote equality and to pursue advances for the nation. What are the powers of the central state? We can get the answer by looking for a moment at how local governments are organized in France.

France has the greatest number of local governments of any country its size in Europe. It is, truly, a country of villages. While an increasing proportion of the French live in urban areas, the *commune,* or township, remains the basic unit of government. There are over 36,000 communes in France. Many of them have only a few hundred inhabitants (in fact, almost 80 percent of French communes have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants), but each has a mayor and a town council (*conseil municipal*). Each commune, through its city hall, or *mairie,* issues public pronouncements, organizes elections, and celebrates weddings. (A civil ceremony, in addition to a religious one, is the practice in France.)

The 36,000-plus communes of France are organized into 100 *départements* (including four overseas departments: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, and Réunion). The department is the most important administrative level of local government in France. Each department has a prefect, a civil servant named from Paris, who is charged with coordinating all the activities and services of the central government in the area. (Under the monarchy, the king's representatives were called *intendants;* under the Republic, the prefect plays this role.) The prefect is typically the most important local official, since his or her powers to coordinate the activities of all the central government services are great. He or she works with a staff

of subprefects, one in each major town of the department, and together these civil servants work with the local elected officials. Each department has an elected council, the *conseil général,* as well.

A map of the French departments (such as the one at the beginning of this chapter) shows that all of the mainland departments are roughly the same size. When Napoleon created the modern system of departments in France and consolidated the system of administration and laws, he insisted that no citizen should live more than a day's horseback ride from a department's capital. The result is a series of provincial capitals, each in the geographical center of its department, and a set of boundaries that remains largely intact today. Another result: Because population densities are not uniform, some departments, like the Lozère, have fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, while others have several million. Paris alone constitutes its own department, obviously unlike any other.

The hundred departments of France are grouped into twenty-six regions. Each region has a prefect and an elected body, the *conseil régional,* as well. The communes, departments, and regions constitute the local levels of government in France. Traditionally, the powers of the central state have been much greater than those of any local level of government, though important reforms undertaken by President Mitterrand in 1982 have given greater powers to local levels of government (on these reforms, see Schmidt 1991). The regions, in particular, are growing in political importance, and the office of president of the regional council is now quite a powerful position. Still, one can appreciate some differences between the American federal system of powerful states and localities and the French centralized system of government by considering how some particular policies are handled in the two countries.

Police protection in the United States has always been a local concern, as have the schools, electric utilities, and many other services. In France, there are several types of police, but all of them are national in scope. These include the *Police nationale,* which provides the bulk of police services in France, especially in the cities; the *Gendarmerie,* which is technically part of the military, but which effectively provides basic police services across France, especially in the rural areas and small towns; and the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* (CRS), a national riot police used to control demonstrations and other events, equivalent to the U.S. National Guard when called out to quell riots.. These national police forces are under the control of the Ministry of the Interior (or, in the case of the *Gendarmerie,* the Ministry of Defense). The concept of a powerful local police department under the control of an elected mayor would seem inconceivable to a French person (there are *polices municipales,* but their powers are limited and they are not the main policing forces in any part of the country). Whereas Americans expect to see local authority in these areas and resent the intrusion of the federal government in such affairs, the French see any kind of local control as a threat to their cherished concept of national equal-

ity. Further, the idea of *elected,* rather than appointed, judges, sheriffs, and other officials of the justice system would seem to call into question their professionalism and the guarantee of national equality. In France, expectations are that there should be democratic elections, clearly, but that civil servants should be trained officials in the employ of the state. Further, local appointments, much less elections of administrative personnel, are frowned upon, since they could lead to deviations in local practice from the national norms.

French observers, like many Europeans, are quite surprised at the idea of U.S. local police forces. While we take them for granted here, and would be shocked at the idea of a national police force, the French see important economies of scale, increased professionalism, greater practical know-how, and enhanced expertise in national services rather than local ones. They have similar views on the schools, where they see no reason for communities to pay different salaries or have different levels of material support for different students; on the provision of electricity or gas, where they do not understand why each small community would have its own independent service when a single national company could serve the entire country equally and with equal prices; on banking, where they see no value in local banks but expect to find the same banks with branches all over the country; or on police services, where they would be surprised to find differences in enforcement of the law in different parts of the country. In fact, the French view many elements of American federalism with suspicion, if not alarm. Let's take as an example the 1999 protests in Seattle, Washington, where a few thousand protestors demonstrated at the meetings of the World Trade Association. The local police force, with little experience in riot and crowd control, was widely viewed as having mishandled the situation. Many Europeans were shocked, not so much by the protests, as by the inexperienced and unprofessional nature of the response. In France, the police response would have been coordinated at the national level, and those involved would have been experienced in dealing with protests, demonstrations, and similar events. Further, the police officers themselves would have had similar experience, and they would have been out in vast numbers, since they would have been brought in from Paris or elsewhere. With a national police force rather than thousands of local ones, experience and professional know-how are greater, the French believe. Jurisdictional disputes among law enforcement agencies, common in the United States, are rare in France. Of course, we Americans view local control of essential public services as an important element of our democratic system, and would be shocked at the concept of a national police force, just as we refuse to have a national identity card. Our distrust of the central state is great; in France, the situation is directly opposed. There, the people expect that the state will be strong, but they also expect it to provide uniform national services professionally, impartially, and equally in all areas of the country.

A powerful cultural element pushes the French toward an expectation of centralization of power: a Cartesian sense of rationality. René Descartes (1595–1650) was a noted French mathematician and philosopher, and the French have long prided themselves on organizing things in a rational, rather than an idiosyncratic or superstitious, way. Indeed these ideas of the enlightenment were central to the establishment of republican government in France. The revolutionaries who removed the king also hoped to rule France through reason, not superstition, as they thought the previous regime had done. Among other things, they adopted the metric system, abandoned the traditional calendar, and centralized power in Paris. While the experiment with the new calendar lasted only a few years, the metric system and the powers of Paris remained. Part of the justification for this was its greater rationality. Centralization of services and the elimination of local variation not only ensured that all citizens would be treated equally but also allowed for economies of scale, the centralizers argued. Centralization of power therefore is seen by many French as simply being more rational and more efficient than coordinating the diverse activities of thousands of local governments, each acting on its own. (In fact, French visitors to the United States are often amazed that traffic laws, drinking ages, university tuition, and the like all change, depending on what state one happens to be in. This is not rational, they argue, and it certainly is not what they are accustomed to. In France, equality of treatment across the entire national territory is almost a religion.)

We can see a further example of the powers of centralized authorities by looking at an organization that has no equivalent in the United States: *Electricité de France* ("Electricity of France," or EDF, the national electric company). Whereas each municipality in the United States has the burden of organizing for the provision of electricity, gas, and other utilities, this is done by a single monolithic organization in France. What are the benefits? Economies are considerable; the training of the engineers and the personnel is uniform and of high quality; the French pay among the lowest electrical rates in Europe; and there are no differences in rates for similar kinds of service anywhere in the country. Further, when the country wants to change its system for energy production, there is only a single decision to be made, as when the French decided in the mid-1970s to replace as much imported oil as possible with nuclear power. Coordinating the policies and decisions of thousands of local utility companies in the United States would be impossible. What are the costs in the French system? Local elected officials have little ability to influence the decisions of these huge state organizations, something that Americans would not be accustomed to.

Whether it is in the schools, the police, the provision of utility service, banking (all the banks are national in scope: no out-of-town checking problems in France), we can see that things are organized in Paris, almost never locally. In this, the French are continuing a long tradition. A further tradition allows those at the local level of government to be involved in many of

these decisions, making sure that important local issues are not completely overlooked.

Traditionally in French society, the local nobility played the role of representing the interests of the local inhabitants to the central authorities. While that system is, of course, no longer in operation, there remains a parallel in what the French call the *local notable*. This is typically the mayor of the town, a person with greater social standing than any other. This *local notable* takes on the role almost of the ombudsman for the town. This means that he or she intercedes with the prefect, with the central authorities, and cuts through red tape on behalf of local citizens. The French system of centralization makes it especially important that someone at the local level have the connections to "get things done" in Paris, and there is a curious tradition of French politics that allows this to happen.

The same person may wear many political hats in France, in a system referred to as the *cumul des mandats,* or accumulation of mandates. That is, the mayor of a town can be at the same time a member of Parliament or a minister. Or, the person may be a member or the president of the Regional Council or of the General Council (the elected bodies at the levels of the region and of the department, respectively). He or she might even be a member of the European Parliament. With all these offices "accumulated" by the same person, such an individual should certainly be able to have the interests of his or her town well represented in the Paris ministries where the important decisions are being made, according to the logic that underlies this tradition. These local power-barons also are hard to unseat from power if they ever become unpopular, since voters may fear losing the benefits that the mayor's wide net of connections and influence presumably brought back to the local community.

Some prominent French politicians have accumulated a great number of political offices. Before becoming president, for example, Jacques Chirac served simultaneously as mayor of Paris and prime minister of France. Pierre Mauroy, prime minister from 1981 to 1983, was also mayor of the northern city of Lille, to which he commuted for long weekends. Many major political figures have held three or more offices, a situation that made them extremely powerful politically, and reduced the number of major political leaders in France to a much smaller number than in the United States. In the United States, when a political leader wants to move on from a local to a national office, he or she must give up the local office, thereby creating space for another, usually younger, political leader to emerge. In France, with no need to give up the lesser office while holding higher office, many political figures have retained their powers for over a generation. For example, François Mitterrand was already a young minister in the transitional government after the war in 1946. As a leftist he was a member of Parliament but never a government minister during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. However, he ran for president in 1965, coming in second to Charles de Gaulle; again in 1974, losing to Giscard d'Estaing; again in 1981, winning

this time against Giscard; and again in 1988 before retiring from the presidency in 1995. In America this would be as if the Democratic Party nominated George McGovern in 1968 and again in each election for the next thirty years. In France, this practice was not remarkable: The "political class" is extremely stable, since many of the major political leaders have been firmly entrenched in electoral strongholds from which they are almost impossible to dislodge. If they lose one election, they retain their other position, so they do not retire or go into private business. President Chirac, for example, was prime minister in 1974, when Gerald Ford was president of the United States. While Ford had been in retirement since 1976, Chirac has constantly been at the forefront of French politics and served as president until 2007.

A recent law designed to breathe some new life into the French political class limits officeholders to only two positions: one at the national level and one at the local level. Over time, this should increase the number of political leaders in France, making it less likely that the same individuals will dominate political parties for thirty years or more, as has often happened in the past. Current President Sarkozy represents a substantial break from the entrenched political class that preceded him in power and is considered an outsider in spite of his many years of government service (including, remarkably, serving as Minister of Interior for many years under President Chirac, hardly an inconspicuous position).

The system of the local notables underscores a further element of the French political culture and the relations of the French to their government. Because it is so centralized, it is by definition a distant and impersonal power. The need to have an especially influential mayor with connections in Paris points to the penalties paid by those who do not have proper representation. With such centralization necessarily come very great rigidities. Local authority is a threat to equality of citizens living in different parts of the country if each local government follows different policies. However, forcing local governments to follow blindly only those policies designed in Paris can lead to some strange outcomes. Students living on the German or Spanish borders in France are expected to take no more or fewer foreign language classes than those living on farms in remote villages in the center of France where foreigners rarely pass through.

Overcentralization can and often does lead to rigidity. In France, however, the power of the concept of equality is so great and the faith in the state elites to enact well thought-out policies is so high, that the balance has always been tipped toward the side of centralizing authority rather than toward that of allowing more local control.

The great distance of decision making from its implementation can be seen to lead to a certain alienation and sense of distance from government leaders among ordinary French citizens, as we shall see in the pages that follow. The French often feel that state authorities are so powerful, yet so distant, that they must resort to protest and demonstrations in order to get

their attention. Considering the revolutionary nature of French history, state elites do indeed look out for signs that they have lost touch and that the people are about to revolt. Michel Crozier, a French sociologist, termed France the "blocked society." In his view, changes come slowly or not at all, until social pressures build up to such a point that they explode, as they did in the demonstrations, strikes, and general revolt of May 1968, and as they have periodically throughout French history (see Crozier 1963 and 1970; also see Hoffman et al. 1963; Wylie 1964).

Crozier, Hoffman, Wylie, and other observers of French society have discussed the simultaneous respect and hostility that the French seem to show toward authority. Beginning in the classroom, where traditionally the teacher has been the absolute master, continuing into workplace relations and to views of the state, French people simultaneously expect and bristle under the powers of authority. Periodically, strikes, protests, and demonstrations shatter the calm, ordered nature of things. The French, much more than Americans, take these events in stride, expecting that the protests will be short, the inconveniences temporary, and the state ultimately victorious. Public-sector strikes (such as those that close the schools, stop the trains and subways, or disrupt airplane traffic) are common, if generally of short duration. Public opinion polls consistently show that most French people usually side with the strikers, not with the state. French views of the state are ambivalent, indeed.

Whether or not the system works perfectly, the French system is very different from a federal one like that of the United States. Powers are centralized, authority patterns are clear, and there is an expectation that state officials are firmly in charge. With this expectation of authority comes a further expectation that they will treat all the French equally, however. They did not have a revolution for nothing.

Culture, History, and Politics

Our overview of French political culture has focused on a few important elements: the legitimacy of the French state (but not necessarily the regime), the powerful myth of homogeneity, the attachment to the concept of equality, the expectation that the state should be staffed by the finest intellects, the belief that the powers of the state should be used to further particular goals in the interests of all the people, the vast powers of the central state as opposed to the local levels of government, and a recognition of some of the problems of overcentralization.

A nation's culture goes far in determining its political system, and in this sense the French are no different from any other people. At the same time, there are many difficulties in distinguishing between culture on the one hand and historical experience on the other, since they are so closely related. The French culture developed as it did in reaction to the historical experiences that the French have shared. In any case, when we study comparative politics, we need to be aware that nations are not simply interchangeable. Each country has gone through a different historical

experience that helps explain why it has developed the political system that it has. By studying the history and a culture of a country, then, we can better understand why it developed those institutions. We will see in the next section that the historical and cultural features that we have discussed so far have had strong effects on the demands that the French people place on their government, as well as on the structure and behavior of that government.

► BASES OF CONFLICT

General de Gaulle is said to have asked, possibly in despair, "How can one govern a country with 365 kinds of cheese?" While the French are virtually uniform in their love of cheese, each one likes a different kind! Similarly, political attitudes are many and varied among the French. While almost all agree on many things, such as the glory of French history and the beauty of the language, this is almost where the consensus leaves off. In any case, considering the lively political history of changes in the control of government, it should be no surprise that the French are deeply divided politically. Conflict is an important part of the French political culture and of French politics generally. In this section, we will consider some long-standing points of political conflict, and we will note some rising conflicts in French politics.

Religiosity

In a country where over 90 percent of the population has a Roman Catholic background, it is difficult to understand the importance of religion in defining political conflicts. But it is precisely because France is an overwhelmingly Catholic country that the role of the church has always been so important to politics. Since the Revolution, leaders of the forces of the left have seen the church as a symbol and as a base of power for conservative forces in society. Since the confiscation of church property that followed the Revolution, leaders of the church have often viewed republicans with mistrust. So the church has been inextricably tied into politics in France throughout modern history. Each of the changes of regime that France has experienced has had a direct or indirect impact on the position of the church in society, and church leaders have often played an active role in promoting or resisting changes in the regime. The net effect of these long-term historical trends has been that supporters of the left and those of the right are recognizable to this day by their attitudes toward the church.

The formal separation of church from state was established in 1905. However, the Vichy regime established more favorable treatment for many church activities, such as state support for private schools. The Liberation brought an end to these close relations, but church and state maintain many links. For example, teachers in private schools (95 percent of which are Catholic) are generally paid by the government, with the result that many children are able to attend religious schools rather than public ones, with

very low tuition payments. Indeed it is over state support for private education that the religious question is most clearly brought into politics today in France. For example, a 1984 attempt by a Socialist government to limit state subsidies to church schools led to massive protests that put over a million people into the streets in demonstrations either in favor of the reform or against it (see Baumgartner 1987). A subsequent effort by a Conservative government to increase state support to these same schools also led to huge public demonstrations and was withdrawn in January 1994. The history of politicization of the question of religion in the schools is one reason why recent debate about the role of Islam in the schools has been so contentious. For some French traditionalists, wearing the *hijab* (Muslim veil) in school is tantamount to wearing a cross; an unacceptable religious display in the jealously guarded secularism of the public schools. Of course, whether wearing the *hijab* represents a religious statement, a cultural one, or no statement at all is an open question for many.

For a variety of reasons, then, the church has always been associated with politics in France, and its role remains an important one even if there is no official role for the leaders of the church in the political system. In fact, many French people would question that religiosity plays an important role in determining their political attitudes at all. France is one of the most secularized countries of western Europe and rates of attendance at Sunday services are very low. The French might point to the more overt references to God and religious symbols in American politics, for example—school prayers, the "In God We Trust" logo on American money, and the large-scale mobilization of evangelical Christians in politics; none of these occurs in France. Religion is not irrelevant in French politics because of this, even though fewer and fewer people attend mass, and religion has become less important in French society. Still, it is remarkable how well one can predict a person's vote by knowing how often he or she attends church!

One's attitude toward the church in France can be said to be a shorthand indication for a variety of social issues that divide the French. The church is strongest in those parts of society where conservative forces generally are strongest: in rural areas, in upper-middle-class areas, among women, and among the elderly. For example, in 1983, 83 percent of respondents to a Sofres survey declared themselves to be Catholic; 3 percent were of other religions; and 14 percent said they had no religion (Sofres 1984, 187). The Catholics vary in their degree of attachment to the church, however: 14 percent were regular churchgoers, 17 percent went occasionally, and 52 percent rarely went (only for weddings, funerals, and the like—this group is referred to as nonpracticing Catholics). If we compare the percentage of regular churchgoers to the percentage of those who say they have no religion, we can see the social basis of the church. First, we can see that it is feminine: 17 percent of the women are practicing, as opposed to 11 percent of the men. Second, it is elderly: the percentage of regularly practicing Catholics increases regularly, from 9 percent among those 18 to 24 years old

TABLE 4
Religious Practice and Party Preference

Partisan preference	Regularly practicing Catholic	Occasionally practicing Catholic	Nonpracticing Catholic	Other religions	No religion	Total (%)
Communist party	1	2	56	3	38	100
Socialist party	7	15	59	3	16	100
Ecologists	12	9	58	2	19	100
Conservatives	27	19	47	2	5	100
Gaullists	23	24	43	3	7	100
Total (%)	14	17	52	3	14	100

Source: Data from Sofres 1984, 188–189.

to 24 percent among those over 64 (and the percentage with no religion declines from 22 to 7 percent). Finally, among farmers, 22 percent are practicing Catholics and only 4 percent have no religion, but among blue-collar workers 6 percent are practicing and 16 percent have no religion (Sofres 1984, 188). The political significance of the church is clear when we look at the partisan preferences of the French. Table 4 shows the degree of attachment to the Catholic church among the French, and the link between partisan attachment and churchgoing.

Religion is an important background variable in French politics. So intertwined is the Catholic church with all of French history that to ask one's attitude toward the church is almost like asking for a reaction to its role in French history. The role of religion in French politics is more indirect than direct. We will see in later sections how religiosity is important in French politics because the church is associated with or opposed to many other organizations that play more overtly political roles. Many political cleavages correspond somewhat, if imperfectly, with religion. One of these is social class.

Social Class

If religiosity has been an important element in French politics since the Revolution, social class has been a paramount fixture of political life for almost as long. Since the Industrial Revolution, it has been an important dividing line in French politics. The main political parties of the French left, the Communists and the Socialists, were founded with the goal of representing working-class interests and have always had close ties with other working-class organizations, such as the labor unions. The main parties of the right, the Conservatives and the Gaullists, have long been allied with business and middle-class voters. Some new parties, we will see in a later section, do not correspond with this cleavage, since they appeal to voters on a different basis. Still, social-class differences in France run deep. As in England, the Industrial Revolution in France came before modern laws protecting worker safety, limiting working hours, and prohibiting child labor.

Working conditions in nineteenth-century industry in France were often very difficult, and the major organizations that represent workers

today in France, be they labor unions or political parties, were created during this period. The legacy of this difficult beginning is a tradition of hostility based on social class. (We will have more to say about social class when we consider political parties and interest groups in later sections.)

Regional Differences

France is a nation of provinces, and the successive efforts by each central government to impose its will have not always been appreciated by those at the local level. Further, geographical differences have long divided the country into recognizable zones of influence for either the left or the right. Religious practice, resentment of Parisian interference, and even counterrevolutionary actions have historically been high in the area of the Vendée, for example (see Tilly 1967). In general, those areas where religious practice was the strongest, rural values most powerful, and conservatism most entrenched include Brittany and Normandy, parts of the center and the eastern part of France. A leftist political tradition has been the rule in the industrial regions in the north and northeast of the country (where the mines and the steel industries were once strong), in the industrial suburbs around Paris and other large cities, and in areas of the south.

Long-term historical differences in the traditions of local areas, in their degrees of industrialization, in their forms of agriculture, in their patterns of landownership, and in their relations with Parisian authorities have left their mark on the political attitudes of different regions. These are recognizable even today in the degree of support for different political parties across the different regions of France (see Todd 1991). There are other, more dramatic regional cleavages than just different levels of support for the various political parties, however: These range from demands for outright independence to requests for greater autonomy. Corsica, Brittany, the Basque areas, and other regions are each home to groups demanding much greater local autonomy. Other areas, including Provence and Alsace, also have strong local traditions, including non-French traditional languages that are taught in local schools. The centuries of Paris-led centralization have not done away with significant cultural diversity in many areas of France. In fact, official policy since the 1980s is to promote the teaching of local languages in schools. The only question is whether it already might not be too late. Only a small percentage of the population in Brittany speaks Breton, or in Provence, the local Occitan or Provençal.

The various regions of France differ greatly in their response to social problems as well, because their populations differ. For example, the southern regions along the Mediterranean are home to many more immigrants than other areas. Some of these are former French colonial settlers from North Africa, dating back to the time when Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco were French colonies. After the wars of independence in the 1950s and 1960s, these *pieds noirs* ("black feet," as they are called in French) were forced to flee, and many settled in the southern port towns of Nice, Marseille, and Toulon, or in Corsica. Not only did the white settlers get

reestablished in these areas, but so did large numbers of Arab immigrants from those same countries, giving these areas a distinctive local political culture and some uneasy relations. In other areas, local conditions or historical traditions make particular regions stand apart. In voting on European community issues, for example, Paris, urban areas in general, and the border regions tend to be especially favorable toward union, while isolated and rural areas see less to gain from increased competition. In sum, regional differences are remarkable in France, especially considering the relentless and centuries-old efforts of the state to homogenize the country. Important regional differences survive.

Generational Differences

Young people differ from the old in several important ways in France, as in most other European countries. Earlier, we discussed the example of the French citizen in retirement and noted all the political regimes, wars, occupations, and crises that such a person would have experienced. One thing we did not mention was the tremendous increase in the standard of living that such a person would have enjoyed over the years. In spite of the various constitutional fights, France, like other countries in western Europe, was transformed from an agricultural to a postindustrial society. (In fact, the French refer to the period from 1945 to 1975 as the *trente glorieuses,* or the "thirty glorious years," because of the rapid economic growth and improvements in their material well-being during that postwar period of prosperity.) The life experiences of people younger than thirty-five years old are entirely different, and for those under twenty-five, even more distinct from those of their grandparents. For those born after World War II, instability, poverty, and deprivation that come with foreign occupation and wartime are unknown. Most have lived only under the Fifth Republic constitution and have begun to take it as much for granted as Americans do theirs. Further, they have not known the degree of ideological hostility or retributions of the Resistance and the Occupation period. A generation of citizens who lived through war, instability, and revolutionary political change has been replaced by a generation that has only known peace and stability. Only 12 percent of the French are 70 years old or over, whereas 25 percent are 19 years old or younger. The current president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, is the first president born after World War II; he was born in 1955, so except for his infancy, he has never known a constitutional regime other than the current one. The legacy of constitutional instability in France is lessening, now that the Fifth Republic has been in place for so long.

Younger people in Europe have grown up during a period of unprecedented economic growth and bounty. Further, they grew up in cities rather than in rural areas, they are more likely to have found work in the service sector of the economy rather than in traditional industrial jobs, and they are very highly educated compared to their elders. Finally, younger people have grown up during an age when European integration was the norm. They are much more likely than their elders to have studied languages in school

(French schoolchildren take a minimum of two languages throughout high school) and to have traveled abroad. In sum, young people in France and in Europe have grown up in a stable, increasingly prosperous, internationalist, and postindustrial country. This is a tremendous contrast to the instability, the destruction, and the nationalism of many countries in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s when their parents and grandparents were young.

What difference does any of this make? It matters because generational replacement is likely to lead to great changes in the fortunes of the various political parties and in the types of political leaders that France will choose. There are strong signs that the traditional political parties in France are less appealing to the young. Traditional class conflict, based on conditions of industrial employment in particular, seems irrelevant to many young people with college degrees but with midlevel service positions. They are not workers, but not owners, either. Other issues appeal to the young, including the fight against racism, movements to protect nature and the environment, and European integration. While each of the major political parties in France has tried to appeal to younger voters, we will see in later sections that they have not been completely successful and that there may be new parties in France in the future. For an older generation that lived through two World Wars, the development of the European Union is first and foremost a way to avoid any future wars between France and Germany; if you were to listen to speeches of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing or other Europeanists of that generation, they might well point to peace between these countries as the greatest accomplishment of the European Union. But for younger people who have never lived through wars (but who are forced to learn about it in history books and to see commemorations of what seems increasingly like ancient history—in May 2005 Europeans celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II), they take for granted a single currency, the ability easily to travel or study in other countries, and other accomplishments of the EU. They also see a 12 percent unemployment rate (something their grandparents definitely did not have to worry about), massive difficulties in getting a good first job, an expansion of the EU toward lower-wage areas in the East, and possible career options that will force them to consider living in other countries for long periods if they want to have a successful career in business. Further, they see political parties with entrenched and increasingly elderly leaders, sexist tendencies allowing few women to play leading roles in them, and an attachment to a cleavage relating to industrial relations that is no longer relevant.

In April 2005, President Chirac started his highly visible campaign to promote a Yes vote in the Referendum for the European Union Treaty with a televised "town meeting" event with young people (under age 29). The meeting was generally considered to be a disaster for the president. After ten years in office, he had begun really to look old rather than only mature. Further, where he wanted to talk about the accomplishments of the European Union in terms of ensuring peace and stability on the Continent,

many of his young questioners were more concerned with how they were going to get a job. The generational disconnect was apparent. No wonder that young people are more alienated than their elders. They take for granted the various accomplishments of Europe in the decades from before their birth, but worry about their own economic future in the face of globalization. On May 29, young people voted against the treaty in even larger numbers than French voters in general. President Sarkozy has a much greater ability to connect with the young; however, he can be a divisive figure as well.

Religiosity, social class, and regionalism may be said to be traditional political cleavages in France. Generational differences are a rising concern and may portend great changes in the French political landscape. No other issue is likely to be as important as that of immigration in the future, however.

Immigration and Minorities: A New Conflict for France and for Europe

We saw earlier that the French state has historically been extremely successful in creating a *nation*. French people, on average, are proud of their national identity. Ninety percent of those polled in 1988 said they were "proud to be French" (Boy & Mayer 1990, 21). However, the French nation is changing rapidly through immigration. Compared with the United States, France is an ethnically homogeneous society, though historically the degree of homogeneity of French society has been more a matter of myth than fact. Immigration has long been an important part of French history, and waves of immigrants have successively been received and integrated into French society. In the past thirty years, however, immigration has become a hot political issue in France, and nationalism has been on the rise.

France has long been a country of immigration: About 7 percent of the population has been made up of recent immigrants, a level that has been relatively stable for most of the twentieth century. Whereas the immigrants once came from Belgium, Poland, Germany, Spain, and Italy, major shifts occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. Massive labor shortages caused huge influxes of workers from relatively poor countries with cultures very different from that of France. French employers, with the aid of the state, actively recruited working men in poorer countries, particularly in North and West Africa. The rise in immigration from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia and from the former French colonies in West Africa has had a dramatic impact on France. These new immigrants have not adapted so easily or willingly to the French way of life. When labor shortages were severe, the French welcomed these workers. After the oil crisis and the rises in unemployment in the mid-1970s, however, new problems arose. Many of the immigrant workers had been in France already for decades, and their families had joined them.

The top three nations from which immigrants came to France in 1954 were Italy, Spain, and Poland. By 1982, the top three sources of immigration had shifted to Portugal, Algeria, and Morocco (Gastaut 2000, 12). During

the period of rapid economic expansion in the 1960s, over 200,000 Algerian workers were brought into France each year in a massive government-sponsored program to ease labor shortages. These numbers rose from 42,000 in 1958 to 356,000 in 1971 (Schor 1996, 204). Over the long term, these waves of immigration have had a dramatic impact, especially because they have been complicated by two factors: the economic downturn of the 1970s and the Algerian war of independence, ending in 1962.

During the early years, when the economy was growing steadily and unemployment was low, the general view was that foreign workers helped the economy and French workers themselves. They helped the economy by providing much of the labor for growing industrial corporations: Factories were full of temporary foreign workers, who helped French workers by taking the menial, difficult, and low-paying jobs. (Any visitor to Paris would have seen during those years that garbage collectors, street sweepers, and other manual laborers were often North Africans or other minorities.) In repeated polls in 1966, 1971, and 1974, over 70 percent of the French public stated that they believed immigrants took jobs that the French would not want; only 14 to 19 percent thought that they took away jobs that the French would want. This attitude remained stable until the economy went sour and unemployment began to rise after 1974. In polls conducted in 1985 and 1989, the numbers were reversed: 72 and 71 percent considered that immigrants took good jobs away from unemployed French workers; just 24 and 27 percent, respectively, thought the immigrants took undesirable jobs (Gastaut 2000, 304). Clearly, immigrants who were once tolerated because they made life better came to be seen in a much more hostile light when the "thirty glorious years" came to an end in the 1970s. In recent decades, immigration has become an increasingly volatile political issue in France.

The other element that complicates the issue considerably is the Algerian War. Algeria was ruled by France from the nineteenth century until it gained its independence in a bloody war that ended in 1962. Hundreds of thousands of French *pieds noirs* (settlers) fled the country for France. Equally large numbers of Algerians, known as *harkis* (Algerian soldiers who had fought on the side of the French, not for independence) also fled for France. Finally, supporters of independence for Algeria, of course, had many ties in France, since hundreds of thousands of Algerians already lived in France; a 1961 demonstration of support for the Algerian cause was brutally put down by the French police, with several demonstrators killed. In fact, 10 percent of the entire French population is estimated to have been directly affected by the war, even thirty years after it took place. This includes 3 million French men who were drafted into the military between 1955 and 1962; 1 million *pieds noirs* (French colonists), who returned to France and live there today; and 1 million *harkis,* loyalist Arab citizens of French Algeria who fled to France just as the white colonists did after the war (Gastaut 2000, 31ff.). With 5 million French having such close ties, including 2 million who were forced to emigrate, it is no wonder that the

Algerian War continues to have a great impact on French society. Ironically, most Americans know almost nothing about it. (In an interesting twist, during the Iraq War when U.S. forces were surprised by the strength of the Iraqi insurgency against it, Pentagon officials were said to be showing a 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers,* depicting the difficulties of urban warfare and how French military tactics often served to mobilize the resistance rather than to subdue it, even as they might have won any other military battle.) In any case, the Algerian War continues to reverberate through French politics even forty-five years after its end.

Competition for jobs, the need for cheap labor, ethnic tensions, and national pride are all mixed into the politics of immigration in France. One thing is clear, however: The politics of immigration has been dramatically transformed in the past decades and will remain an important and growing part of the political agenda in France for years to come.

Far from being only seasonal workers expecting to return back to their countries at the end of a contract, the new immigrants to France have established themselves permanently. However, unlike preceding generations of immigrants, they have not all assimilated into French society, and many have questioned the value of doing so. Like immigrants in the United States, many want to maintain their own cultures rather than "fit in." Unlike the United States, however, France is not accustomed to this type of mosaic of different cultures. With the rise in unemployment following the oil crisis of the mid-1970s, many French have begun to resent the presence of so many foreigners. Recent immigrants to France differ from their predecessors because of their religious and cultural backgrounds, and because they have come to the country during a period of high levels of unemployment and of economic stagnation rather than during a period of growth. The combination of these differences has caused many problems for these new immigrants and their children.

Table 5 summarizes trends in immigration since 1962. It makes clear some transformations of the population but also some of the contradictions in the French debate on immigration. There has been no long-term increase in the extent of immigration, since it has remained at about 6 to 7 percent of the population consistently (and in recent years it has even declined). Further, as is normal, neighboring countries such as Italy, Spain, and other European countries still supply the bulk of France's immigrants. However, there have been undeniable shifts. Whereas in 1962 almost 50 percent of all immigrants to France were from Italy or Spain, these countries no longer supply the bulk of French immigrants. Algerian immigrants have long been an important part of the story (note that the series starts in 1962, when Algeria received its independence and hundreds of thousands of Algerians moved to France), but they have been increasingly joined by Tunisians, Moroccans, and sub-Saharan Africans, as well as by large numbers of Asians. As in earlier generations of immigration, the new immigrants tend to take low-paid jobs and to work hard. In contrast to Poles, Spaniards, and Italians

TABLE 5
Changing Patterns of Immigration

	Population census of					
	1962	**1968**	**1975**	**1982**	**1990**	**1999**
Total population, Metropolitan France	46,520,000	49,778,000	52,788,000	54,631,000	56,823,000	58,776,000
Number of immigrants	2,861,280	3,281,060	3,887,460	4,037,036	4,165,952	4,306,094
Percent immigrants	6.2	6.6	7.4	7.4	7.3	7.3
Percent from:						
Europe	78.7	76.4	67.2	57.3	50.4	44.9
Italy	31.8	23.9	17.2	14.1	11.6	8.8
Spain	18.0	21.0	15.2	11.7	9.5	7.3
Africa	14.9	19.9	28.0	33.2	35.9	39.3
Algeria	11.6	11.7	14.3	14.8	13.3	13.3
Morocco	1.1	3.3	6.6	9.1	11.0	12.1
Tunisia	1.5	3.5	4.7	5.0	5.0	4.7
Other	0.7	1.4	2.4	4.3	6.6	9.1
Asia	2.4	2.5	3.6	8.0	11.4	12.8
America, Pacific Islands	3.2	1.1	1.3	1.6	2.3	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

who came before them, these more recent immigrants typically do not have the same European cultural background and, of course, there are many problems of assimilation. France does not think of itself as a "melting pot," but since the 1970s immigrants have come in massive numbers to France without the intention of disappearing into the cultural mix of France. It has become a multicultural society, whereas it did not have that tradition. Assimilation, rather than diversity, had been the historical tradition.

As in many of its neighboring countries, France is having a very difficult time dealing with the pressures of immigration. Economic pressures, unemployment, and the competition for jobs are strong in France as they are in many countries. As in many countries as well, there is an unsettling tendency to use the rhetoric of nationalism to blame many current problems on the immigrant population. (Jean-Marie Le Pen, the far-right political leader, often gives speeches in which he argues, "3 million unemployed is 3 million immigrants too many"—whether the French would want the low-paid jobs that many immigrants take is another question, of course.) In spite of the new and sometimes highly charged political debates surrounding immigration, there is nothing new about immigration for France; it has long been a country of extraordinary openness to economic and political refugees. And, of course, as a major colonial power like Britain, the cultural ties it created with many countries in Asia and Africa guarantee that large numbers of individuals from those countries will continue to seek to come to France. In fact, the French discussion about immigration is not really so much about immigrants anymore as it is about the second and third generations of children born to these immigrants. They are often referred to as immigrants, but they are not in any sense immigrants, but rather French

citizens of different ethnic backgrounds. This ethnic diversity is new in a country that had been virtually all white and of a single dominant religion. In this sense, the new politics of ethnic diversity is much different from what we know in the United States, where the ethnic diversity of our history has certainly not meant that we all get along. In France, there is no such long-standing tradition of diversity in the first place; in the past, those who immigrated to France did so from relatively similar countries and assimilated into the French language and culture relatively seamlessly. The political debate about "immigration" in France is really one that Americans would recognize as being about race or ethnicity; it has little to do anymore with new arrivals. In fact, in spite of all the rhetoric, the best recent evidence suggests that Arab immigrants, just like previous waves of immigrants before them, are oriented toward assimilation, though it takes time. The grandchildren of Algerian, Tunisian, and Morrocan immigrants, whose families have lived in France for all that time, have vastly different political attitudes (and educational and economic aspirations) from more recent arrivals, even those from the same countries (see Brouard and Tiberj 2005).

A Homogeneous Country Divided

France represents an interesting contrast to the United States. Although this has been changing dramatically in recent years with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from outside of Europe, France traditionally has been a very homogeneous country: Racial divisions were nonexistent, the vast majority of the population was of the same religious background, and regional differences were long since "handled" by the centralization of the regime. Nevertheless, perhaps because they have so much in common, the French are greatly and deeply divided: While the vast majority is Catholic, strong differences remain between those who attend church regularly and those who do not. While the vast majority is white, social-class differences divide them nonetheless. While the vast majority has great pride in being French, political opinions differ dramatically. While France is resolutely a supporter of European integration, there are great differences in the level of enthusiasm with which different people embrace the idea of further cooperation with neighboring countries. After all, many elderly Frenchmen were engaged in wars in earlier years against these same countries, but younger people are more tolerant: They are likely to have gone to summer camp abroad or to have stayed with families abroad as part of a cultural exchange through their school. Learning about foreign cultures in school and through visits is different from learning about them through war. On the other hand, younger people face much greater uncertainties about their job prospects than did their grandparents, who came of age when there was virtually no unemployment.. So many young people are concerned about the impact of the EU on jobs and job security. The way people of different generations relate to the European Union is greatly affected by their differing historical experiences.

All in all, we can say that while France remains demographically more homogeneous than the United States, Canada, Belgium, or many other countries, it is home to a great variety of opinions. In the next section, we turn our attention to how these diverse opinions and interests are represented in government.

► POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

We saw in the previous section that there are many things that divide the French. These differences are by no means so severe, however, that they cause paralysis. On the contrary, the French government operates relatively smoothly. A great variety of interests is represented within the governmental structures through a variety of means. Of course, not all interests are well represented, but in this section we will examine some of them. Interests are represented first through political parties and elections, so we will turn our attention to those. Subsequently, we will note how interest groups and social movements are also important to the French political system, and we will discuss how these groups are organized as well.

Political Parties

France has always had a multiparty political system. That is, in contrast to the United States or to Great Britain, there has always been a great number of serious political parties. This makes describing the party structure in France somewhat complicated, since not only have there always been many parties, but they have periodically changed their names, merged with others, risen to great popularity, or dropped away. The multiparty system stems from the great variety of interests present in French society, from the various social cleavages that we discussed earlier, and from the electoral system that allows for a variety of parties to be represented in Parliament. We will discuss each of these factors in this section.

Table 6 shows the results of the 2007 legislative elections, and Table 7 shows the results of the presidential election of that year. We can see that diversity of views is not a problem here. The major French parties range from Communist to neo-Fascist, with almost every stripe in between. Only a few parties get a lot of votes. Some of the smaller parties have been around for a long time, but others are transient groups organized by major political figures who are dissatisfied with their own party for one reason or another. Parties sometimes serve the purposes of single individuals in France, though most of them, and all of the larger ones, are substantial organizations with long-standing histories. As Table 6 shows, there are a number of very small parties that get less than 3 percent of the vote; this diverse group includes Trotskyists, dissident environmentalists (that is, who broke off from the main environmental party, The Greens), dissident neo-Fascists (who broke off from Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front), and an anti-globalization group following José Bové. (He is the pipe-smoking farmer and union

TABLE 6

The Legislative Elections of 10 and 17 June 2007

Party	Label	Percent vote first round	Number of seats	Percent of seats
Union for a Popular Movement (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*	UPM	39.54	313	54.25
New Center (*Nouveau centre*)	NC	2.37	22	3.81
Diverse Right (Various small parties)	DD	2.47	9	1.56
Movement for France (*Mouvement pour la France*)	MPF	1.20	1	0.17
Total "Presidential Majority"		**45.58**	**345**	**59.79**
Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste*)	PS	24.73	186	32.24
French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français*)	PCF	4.29	15	2.60
Diverse Left (Various small parties)	DVG	1.97	15	2.60
Left Radical Party (*Parti Radical de Gauche*)	PRG	1.31	7	1.21
The Greens (*Les Verts*)	VEC	3.25	4	0.69
Total "United Left"		**35.55**	**227**	**39.34**
Democratic Movement (*Mouvement Démocratique*)	MoDem	7.61	3	0.52
Regionalists and Separatist Parties		0.51	1	0.17
Miscellaneous (*divers*)	Div	1.03	1	0.17
National Front (*Front National*)	FN	4.29	0	–
Other Far Left	ExG	3.41	0	–
Hunting, Fishing, Nature, Traditions (*Chasse, pêche, nature, traditions*)	CPNT	0.82	0	–
Other Ecologists		0.80	0	–
Other Far Right	ExD	0.39	0	–
Totals		**99.99**	**577**	**100.00**

Rate of abstention: 39.56% in first round; 40.01%, second round
Source: http://www.electionworld.org/france.htm

TABLE 7

The Presidential Election of 22 April and 6 May 2002

Candidate	Party	Label	First round	Second round
Nicolas Sarkozy	Union for a Popular Movement	UMP	31.18	53.06
Ségolène Royal	Socialist Party	PS	25.87	46.94
François Bayrou	Union for French Democracy	UDF	18.57	–
Jean-Marie le Pen	National Front	NF	10.44	–
Olivier Besancenot	Revolutionary Communist League	LCR	4.08	–
Philippe de Villiers	Movement for France	MPF	2.23	–
Marie George Buffet	French Communist Party	PCF	1.93	–
Dominique Voynet	The Greens	Verts	1.57	–
Arlette Laguiller	Workers' Struggle	LO	1.33	–
José Bové	Anti-globalization activist		1.32	–
Frédéric Nihous	Hunting, Fishing, Nature, Tradition	CPNT	1.15	–
Gérard Sch	Workers' Party	PT	0.34	–
Totals			**100.01**	**100.00**

Note: Abstention in the first round was 16.23%; in the second round, 16.03%
Source: http://www.electionworld.org/france.htm

activist with a droopy mustache, who became famous in 1999 when he led a group that destroyed a McDonalds and who has since remained in the news with a variety of environmental and anti-globalilzation protests and demonstrations.) There is even a group that is present in virtually all French elections, representing fishermen, hunters, and rural interests in general. As the table shows, these groups are notable mostly for their extremely feeble electoral showings, though they do sometimes make the race more interesting to watch on television! We'll review the major parties below.

The Parties of the Left The major parties of the left in France are the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS). Their histories are closely intertwined. At the turn of the century, there was only one party, the Socialists, led by Jean Jaurès, who was assassinated just before World War I. If you travel to France, you will see streets and squares named after Jaurès, one of the great heroes of the French left. With the Russian Revolution in 1917, divisions among the parties of the left became the rule across almost all of western Europe. Different groups adopted different attitudes toward the events in Moscow. Some saw the Bolsheviks as the new leaders of an international movement of workers; others considered that their work was essentially domestic and wanted to avoid any strong ties to the new leaders of Russia and the Soviet Union. In 1920 the split came: Communists in Moscow asked each of the parties of the left across western Europe (and elsewhere) to form an alliance as members of the Communist International, and they laid out twenty-one points of membership. At the Congress of Tours, French Socialists met to discuss the proposal. The majority of the party agreed to join and (as was stipulated in the rules) changed its name to the French Communist Party (PCF).

A minority of the party refused and, after a bitter fight, walked out. It formed a new party, called the *Section française de l'internationale ouvrière* (French Section of the Workers' International, or SFIO). This group refused a number of elements of the twenty-one points, in particular the demand that the party refuse to participate in reform or negotiation with "bourgeois" governments or parties, that it work for revolution rather than for reform. France developed two major parties of the left and has always had them, since the Congress of Tours in 1920. The SFIO was renamed the *Parti socialiste* (Socialist Party, or PS) when it was reorganized and given new direction by François Mitterrand in 1969.

Disputes between the Communists and the Socialists have been many and long-lasting. And yet, at the same time, the two parties have been allies. During the late-1970s they issued a Common Program for government, and in 1981 both Socialists and Communists were included in the government. Still, cooperation between these two rivals has always been difficult. The two parties are in fact very different, both in their internal structures and procedures and in their platforms and activities. The Communist Party has traditionally had a strong organizational structure, with local cells, a mass

circulation daily newspaper (*L'Humanité*), and an organizational culture of democratic centralism. Democratic centralism means that there are debates within the party to determine its platform positions, but that once these decisions are made, party members are expected not to criticize the leadership. This policy has led many important members of the party to leave or to be expelled, as they have refused to be silent when they have disagreed with party positions. In terms of platforms, the French Communist Party has been an ardent advocate for workers' rights, but its most notable position historically was to cultivate close ties with and support the Soviet Union in almost every way. The PCF issued public statements condoning the invasions of Hungary (1956), Prague (1968), and Afghanistan (1978). In perfect hindsight, of course, this linkage was a disaster for the party, but during the Cold War it was not so obvious as it seems today.

The Communist Party was outlawed during the German Occupation of France, and its members were among the most active bands of Resistance fighters. After the war, the PCF emerged as one of the largest parties. Throughout the Fourth Republic it had the steady support of 25 to 30 percent of the electorate, often emerging as the largest party in France. Support for the Communists has declined rapidly since the 1980s, however. Their Stalinist attitudes toward internal dissent have caused rifts, their support for the Soviet Union has proved embarrassing, and some powerful voter shifts toward the Socialist Party have made them lose vote share regularly. In 1978 they were outvoted for the first time by the Socialist Party, when their vote share declined to 21 percent. In 1981 their candidates received only 16 percent of the vote. In 1986 they suffered a further erosion, gaining only 9.8 percent of the vote. In the 1995 race for the presidency, Robert Hue received 8.6 percent of the vote, and then only 3.4 percent in 2002, and in the 2007 race Marie George Buffet got less than 2 percent of the vote, as shown in Table 7; in the 1997 legislative race, they showed steady support at 9.9 percent of the vote, with 37 seats in the National Assembly, but by 2002 they had eroded further with just 4.8 percent of the vote and only 21 seats, and finally in 2007 down further to just 4.3 percent of the vote and 15 seats as shown in Table 6.

Although the PCF emerged from World War II as the dominant party of the left in France, today it is in serious danger of losing all representation in Parliament. The future of the PCF appears to be one of a hard core of steady supporters, but it is unlikely to regain its previous stature as the largest party of France. In fact, it could disappear altogether as a major party; already it is not taken as seriously, as the right increasingly ignores it and rivals on the far left compete more effectively for space in the public discussion. Over the past 50 years, the decline of the Communist Party is one of the most remarkable developments in French politics.

The Socialist Party is the primary cause for the decline of the PCF and the primary beneficiary. It contrasts with its rival in many ways. Its internal structures not only allow for debate and dissent but almost call out for it. It

is the only French political party to have formal *courants* ("streams," or factions) within it. The diversity of views represented within the party makes for some great internal debates about which individuals should lead the party. During the 1970s and 1980s these were always handled with the knowledge that François Mitterrand was the undisputed leader. However, with the retirement of Mitterrand in 1995 (and his death in January 1996), the internal competition for the leadership of the Socialist Party has been strong. Many leaders, including several former prime ministers, emerged as potential successors to Mitterrand as head of the party. Most prominent for a time was Lionel Jospin, who waged a surprisingly successful campaign for president in 1995, having won the leadership of the party only that same year. His 47 percent showing against President Chirac in the second round of the presidential election was better than many expected, and put him in a strong position to lead the party in the future. But the party (and Jospin in particular) suffered an unexpected disaster in the 2002 presidential elections. Jospin was the incumbent prime minister at the time, running against the incumbent president, Jacques Chirac. The two were neck-and-neck in the polls and all expected a second ballot showdown between the two, repeating the 1995 election which Chirac had won. But the vote of the left was split with many rival candidates. To virtually everyone's surprise, President Chirac found himself in the second round not facing off against Jospin, but against Jean-Marie Le Pen, the ultra-right wing nationalist leader of the National Front. The FN had received 16.9 percent of the first-round vote, a record showing for it, and just barely more than Jospin's 16.2 percent. As the top two candidates go on to the next round, it was Le Pen rather than Jospin who appeared on the ballot. This caused a major embarrassment across France; leaders of all the major parties rallied for a Chirac victory, which he achieved two weeks later, with over 80 percent of the vote, as mainstream politicians of all kinds called for their supporters not so much to endorse President Chirac, but to repudiate the National Front leader. For the Socialist Party, however, this was a great embarrassment, and effectively ended the career of Lionel Jospin. In his place, no strong leader emerged; rather there are great rivalries in the party, as often occurs when a party is in the opposition.

After his crushing defeat, Lionel Jospin relinquished the leadership of the party, and in 1997 François Hollande became the leader, though not, as was traditional, the next presidential candidate. Hollande has led the party for the past ten years through considerable turmoil. Without a strong electoral base of his own (he is a deputy and the mayor of the town of Tulle, in southwest France), and not having previously been a minister, Hollande lacked the influence of previous leaders of the party such as Jospin, a former prime minister, or of Mitterrand, architect of the party. Serious rivalries among such leaders as Laurent Fabius, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Hollande, and Presidential candidate Royal have divided the party. These conflicts are not just personal; they include such major issues as whether to support or

oppose the 2005 referendum on the European Treaty. In an internal referendum, 60 percent of the party activists voted along with leader Hollande to support the Yes vote, but a large minority supported Fabius and others in rejecting the traditional pro-European stance of the party, arguing for the need for greater social protections and unemployment concerns. Hollande is the father of four children with his long-time partner, Ségolène Royal, herself a deputy and president of the regional government of Poitou-Charentes. When Royal won the nomination to be the Socialist Party candidate for president in 2007, this "power couple" was much in the news, and not always singing from the same song book. Shortly after her defeat in June 2007, indeed just hours after the polls closed, Royal announced her separation from Hollande.

The Socialist Party grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s because it began to appeal to both blue-collar workers and the new group of white-collar intellectuals, managers, and employees in the growing service sector of the economy. Its supporters did not espouse the strong class-warfare ideology or the Stalinist internal dynamics of the Communist Party. Once it became clear that the Socialists might become stronger than the Communists, ensuring that any coalition government would be dominated by the Socialists rather than by the Communists, many more people became willing to support the relatively moderate Socialist Party. Its share of the vote increased from 17 percent in 1968 to 21 percent in 1973, followed by a steady growth to 25 percent in 1978 and 38 percent in 1981. At this point, the PS achieved an absolute majority of the seats in the National Assembly, and its leader, François Mitterrand, won the presidency.

The 1981 election marked an important turning point in the history of the Fifth Republic, since it was the first time that any parties of the left participated in the government. Since this period, French politics has changed in many ways. As the Socialists were not able to solve all the problems of unemployment, treatment of workers, education, and integration of immigrant workers, and as they suffered some embarrassing corruption scandals, their popularity has declined. However, the French have also been reminded that the problems of government are not so simple that a single party, armed with a new ideology, can solve them with ease. The French have blamed the Socialist Party for its failure to solve the problems for which it had criticized the previous government. However, the French political system has become more subdued as a result of this as well: neither right nor left claims any longer to have a magic solution to the nation's problems.

The Socialist Party has always been a more diverse party than the Communist; a greater range of internal opinions have been welcome there. In recent decades the party has become extremely divided on a number of important issues, however, and has been in serious danger of splintering. The party was traditionally close to the Greens and had a substantial environmentalist leaning during the years when it was in opposition. However, during its years in power it did not adopt a substantially environmentalist

stance (though it was certainly closer to this than the conservative parties, most would agree). In fact, this is one of the reasons why the Greens were mobilized in the first place; there was no Green Party in France in the 1960s. Whereas the PCF has always viewed the European Union with hostility (seeing it as a tool of big business to increase profits and reduce workers' rights, for example, by using free trade rules to move manufacturing to the lowest cost areas), the Socialist Party has been one of the traditional supporters of the EU. In the 2005 referendum campaign for the European Treaty, however, the party has been badly split. After an internal referendum showed majority support for the treaty, party leader François Hollande mobilized support for the Yes vote. But some major leaders in the party, including former prime minister Laurent Fabius, actively campaigned for the No vote, in a direct challenge to the party leadership. In fact, with a conservative prime minister and president, many saw the election as a time to express dissatisfaction with the current national government, so the No vote had a certain appeal to those in the opposition. (In the 1992 European referendum, held while Mitterrand was president, PS voters overwhelmingly supported Europe.) In any case, the party is deeply split on its position regarding Europe at this point. Without a disputed leader and no one available to unite the party, it is in disarray. Europe is becoming one of those issues that breaks down the traditional party identities and where splinter groups and new political leaders may emerge.

The Parties of the Right The major parties of the right in France are divided just as the two parties of the left are. President Sarkozy is the undisputed leader of the Union for the Presidential Majority (UMP), an organization which he took over from his predecessor, Jacques Chirac. Relations between Chirac and Sarkozy were not easy, however, as Chirac openly supported rival candidates within his party, including Dominique de Villepin, who served as prime minister under Chirac while Sarkozy was in the number two position as Minister of Interior. In the months following the presidential election of 2007, both Chirac and de Villepin were under investigation by magistrates looking into allegations that they participated in a scheme to link Sarkozy to a shady series of financial dealings (including kickbacks and hidden foreign bank accounts by falsifying records associated with the "Clearstream affair," adding Sarkozy's name to a list of other prominent French officials linked to the affair). Chirac and de Villepin have defended themselves against these allegations, but Sarkozy is not likely to forgive easily, and the justice system continues to investigate. The UMP has achieved predominant status on the political right in France, largely eclipsing its rival *L'Union pour la démocratie française* (Union for French Democracy, or UDF), a party long led by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, president of France from 1974 to 1981. In the 2007 elections, President Sarkozy received over 31 percent of the vote in the first round, whereas François Bayrou, the UDF candidate, received 19 percent.

The UMP is the newest incarnation of what was previously called the *Rassemblement pour la République* (Rally for the Republic, or RPR), generally known as the Gaullist party. Its leader, Jacques Chirac, was prime minister from 1974 to 1976, again from 1986 to 1988, and was president of France from 1995 to 2007. The Gaullists and the Conservatives (that is, the UDF) have long dominated the political right in France, but they are increasingly divided; the Gaullists in particular are exceptionally prone to internal divisions. In the 1995 elections, President Chirac faced a challenge from his own party. Edouard Balladur, a Gaullist serving as prime minister, whom Chirac had expected not to run for the office in order to allow him easier access to it, in fact challenged his own party leader. After Chirac won (and Balladur was relieved of all functions in the party), he appointed a rival to Balladur, Alain Juppé, as prime minister in 1995. Juppé proved particularly unpopular in France, especially as a series of corruption scandals affected his public standing, and in 2007 Juppé lost his seat in Parliament, though he remains Mayor of Bordeaux. When President Chirac called surprise legislative elections in 1997, the prime minister's position was lost to the Gaullists. It was Lionel Jospin, a Socialist, who won control of the government. Since then, recriminations and rivalries have loomed large in the Gaullist camp, continuing through the preparations to the 2007 Presidential elections with Chirac and de Villepin refusing to support the eventual winner (and current president of France), Nicolas Sarkozy, until the last minute. Increasingly, the political right in France is divided because of two new issues: whether the EU is becoming too strong, and whether the parties should enter into any kinds of electoral coalitions with the increasingly strong but politically untouchable National Front. Traditional conservatives in France, such as former Presidents Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Chirac, are firmly pro-European and quite wary of any deals with the National Front, which they consider to be dangerously close to a neo-Fascist party. Whereas these views once dominated the political right, the two new issues of Europe and immigration increasingly divide French politicians of all kinds.

The second administration of President Chirac led to dramatic new rivalries in the Gaullist camp, and these grew only more intense as the 2007 elections approached. President Chirac appointed a relative outsider to be prime minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, after the 2002 elections. He had previously been a regional leader but was not visible at the national level. Prime Minister Raffarin proved to be quite unpopular (indeed polls in spring 2005 showed him to be one of the least popular prime ministers in decades), but President Chirac did not replace him until voters rejected the Treaty on European Union on May 29, 2005. During his entire term, he enjoyed a huge majority in Parliament. This does not mean that rival politicians refrained from criticizing him sometimes quite severely, including Dominique de Villepin (former Minister of Foreign Affairs who very visibly debated against the U.S. invasion of Iraq at the United Nations), and Nicolas Sarkozy (leader of the UMP and Interior Minister at the time). The

Socialist Party was sometimes held together only by the leadership of President Mitterrand; similarly the Gaullists showed signs of rivalry and ambition as the Chirac years came to a close and ambitious politicians jockeyed for position. Prime Minister Raffarin's unassuming style and loyalty to the president were much appreciated by President Chirac, but shortly after the disastrous referendum vote the president chose Dominique de Villepin to replace Raffarin as prime minister. During the Villepin government, rivalries between the prime minister and Interior Minister Sarkozy reached new levels. Now, with President Sarkozy firmly in control of the party, his undisputed leadership may allow him to refashion the party. But with these strong personalities and personal rivalries, it is no easy task..

The UDF, like the Socialist Party, is made up of a number of different groups. Actually, it is a coalition of smaller parties. Each of the component parts of the UDF shares, however, a belief in the value of the market system, in international trade, and in reducing the role of the state. The Gaullists share many of these values, in particular the emphasis on promoting business growth. However, historically the Gaullists have been much more willing to use the powers of the state to intervene in the economy to achieve certain ends that they deemed important, such as the glory of France. Practically speaking, this has meant that the Gaullists have been more willing than the Conservatives to engage in state subsidies of important industries and to enact protectionist barriers so that French industries could be saved from competition. In other domains as well, the Gaullists have been more willing to use state power than the Conservatives. For example, several Gaullists, including a former interior minister, Charles Pasqua, have called for very strict measures to combat immigration, including deportations. Gaullists tend to be somewhat to the right of the Conservatives on social and economic issues. These strongly anti-immigration views, combined with the hostility toward the European Union, caused Pasqua to leave the RPR and to create a new party, the RPF in 1999; the Gaullists are much more divided on these issues than the Conservatives. As a result, the RPR is in danger of splintering, whereas the UDF remains more stable. As we saw for the Socialists, Europe is also a point of disagreement. Whereas the UDF, with its business and free-trade ideology, has always been in support of Europe and remains so, the Gaullists are more divided, potentially more receptive to criticisms of the European supranational ideal based on nationalism and patriotism. The National Front is overtly hostile to Europe, of course. So the question of Europe divides the right just as it divides the left. While interior minister, President Sarkozy was one of the harshest of the political right on the issue of immigration and what the French call "insecurity" (law and order). In response to rioting in poor suburbs surrounding Paris, Sarkozy referred to the unruly youth as "scum." How to deal with crime and immigration are major issues, of course, on the French political agenda. President Sarkozy, while serving as interior minister in the previous government, made clear that he favored a hard-fisted approach. Some suggest that

the electoral decline of the National Front in the 2007 elections is largely due to Sarkozy's success in preempting themes that had traditionally been left to them. Never before had a mainstream French politician used such a word as "scum" to refer to any group in society.

Together, Gaullists and Conservatives supplied every government from 1958 to 1981. Each of the presidents of the period, de Gaulle, Pompidou, and Giscard, came from this group. For an entire generation, then, France was ruled by a single coalition. Over such a long time, however, and especially after the events of May 1968, the parties developed an image of becoming stale. Finally, with the 1981 elections bringing a strong victory to the left, the parties of the right were suddenly in a position many French people had trouble even imagining. Those who had governed for so long were now in the opposition. In fact, France now has a relatively competitive party structure. While one side ruled the country for a whole generation without interruption, the practice of alternation is a part of accepted political practice now. Since the first experience with alternation in 1981, left and right have succeeded each other in power several times. With Sarkozy's impressive victory in the 2007 elections, the right is clearly in a dominant position for the near future. Of course, his political supporters *lost* seats in Parliament in the June 2007 elections (though they retained a majority), so the political situation in France is one of healthy competition between left and right (and, as one can tell, within left and right as well!).

The National Front, the Ecologists, and Smaller Parties France's main parties are the four just listed. However there are some new parties that merit serious attention as well. First is the National Front (*Front national,* or FN), a far-right party known for the bombastic speaking of its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, for its strong anti-immigrant views, and for some dangerous indications of anti-Semitism and of a new style of Fascism. Le Pen is a former paratrooper who speaks proudly of his service in the Algerian War, when he fought in the losing battle to keep Algeria a part of France. He burst on the national political scene in the 1986 elections, denouncing what he called the "Gang of Four" (the PC, PS, UDF, and RPR). Playing to the French fears of rising unemployment, he blamed many of the nation's problems on its immigrant population. With almost 10 percent of the vote in the 1986 elections, the party gained seats in the National Assembly, outpolling the Communist Party. Since that time the FN and Le Pen have been consistently in the news for their far-right views, and have polled consistently around 10 percent of the vote. The party received 15 percent of the vote both in the presidential elections of 1995 and in the legislative elections of 1997; they garnered only one seat in Parliament, however, because other parties of the right typically would not enter into a coalition with them. In 2002, they shocked the political establishment with a second-place showing in the presidential election, and an additional strong showing in the legislative elections that followed. They gained no seats in Parliament because of the

functioning of the single-member district system used for the National Assembly. Many regional and local elections are conducted by proportional representation, however, and the FN has emerged as an important power broker in some regions of France. This is one reason why one should not expect the French to adopt proportional representation any time soon for the National Assembly. In certain areas, especially those with large immigrant populations, the FN has achieved much higher scores than its national average. Le Pen and the FN are considered a danger by many, since Le Pen's views include describing the gas chambers as a "detail" in the history of World War II. Le Pen's share of the vote in the 2007 presidential election declined to just above 10 percent, and his supporters got only 4 percent of the vote in the legislative elections, as Tables 6 and 7 showed. Born in 1928, Le Pen was close to 80 years old during his last campaign in 2007, and the future of his party is unclear.

Another new political force is represented by the ecology movement. The two main ecological parties have attempted to avoid the normal left-right divisions of French politics, arguing for a "new way" of governing. Their major concerns, besides protection of the environment, include women's rights, reduction in the workweek in order to spread employment more broadly, and in general a "new form" of politics with greater emphasis on leisure, protection of minorities, and fighting pollution. While polls indicated considerable support for these ideas, particularly among the young, the 1993 results were clearly disappointing to the leaders of the two major ecologist parties. They had gotten over 14 percent of the vote in the 1992 elections to the Regional Councils and were expected to garner about 15 percent in the 1993 legislative elections, which could have brought them into the National Assembly. However, deep divisions between the two parties prevented effective coordination. The 1995 presidential race showed the electoral costs of such divisions, as the ecologist candidate failed to get even 5 percent of the vote, and in 2002 these divisions continued as the Green candidate received just 5.2 percent, with even further declines in the 2007 elections. These problems are based on personal rivalries between the leaders of the two groups and on differences in opinion on political tactics (such as whether there should be any ties or agreements with the Socialist Party, traditionally the major party with the closest links to the ecologists). The 1997 legislative elections brought the Greens into the National Assembly with 8 seats, but they got only 3 seats after the 2002 elections and 4 in 2007. Major rivalries among the various personalities of the Green movement limited their overall impact, and the tradition of decentralized leadership makes it hard for any strong personalities to emerge who can represent the movement and become well known by the public as, for example, are many other political leaders. The ecology movement in France has significant public support, but divisions among the political leaders have so far limited its electoral results to be less than what one might expect.

It is clear from this discussion that France has a lively (and complicated!) set of political parties. In fact, the newspaper *Le Monde* listed a total of sixty-six different parties in reporting the results of the 1993 legislative elections, and such numbers are not unusual in most national elections. Besides the major ones listed above, many were local independence parties, but several had national ambitions. These party names attest to their diversity: Hunting, Fishing, Nature, and Tradition; Communist Revolutionary League; New Royalist Action; Humanist party (see *Le Monde* 1993, 86). How can all this diversity be aggregated into a voting system and into a legislature? In the next section we consider how the French electoral system acts to winnow out many extremist parties.

Elections and Electoral Systems

The French use a complicated electoral system because there are so many parties running. Whereas in the United States we vote in one round and the candidate with the most votes wins (a plurality electoral law, with single-member districts), such a voting rule in France would be unfair and unpredictable since so many parties compete: one might win election with only 15 or 20 percent of the vote. But if you look back at Table 6 you can see that the French system produces glaring disparities between the percentage of the votes a party gets and the percentage of seats in Parliament. For example, Table 6 showed that the Presidential Majority got 46 percent of the vote in the June 2007 legislative elections, but received 60 percent of the seats. Such disparities are not uncommon. Table 8 shows, for example, that the Socialist Party, with only 26 percent of the vote in 1997, got 43 percent of the seats in Parliament. Prime Minister Jospin, the leader of the Socialists, was able to form a government even though his party had the support of only about one-quarter of the voters. (Of course, this was more than any

TABLE 8

Vote in First Ballot of Legislative Elections and Seats in the National Assembly, 1973–200 (percentages)

	Communist Party		Socialist Party		Conservatives (UDF)		Gaullists (RPR)		National Front		Ecologists		Percentage of votes won by winning party or coalition compared to seats in National Assembly
Year	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	
1973	22	15	21	21	**13**	**17**	**34**	**38**					47% votes, 55% seats
1978	21	18	23	24	**21**	**25**	**23**	**32**					44% votes, 57% seats
1981	16	10	**38**	**59**	19	13	21	18					38% votes, 59% seats
1986	10	6	31	36	**41**[a]	**48**[a]	[a]	[a]			10	6	41% votes, 48% seats
1988	11	5	**35**	**48**	18	23	19	22			10	0.2	35% votes, 48% seats
1993	9	4	20	12	**19**	**36**	**19**	**42**	13	0	11	0	38% votes, 78% seats
1997	**10**	**6**	**26**	**43**	15	19	17	24	15	0.2	**6**	**1**	42% votes, 50% seats
2002	5	4	24	24	**5**	**5**	**34**	**62**	11	0	5	0.5	39% votes, 67% seats
???	4	3	25	32	[b]	[b]	**40**[b]	**54**[b]	4	0	3	1	46% votes, 60% seats

[a] The UDF and RPR ran a joint list in the 1986 elections. Their totals are combined here.
[b] Refers to the Union for the Presidential Majority
Note: The 1986 election was by modified proportional representation. Scores of the winning party or coalition of parties are in boldface.

AU: What year are we adding and is Title Date Correct?

other party; the next most popular party in 1997, the Gaullists, got 17 percent of the vote.) But the tables were turned in 2002, when the Gaullists got 34 percent of the votes, but 62 percent of the seats! In 2007, the combined list of all those supporting the president got 46 percent of the vote, but retained a 60 percent share of the seats in Parliament. The electoral system that France uses is one of the key explanations of how it has a relatively stable government in spite of the great number of political parties.

Under a system of proportional representation, the *swing ratio,* or the ratio of the percentage of votes received to the percentage of seats obtained, would be 1:1. France used a system of proportional representation (PR) during the Fourth Republic, and one of the most important reforms of the Fifth Republic constitution was to create the complicated two-ballot system that France uses today. It works this way: French voters go to the polls on a Sunday where they are faced with candidates from a wide assortment of parties. In each parliamentary constituency (one for each of the 577 seats), any candidate who receives over 50 percent is elected. Given the multiplicity of parties, however, it is rare for anyone to be elected on the first round (in the 1993 elections, 80 members were elected in the first round; in 2002, 58; in 2007, 110). In the vast majority of districts, there is a second ballot one week later. At this second and final ballot, only those candidates who had received at least 12.5 percent of the first-round votes may remain on the ballot. The candidate receiving the most votes at the second ballot is elected.

Although the rules allow for many parties to remain *en ballotage,* or present at the second ballot, political realism dictates that in the vast majority of cases there are just two. In fact, the parties of the left and of the right generally have reached agreements (termed *mutual desistance agreements*) that pledge whichever of the partners gets fewer votes in the first round to drop out and to urge their supporters to vote for the candidate of the allied party. This is in order to prevent the seat from being taken by the mutual rivals: a party from the other block. For example, if the Socialists and Communists each polled 30 percent at the first ballot, but refused to cooperate and decide only on a single candidate to be present at the second round, a rightist might be elected if he or she combined the support of all those on the right, even though the left parties together controlled 60 percent of the vote. So tradition and practical politics dictate that the parties coordinate their efforts, generally leading to a showdown of a single candidate of the left facing a single candidate of the right at the second ballot. (The increasing importance of the ecologists and of the National Front, who sometimes refuse to participate in these agreements, has caused many electoral complications in France. As mentioned above, the question of whether or not to enter into an electoral coalition with the National Front has caused deep divisions, and sometimes outright splits, within the Gaullist party.)

The two-ballot electoral system that France uses has several effects. One is that it makes it almost impossible for small parties to gain seats in Parliament. Any party that spreads its support across many districts is likely

to come in consistently second, third, or fourth, but the seats go only to those who come in first in a district. As a result of this bias against small parties, the larger parties enjoy tremendous bonuses. In fact, in every election where this system has been used, the ranks of the winning party in Parliament have been swollen, sometimes dramatically. Of course, this comes at the cost of little or no representation for smaller parties or those with no electoral alliances. Table 8 shows how strong the bias has been in recent French elections.

Single-member electoral districts produce stronger majorities in Parliament than do proportional representation systems. In fact, the electoral system used in France during the Fifth Republic has been one of the sources of the president's power, since he can usually count on a stronger majority in Parliament than he might have otherwise. However, this comes at an obvious cost in terms of fairness, and small parties have consistently complained that the system was unfair to them. During the first twenty-five years of the Fifth Republic, it appeared that the parties of the right were consistently at an advantage, while the parties of the left were consistently disadvantaged. Indeed, both the Communists and the Socialists consistently demanded a return to proportional representation as had been used in the Fourth Republic. In 1981, when the Socialists were swept into power, they benefited from a huge bonus, gaining an absolute majority in Parliament with slightly less than 40 percent of the vote. It is clear today that the French electoral system is not biased against the left or the right; rather it shows a clear bias against any small or geographically dispersed parties. (Table 8 shows that the Communist Party has been consistently underrepresented in Parliament as well.) In any case, it was an article of faith on the left that proportional representation should be used, and in 1986 the electoral law was changed to PR for the first time in the Fifth Republic. The Conservative government of Jacques Chirac changed the law back after that election, however, and France has returned to the two-ballot system that is one of the hallmarks of the Fifth Republic. It is clear now that the electoral law is biased toward neither left nor right. Table 8 shows that in 1981 the left got 38 percent of the vote but 59 percent of the seats; in 1993, the right got 38 percent of the vote but a whopping 78 percent of the seats. The system's clear bias against small parties is sometimes seen as a positive. Not only does it give the Prime Minister a majority, but, the "success" of the electoral system in keeping the National Front out of Parliament even when it has gained considerable vote share has been often mentioned as a major accomplishment.

The French electoral system, as we can see, is distinctive and is a controversial part of the political debate in France. Unlike the United States, where no one questions the electoral law, there are serious public debates in France about what the law should be. The French all agree on the value of free and fair elections, but there are serious disputes about how they should be organized. Further, as is common, these disputes are related to partisan preferences: Ecologists, National Front supporters, and many

Communists complain about the electoral law. Socialist Party members used to complain of it as well, until it began to work in their favor in 1981. In general, it is fair to say that those whose parties have consistently benefited from the "electoral bonus" that the system gives to the larger parties have supported the system, while those from the smaller parties have been displeased with it. In any case, all agree that the main effect of the two-ballot electoral system is to give greater authority to the government by increasing its parliamentary majority. Disagreements concern whether this effect pushes the Fifth Republic too far toward efficiency and away from fairness, to return to a trade-off that we discussed at the beginning of our discussion of French politics. Many, especially those smaller parties who are effectively closed out of the system, argue that it simply is not fair. But each country makes these trade-offs, and with the instability that plagued the Fourth Republic, others argue that stability and order require institutions and laws that limit the debate in some way. The increasing importance of the National Front, and their proven ability to gain seats at the local and regional levels (where PR systems are used), provide one more reason to expect no change in the two-ballot system used in France for the National Assembly. Keeping small and extreme parties out of the Parliament is exactly what the system is designed to do. In addition, it makes the president and his government more powerful. So these are compelling arguments to hold up against a fairness argument on the other hand—contestable ones, certainly, but that is how it works.

Presidential elections in France are held by a similar system with two ballots (see Table 7). Many candidates appear at the first ballot, and only the top two vote-getters remain on the ballot in the second round. This ensures that the eventual president will have been elected by a majority of voters, at least at the second round. However, as the results of the 2002 election made clear, the winner may not have been the first choice of a great number on the first ballot. In American elections, the "weeding out" of candidates takes place during the primary season, so after the two major parties hold their conventions and nominate their candidates, the choices are limited. Of course, many names appear on U.S. presidential ballots, but not as many votes go to the smaller party candidates as in France. In France, there is usually just one candidate from each party, but there are so many parties that even the presidential election can be a surprise, as clearly happened in 2002.

Interest Groups

Just as there is a great diversity of views apparent across political parties in France, so there is a great number of rival interest groups. These range from the major labor unions to a huge multitude of local voluntary associations that deal with all sorts of political and social issues. The French interest-group system is lively indeed. Some might say that it is too lively. Even casual visitors to France are often confronted with an "action day" or some kind of public demonstration, strike, or work slowdown by an organized interest.

These are sometimes fun to watch, as when farmers organize a demonstration in Paris by setting up stands in various neighborhoods and passing out free food to demonstrate that they may as well give it away as sell it for the prices the market offers! Other times, as when the train or air traffic control workers show their muscles, it can be somewhat less than quaint.

The French interest-group system is diverse, but it is divided and sometimes weak. While many French people are members of associations, many also feel that interest groups are not the means through which interests should be represented. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most important French political philosophers, felt that one should distinguish between the "general will" of the society as a whole and the "particular wills" of any person, group, and segment in society. In a properly ordered government, he argued, the state would represent the general will. This Rousseauian view of the state as the guarantor of the general interest is very powerful in France. We will see below that the civil servants who staff the high positions in the state ministries certainly believe that their job is to serve the general will of the nation and, therefore, that they should feel free to enact policies to which any individual group might object. This philosophy also implies a reduced legitimacy to interest groups, and in French to use the word *groupe d'intérêt* is to imply something vaguely nefarious. It is not as pejorative as the term *le lobby,* but almost! When we look at interest groups in France, therefore, we will see an interesting contradiction. People, of course, value their right to form associations, labor unions, and the like, but many also resent what they see as the power of special interests and expect the state to use its powers to counter them.

Major interest groups in France include formal labor unions, business organizations, and professional associations, as well as smaller informal groups. We will look at each of those in turn. The major labor unions in France are old and venerable. However, they have always been split by ideological divisions, and only 8 percent of the work force is unionized as of 2003. (This is the result of a steady decline from over 25 percent in 1950, down to about 15 percent by 1980, and below 10 percent today.) Still, labor unions constitute the mechanism through which workers are represented in contract negotiations, they call strikes, and they play an important role for all workers, whether or not they are union members. Further, there are particular areas where unions represent much larger percentages of the work force, in particular among public-sector workers such as teachers. And, unlike the United States, where workplaces are either fully unionized or not at all, French unions are active in workplaces even where few workers may be members of them, or where different workers support different unions. No matter how many formal members they have, French unions take part in collective bargaining (that is, negotiating wages and work conditions) and over 50 percent of French workers work in companies where unions compete in the elections to serve on the boards that do this collective bargaining. So the effective importance of unions in the workplace is

much greater than their numbers of members reflect. The competitive nature of these collective bargaining elections also stands in sharp contrast with the monopolistic nature of U.S. unions; they are either present or not, but if they are present, there is only one union in any U.S. workplace.

In contrast to the situation in the United States and many other countries, French labor unions are organized by ideology rather than by profession. That is, in the United States we have the United Auto Workers, the United Steel Workers, the Teamsters, and the like, each of which is active only in one broad area of the economy. In France, to take the example of a single automobile plant, there might be six or seven labor unions competing for the membership of the workers and negotiating with management over working conditions and pay scales. Often in France, one union will call for a strike and others will not, so a plant will work at partial capacity. This ideological division is symptomatic of the French interest-group system. It precludes unity, but it reflects the great social divisions and historical events that have buffeted France throughout its history.

The major labor unions are as follows. The largest union is the *Confédération générale du travail* (General Confederation of Labor, or CGT). It is affiliated with the Communist Party and has long been the largest union in France. The *Confédération française démocratique du travail* (French Democratic Confederation of Labor, or CFDT) is one of the major rivals of the CGT. The CFDT is affiliated with the Socialist Party and has been known for its emphasis on worker participation and democratic norms of decision making. The CFDT was formed from a split in what had been a very important union, the *Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens* (French Confederation of Christian Workers, or CFTC). As its name indicates, the CFTC was associated with the Catholic church and argued for increased wages for the working class, of course, but differed dramatically from its rival the CGT by also emphasizing the spiritual needs of the workers. The CFTC was powerful during the early postwar years, but as churchgoing declined, its support diminished. The CFDT emerged from this organization and retains a relatively diverse membership and set of priorities, as compared with the more hard-line views of the CGT.

Other major unions include the rising star of the French labor movement, the *CGT-Force ouvrière* (Workers' Force, or FO). The FO stems from a break from the original CGT, and it is a more moderate union ideologically as well. Though none of these unions is formally tied to any political party as unions are in Great Britain, each tends to have a distinctive slant. FO's preferences seem to be toward the Socialists. The *Confédération générale des cadres* (General Confederation of White-Collar Workers, or CGC) recruits in the areas its name suggests. A variety of smaller unions also appeal for the right to represent workers across many areas of the French economy, but these are the major ones.

Specialized unions are active in some areas. In agriculture, a single union, the *Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles* (National

Federation of Farmers' Unions, or FNSEA) is by far the dominant presence, though it, too, has rivals. In education, the *Fédération syndicale unitaire* (United Trade Union Federation, FSU), is the largest single body. From its creation shortly after World War II until the late-1990s, education was unique in France in that it had a single labor federation. The *Fédération de l'éducation nationale* (National Education Federation, or FEN) was made up of forty-nine component unions, each specializing in different areas such as elementary schools, college professors, school principals, and the like. Further, these member unions of the FEN showed a variety of different ideological tendencies. The FEN finally ceased to exist in 1991 when the rival component unions decided to go their separate ways. Today the major unions in the field of education are grouped into the *Fédération syndicale unitaire* (FSU), which took on the Communist-leaning unions of the former FEN, and the *Union nationale des syndicats autonomes* (UNSA), the new home of the Socialist-leaning unions dominated by the huge union representing elementary school teachers, the *Syndicat national des instituteurs* (SNI). The FSU's main component union is the *Syndicat national des enseignants du second degré* (SNES), which represents high school teachers. The SNI and the SNES regularly fought over the degree to which the FEN should adopt various positions and these battles finally became so great that the large union federation split into two. Such a story is ironic in this area, since the FEN was created originally when its leaders refused to join either the CGT or the CFDT and vowed to join together. That worked for about 50 years, but in the 1990s it fell apart. In any case, one can see that ideological divisions remain great among French unions of all kinds.

Students, too, have unions to represent them, though few are members. Still, when the government seeks to negotiate over such things as tuition payments, housing allowances, and the state of the universities, it can turn to the *Union nationale des étudiants de France* (National Union of Students of France, or UNEF). Not to be outdone by their elders in the union movement, the UNEF has great ideological debates and is now made up of two rival groups: *UNEF-Solidarité étudiante* (Student Solidarity) and *UNEF-Indépendante et démocratique* (Independent and Democratic). The first of these has historically been closer ideologically to the Communist Party, while the second has housed a great variety of views, from Trotskyists to Socialists. The student unions in general do not represent even close to a majority of students. However, like many organizations in France, they can spring to life during certain periods of crisis. During such a period their leaders can become the spokespeople for the groups they hope to represent, even though many are not members of their group. (Because of the low levels of representation, however, this kind of self-appointed spokesmanship is often controversial. Rivals complain that the organized group leaders do not really know what their "constituents" want; otherwise, their membership rates would be higher!)

Business interests are better unified than most other groups in France and have long had close relations with state bureaucrats. The *Mouvement des Entreprises de France* (Movement of French Business, MEDEF) faces no serious rivals in its efforts to represent large business firms. President Nicolas Sarkozy's brother, Guillaume, is a leading executive of MEDEF. Other specialized organizations represent small businesses, small industries, and a variety of other interests.

Labor unions in France are an important force despite their ideological divisions. They hold seats on official committees that make recommendations to the government, they provide elected representatives to various bodies that administer the social security funds and retirement benefits, but, most importantly, they negotiate with business leaders and with the government over wages and working conditions. As most of the unions developed with an emphasis on heavy industry, they tend to be of various stripes of the left and have long provided an important base of support for the political parties of the left. As industrial employment has declined, however, and as the unions of France have been unable to stop competing with each other over increasingly arcane ideological issues, they have seen their memberships steadily decline. New types of interest groups are becoming more important in France. These include the various social organizations active at the local levels and some massive social movements, especially those in favor of the environment and to combat racism. We look at those groups next.

Social Movements and Local Organizations

While many of the French view labor unions as "lobbies" and consider that they ask for special privileges which the government should resist, many local associations and powerful social movements have had a great impact on the French. Indeed, a great number are active in local associations. A major survey on the subject in 1983 found that over 8 million French people were members of sports clubs, 4 million were in unions or professional associations, 1 million in alumni associations, and that in all, two-thirds of all women and half of all men were members of some kind of association (Héran 1988). While participation in labor unions may be on the decline, other types of groups seem to be growing more and more popular in France.

In the area of the environment, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between the French Green party and a broader social movement of which it is a part. The distinction between an interest group and a political party is that a party offers candidates for elections, while interest groups do not. In the United States, the Sierra Club runs no candidates for office, though it may support candidates for office from one or another political party. In the French environmental movement, this distinction is blurred somewhat because the environmental movement attempts to combine both the functions of a general social movement and to have its own political parties. Membership is growing in these various environmental associations, and

increasing numbers of French people, especially the young, voice agreement with their goals.

One of the most significant new social movements in France is that led by a charismatic young man, Harlem Désir. *SOS-Racisme* has mobilized thousands of French since the early 1980s in support of protecting the rights of minorities. As the National Front's anti-immigrant rhetoric has gained attention, an important countermobilization movement sprang up. It included several organizations, such as SOS-Racisme, *France-Plus,* other human rights groups. Many of the major political parties—especially those on the left—moved to fight against racist and antiforeigner attitudes. These new social movements are having considerable success, and their hip events, street demonstrations, and new attitudes have gained the attention of political leaders of all the major parties. Globalization has spawned important protests and demonstrations in France as in other countries. The main group focusing on these issues is ATTAC, a group created in 1998 and which has a broad agenda focusing on debt, global poverty, anti-European Union initiatives, and a variety of other causes. In recent years, voluntary associations such as *The Children of Don Quixote,* created in 2006, have gained considerable attention as they distributed tents to homeless people in Paris, encouraging them to set them up in visible places, and inviting members of the public to come sleep in the campsites, including along the Canal St. Martin in central Paris. Eschewing traditional politics, many groups on the political left have gotten involved in such issues as homelessness, poverty, race relations, and anti-globalization issues.

The Effervescence of the French Interest-Group System

What can we say about all these interests being represented in France? First, there are many groups. Scarcely an interest or a political point of view exists in France, it seems, without some organization, large or small, to promote its propagation. Second, we can note how small and divided they tend to be. Not in every area, but in many, there are rival groups competing to represent the same workers or interests. This competition often takes on, or is based on, ideological differences that Americans might find hard to comprehend. What difference does it make, one might ask, whether the people who negotiate with management over working conditions are motivated by one ideology rather than another if they are effectively working toward the same ends? Because of the historical instability of France and because of the great political revolutions that have shaken the country, divisions among people are strong. These historical divisions are formalized, to some extent, in the organizations that people join or feel close to. People prefer to have their own association rather than join an existing one from another social group. Sometimes this insistence on independence and "purity" can go quite far. For example, in France there are even rival versions of the Boy Scouts: some Socialist, some Communist, and some stemming from a Catholic tradition. Rival groups are not set up so much because any one group is actively hostile toward the others, but because it simply seems logi-

cal to create an organization of one's own. Many of these groups, therefore, have affiliations with each other because they stem from similar sociological groupings in society.

Many groups in France are effectively defined around the major social cleavages that have divided the French through the centuries. Many groups are defined as supportive of the church or harbor strong anticlerical views, for example. The Communist versus Socialist split that is apparent in the political party system certainly shows up again among various interest groups. Often children go to a certain kind of school, join a particular kind of after-school activity group, join a certain union when they enter the work force, and vote for a certain political party, all of which can be recognized by their common set of affiliations. In fact, it was often said that in certain Communist Party neighborhoods, the network of affiliated organizations was once so strong one could virtually go from birth to death without leaving it. So we can see that the social cleavages that we discussed in earlier sections are reflected in the organizations that represent the French, both in the political parties and in the interest groups. Socialist-inspired organizations often have anti-clerical roots. That is, they were often formed in reaction to the powerful role of the church in politics or everyday life. Teachers' unions are largely affected by the degree to which their main historical focus was anti-clericalism versus more of a Communist perspective on workers' rights. To this day, the issue of *laïcité,* or secularism, remains important in politics (such as in the example of the banning of Muslim head scarves), more so than in other countries. To understand why this is so, we have to look back at the history of the period when important social organizations were formed, and the reaction to the major social conflicts of the time. The church-state conflict was enormous. So was the industrial conflict. Of course, all these old conflicts are fading as new generations of French face new issues, such as globalization, immigration, a newly multicultural society, and international instability. There are clear strains in both the parties and the interest groups that represent the French because the cleavages on which they were founded are shifting under the feet of the political leaders. This process by which new social cleavages lead to new political organizations takes time, however. But it is clear that many French people find that the parties do not reflect their views on important issues, which is why alienation and abstention has risen. It also explains why new interest groups and new political parties are constantly being formed in France, as leaders attempt to catch up with the public.

Interest groups in France are many and divided, reflecting as they do the diversity and the events that have divided the French. From the point of view of the government, dealing with such a diverse group of "social partners" (as the state bureaucrats often call their interest-group opponents) is quite a task. But it is a task that the French government is well designed to handle, as we see in the next section.

With all the conflict and divisions that have long divided the French, it is clear that their system of government must provide the means to aggregate all these interests and to reach decisions. France has experienced a great range of constitutional structures over the centuries, as we have seen. The institutional arrangements of the Fifth Republic, France's current structure, are notable for the powers that they give to the leaders of the executive branch. Civil servants, governmental ministers, and the president wield important powers in the central government, which itself is far superior in its powers than any of the local levels of government. In considering the institutions of decision making, it is important to understand the role of the legislature, the organization of the executive branch, and the role of the judiciary.

The Legislature

The French Parliament is made up of the National Assembly and the Senate. The 577 members of the National Assembly (called *députés,* or "deputies") are elected for five-year terms. We discussed in an earlier section how the deputies are elected: a two-ballot system within single-member constituencies covering all France. The 322 members of the Senate are elected not by the public at large but by an electoral college that is made up of local elected officials: Deputies, members of General Councils, and delegates of the city councils (of which there are over 100,000) choose the senators. The Senate, therefore, represents the various localities, much in the same way that the U.S. Senate represents the states. Given the great number and small size of French *communes,* however, the French Senate is dominated by relatively small-town and rural interests. One-third of the senators are elected every three years, for a nine-year term.

Like the American Congress, the French Parliament is bicameral. However, the two chambers are not of equal powers. As in England, the lower house, the National Assembly, with its members being directly elected, is much more powerful than the upper house, the Senate, whose members are not directly elected. While there is an expectation that the National Assembly and the Senate will both agree to legislation in identical terms before it becomes law, in case of dispute, the National Assembly has the authority to rule definitively. Effectively, this means, as in England, that the Senate has the power to delay legislation, sometimes for as long as a year, but that in the end it cannot force the National Assembly or the government to adopt a text they do not prefer. Given the rural basis of the Senate, it has traditionally been much more conservative in its views than the National Assembly. This has occasionally led to conflict, especially after the 1981 election of President Mitterrand, when conservatives in the Senate, with encouragement from their allies in the National Assembly (who were outvoted in their own chamber), attempted to block many pieces of legislation. The constitution is clear, however, on this point. After considering the

Senate's views, the prime minister has the authority to ask the National Assembly to pass legislation over the Senate's objection, if necessary.

The Parliament has the authority to pass all laws. The constitution of 1958 spells out the specific areas of the domain of law: civil rights, criminal procedures, elections and the organization of local government, taxes, education, nationalization of industry, organization of national defense, property rights, employment and social security, etc. Any not spelled out in this list are reserved for the executive branch. In practice, it turns out that the list (called the *enumerated powers* of Parliament) is quite extensive and has been interpreted to make it even more extensive. In sum, Parliament passes laws in all important areas of French national life.

The Parliament can pass legislation in all important areas, but the government has considerable powers to influence the Parliament. For example, in a constitutional clause that would make an American president green with envy, the French prime minister may control the agenda of the National Assembly. Further, the government may write bills for consideration by Parliament. The government may also amend bills, and the government has veto power over amendments offered by members of Parliament. This all adds up to a situation where the prime minister may write a bill, submit it to Parliament, and be confident not only that it will pass but that it will pass with no amendments, or with only those amendments that the prime minister accepts. If members of the National Assembly are hesitant or attempt to delay legislation, the prime minister can cut short the debate and force a vote. All in all, the powers of the National Assembly, compared to those of the prime minister, are quite limited.

The constitutional restrictions on the power of members of Parliament are quite extensive. However, they are not complete. First, the Parliament has the power to pass a motion of censure of the prime minister. In this case, if a majority of members vote in favor, the prime minister and the entire government would be forced to resign. The president at that point would have the option of naming a new government or of dissolving the National Assembly and calling for new elections. In fact, the motion of censure is rarely used, partly for the obvious reason that a likely outcome is a dissolution of the Assembly, thereby putting all those currently in Parliament at risk of losing their seats! But the main reason that motions of censure are rarely successful is the strength of the parliamentary parties.

Members of Parliament are voted into office with the support and on the basis of their affiliation with a particular party. Within Parliament, the members of the various parties sit together, and virtually all the work and voting of the National Assembly is organized around these party groups, or caucuses. Members are expected to vote along with the recommendations of their party, and indeed voting statistics show that most legislation is passed with huge blocks of party-led votes either in favor, against, or abstaining. Party caucuses meet regularly to discuss upcoming legislation and the attitude that the party members should take; party leaders assign particular

members to make speeches or to conduct research about a particular bill; party groups, rather than individual members, generally do the bulk of the research and decision making concerning whether to vote in favor or against and whether to offer particular amendments. So strong is party leadership in the French Parliament that, until 1993, it was the accepted practice that when a vote is taken after much debate in committee and on the floor of the National Assembly, often only one or a few members from each party would be present; they would walk up and down the aisles of the Assembly, voting for each of their party colleagues by turning the key in their desk to *oui* or *non,* decided by the party. The view of an almost deserted chamber, with votes being cast for members who were not present, was a sign of the importance of party structures in the organization of the National Assembly. (It was also seen as a poor symbol of the quality of democratic debate, and the practice was abandoned in 1993.)

The strength of the parties is one of the reasons why the government itself is so strong. In France as in any parliamentary democracy, the leaders of the majority coalition in Parliament form the government. The leader of the largest party traditionally has been called upon to become the prime minister, though since the prime minister is chosen by the president, there is a certain degree of leeway as to how the major figure of the dominant party shall be chosen. The prime minister then chooses ministers from the parties that comprise his or her coalition. The "incompatibility clause" of the 1958 constitution states that any member of Parliament who is chosen to join the government (that is, to become a minister) must resign his or her seat in Parliament. (Often, ministers retain their positions as mayor of their town or city, however. Some examples include Pierre Mauroy, who was mayor of Lille while he served as prime minister from 1981 to 1983; Jacques Chirac, who was mayor of Paris while prime minister from 1985 to 1988; and Alain Juppé, who was mayor of Bordeaux while prime minister from 1995 to 1997.) The government may also contain ministers chosen from outside of Parliament, but in general the government is comprised of major figures from the majority party or parties in Parliament.

Logic dictates that the majority party members shall, in general, support the government. Since by definition the government must have the support of a majority of the members of Parliament before it can even be named, it is rare for a motion of censure to pass. Such a passage would mathematically require the support of at least some members of the parties supporting the government. Unless one of the parties in the government's coalition withdraws, or unless the government's majority in Parliament is razor thin, the chances of passage of a motion of censure are virtually nil. In fact, motions of censure were quite common in the Fourth Republic, and ministers came and went with some regularity. In the Fifth Republic, however, they have been extremely rare. The voting system keeps it that way. Government coalitions rarely have included more than two major parties since 1958, and they have usually enjoyed a significant majority in seats in the National Assembly.

Looking back to Table 8, we see how the electoral system creates a larger majority of seats in Parliament than would occur under straight proportional representation. The two-ballot electoral system, combined with strong party discipline in the National Assembly, creates a very stable executive branch in France. This is one of the most notable achievements of the Fifth Republic as compared to the Fourth Republic and is precisely what its founders hoped for.

Why are the parties so strong? They control the careers of the politicians. Members of Parliament can be elected from any district of the country, and the national parties typically decide who will run from which district. Therefore, they can choose to "parachute" a candidate into an easy district, ensuring that person a long career in the National Assembly. Just as easily, they can take the nomination away. Further, many elections, such as those for European Parliament and local and regional bodies, are run by proportional representation. In these elections, each party presents a list of candidates and, depending on the number of votes won, a certain number of these candidates are elected. But which ones? They are elected in the order in which they are presented on the list, so the parties' power to list the politicians in a certain order gives the parties the ability to prolong or put an end to the political careers of various politicians. If there are eighty seats and a party gets 10 percent of the vote, then the eight politicians listed at the top of the party list are elected; the other seventy-two must hope for a higher placement in the party list at the next election. Political careers can be started, prolonged, or ended by those who determine the placement of names on the party electoral lists; politicians themselves take these decisions very seriously. Cabinet positions, of course, are distributed by the prime minister, and as leader of his party, he is careful to choose those members who have been good party loyalists. Finally, electoral campaigns in France are very short in comparison with those in the United States. Most voters rely on partisan labels, in particular for legislative elections. The parties supply virtually all the money and material support for the candidates; unlike candidates in the United States, the French candidates themselves are not responsible for raising the money. All in all, the parties have great powers over the careers of the politicians, so the elected officials pay close attention to the party leaders. The strong parties of France are typical of most European countries, and stand in stark contrast to the candidate-centered politics of the United States.

Considering all the limits on parliamentary checks on the executive branch in France, one might question its purpose. But the National Assembly has proved itself to be an important venue for political debate in France. Ministers are regularly called into the chamber during regular Wednesday question hours during which they are forced to justify government policies, often in the face of hostile questioning. Parliamentary debates are widely reported in the media, and members of Parliament regularly offer amendments to legislation that are accepted by the government.

The government attempts to avoid using its constitutional arsenal against the Parliament, preferring always to work out a compromise, if possible. Prime ministers who are forced to resort continually to the powers of limiting parliamentary debate on an issue, calling too often for a blocked vote or using article 49-3, however, may appear undemocratic and suffer in the popularity polls. Given that elections are never more than a few years away, no prime minister wants to appear overly autocratic. Finally, Parliament is the only institution in France that holds important national debates, where representatives of all the major parties are present. It is, therefore, the place where political leaders make their reputations, where they promote the views of their party, and from where future leaders of the government are chosen.

Examples of parliamentary debates that focus national attention on the potential unpopularity of government plans are easy to find. In 1984, when there was a proposal to revise the relations between the state and private schools, Catholic opponents to the proposal organized massive street demonstrations. In this effort they were aided by members of Parliament from the Conservative and Gaullist Parties, who were at the time in the minority. The combination of street demonstrations and parliamentary delay tactics caused such a turmoil and was so politically damaging to the government that President Mitterrand ordered the bill rescinded (see Baumgartner 1987). In 1990, the Communist Party, holding only twenty-six seats in Parliament but generally supporting the Socialist-led government, objected to a bill which would have allowed a partial sale of the Renault automobile company. The government wanted to allow Renault to merge with the Swedish auto maker Volvo. Communist Party leaders vowed to fight with all their powers. They used a variety of delay tactics, including the submission of over 1,000 amendments, in order to make their point. In the end, the government prevailed by using its constitutional powers, but the incident showed how even a small minority party can on occasion use the Parliament to embarrass the government (see Ferenczi 1993).

All in all, the legislative branch is the seat of democratic legitimacy in France. However, in part of the trade-offs between efficiency and popular participation that we have discussed throughout this section, the powers of the Parliament have been strongly curtailed in the constitution of the Fifth Republic. Does this mean that there is no purpose to being elected deputy in France? Not by any means. The discussions in Parliament are widely covered in the media, the members of Parliament are the main leaders of the political parties, and the route to political power in France is undoubtedly through the halls of the *Palais Bourbon*. What is the seat of power? For that, we turn to the organization of the executive branch of government.

The President and the Prime Minister

The executive branch of government is headed by the president of the Republic, seconded by the prime minister. This two-headed executive is the seat of real power in the French Fifth Republic. To discuss the func-

tioning of the French dual executive one must first distinguish between the normal situation, where the president and the prime minister are of the same party or coalition, and the relatively unusual situation, called *cohabitation,* when the two are of rival parties or coalitions. It is reasonable to call the period of shared control "normal," since it was the case from the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958 until 1986. Further, it appears that the framers of the constitution of the Fifth Republic did not consider the possibility of shared control. In any case, for almost thirty years the prime minister was clearly the subordinate and ally of the president. Then from 1986 to 1988, there was a period of cohabitation, with Gaullist Jacques Chirac serving as prime minister under the Socialist President François Mitterrand. The 1993 elections ushered in another period of cohabitation, with Gaullist Edouard Balladur serving as prime minister under President Mitterrand until the end of the presidential term in 1995. The 1997 legislative elections created a third experience with cohabitation, with Lionel Jospin, the leader of the Socialist Party, serving as prime minister alongside Gaullist President Jacques Chirac until 2002. In sum, there was no cohabitation from 1958 to 1986, but from 1986 to 2005, nine of nineteen years, almost half the time, have been periods of cohabitation. The constitutional reform of 2000 that reduced the presidential term from seven to five years was designed specifically to make cohabitation less likely, as legislative elections will immediately follow the election of a new president. French voters in 2007 gave President Sarkozy a majority, but not the overwhelming one initially projected in the polls. Apparently, the voters were sensitive to the opposition's argument that too much power should not be concentrated in a single group. It seems that the French public likes cohabitation or shared control more than the political elite.

The president of France serves as head of state, but he is no mere figurehead. Being the only official in the French governmental system who is directly elected in a single nationwide race, the president enjoys great powers; while the prime minister aspires to be president, no president would prefer to be prime minister. In fact, during periods of shared control, the president is by far the dominant personage of the Republic. This is because he has the authority to choose and to dismiss the prime minister and because of other powers spelled out in the constitution. During normal times, the president is generally expected to play a leading role in defense and foreign affairs (called the *reserved domain*) and to set the general direction for governmental action. Day-to-day affairs are run by the prime minister, who works closely with the ministers. Effectively, this means that the president chooses a close ally with whom he can work and to whom he leaves significant discretion, intervening only in the most important affairs or in those where he happens to take a personal interest. Some of the traditions of the French presidency seem to have been established particularly by the first president of the Fifth Republic, General Charles de Gaulle. Each succeeding president has fallen into a similar pattern as well.

The powers of the president derive from several constitutional clauses specifically designed to ensure that France would have a powerful executive. However, some of them have caused confusion during periods of cohabitation. This is because, while it is clear that together the president and the prime minister have much more power than the legislature, some of the powers of the two executives are shared. First, the president appoints the prime minister. Second, he has the power to dissolve the National Assembly. Effectively, this means that when a new president is elected, he can be expected to appoint a new prime minister and, if necessary, call immediately for new legislative elections to give him a majority that shares his views. Thus, in 1981, when President Mitterrand was elected, he inherited a Parliament elected in 1978 that had a Conservative majority, but he called for a new election in June 1981 and received a large majority of deputies from his own party. When President Chirac assumed power in 1995, his party coalition already enjoyed a large majority in the legislature, so he did not need to call for new elections. But in 2002 when he was reelected, he immediately called for elections and received a large parliamentary majority which extended for five years until both terms reached their end in 2007. (Presidential and legislative elections are "on synch" as of 2007, a result of the new five-year presidential mandate.)

In one of the most remarkable political miscalculations of recent times, President Chirac dissolved the National Assembly and called for new elections in 1997, even though his prime minister had a huge majority in Parliament, with 78 percent of the seats, as shown in Table 8. His feeling, apparently, was that the government of Alain Juppé would likely lose popularity over the next few years, that his opponents would not be expecting an election so soon and therefore would not be well prepared for it, and that if he won the election in 1997, he would enjoy the entire rest of his presidential term, until 2002, with a like-minded parliamentary majority. He hoped, in other words, to avoid cohabitation during his entire seven-year presidential term by calling early elections. He was wrong. The public reaction to his decision was to see it as a cynical effort to manipulate the timing of the elections for political gain (see Lewis-Beck 2000). Lionel Jospin waged a surprisingly strong campaign and defeated the incumbent Juppé. In fact, one of the reasons Chirac called the election in 1997 rather than waiting longer may have been that Lionel Jospin's popularity ratings were very low at the time. In March 1997 the Socialist leader had only a 30 percent favorable poll rating, with 57 percent negatives, and his positives even dropped to 28 in April. By May he had reversed these numbers into positive territory, however, and through a spirited campaign he gave a very unpleasant surprise to the Gaullists. President Chirac's miscalculation cost him dearly and meant that five years of his presidential term would be spent with a prime minister and government dominated by the left. The power to call new elections is one of the most powerful items in the presidential arsenal; this example shows how it must be used with care, however.

In addition to the powers to dissolve the National Assembly and to choose the prime minister, the president has emergency powers under Article 16 of the constitution. Effectively, these powers, to be exerted only when there is a "grave and immediate danger" to the nation, allow the president to rule by decree. Luckily, these have been used only once so far in the Fifth Republic, in 1961 by General de Gaulle when faced with a threat from army officers unhappy with his handling of the war in Algeria. The president is the "guarantor of national independence" and is the chief of the armed forces. He chairs the meetings of the cabinet (called the *council of ministers*). In general, then, there is no question about who is at the top of the French executive.

Only six individuals have been elected president since the beginning of the Fifth Republic in 1958. These are General de Gaulle, who served from 1958 until he resigned in 1969; Georges Pompidou (1969 to 1974, when he died in office); Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974 to 1981, when he was defeated at the polls); François Mitterrand (1981 to 1995); Jacques Chirac (1995 to 2007); and Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–). Of course, the impact of General de Gaulle was enormous. Because of him, France adopted the constitution of the Fifth Republic, promoting much greater powers to the executive branch. He also instituted the direct election of the president through a 1962 referendum. De Gaulle led the country through the Algerian crisis, the revolts of May 1968, and had a powerful impact on the country's political life. President Mitterrand could potentially be seen by historians to have had an even greater impact on French democracy than his old rival, however. When President Mitterrand resigned in the spring of 1995, he was the longest-serving president of the Fifth Republic and possibly the one with the greatest impact on the political system. Among his achievements is the consolidation of the democratic institutions of the Fifth Republic. With his election in 1981, Mitterrand presided over the first normal, undramatic, bloodless, and constitutional change in power in France in decades. This smooth alternation calmed the fears of many who had expected much more radical changes; it was a remarkable achievement. President Mitterrand was also the chief architect of the rise of the Socialist Party at the expense of the Communist Party; he was the first to ensure the successful functioning of the institutions under cohabitation; and he guaranteed the continuation of France's foreign policy, in particular in the European Union, reinforcing ties with Germany, and maintaining a high and independent international profile, demonstrating that these policies were clearly in the national interest, not only the partisan preferences of those of the right who had previously been in power. Of course, he had some disappointments as well, in particular in his governments' inability to combat unemployment. His last months in office were also dominated by questions about his role as a supporter of the Vichy regime and exactly when he switched to join the Resistance. Most importantly, however, as the only president of the Fifth Republic to complete two seven-year terms in office, Mitterrand presided

over a period of increased "normalization" of French politics. Few argue any more in France that either the right or the left has any magic solutions to the troubles of the modern political system. Mitterrand's fourteen years in the presidency left a powerful mark, potentially as great as that of his former rival, General de Gaulle. The arrival of President Chirac in power in 1995 was remarkably undramatic compared to the arrival of President Mitterrand in 1981. Alternation in power had come to be normal.

The prime minister is a powerful figure as well. Named by the president, the prime minister (also called the *premier*) "directs the operation of the government." This means that he is in charge of all the ministries. Further, he is responsible for national defense and for the execution of the laws. In practice, these constitutional clauses mean that the prime minister runs the operation of the government, while the president sets the general directions. However, since the prime minister serves at the pleasure of the president, there is little question about who is in charge. The prime minister faces another constraint on his actions, however: The Parliament can vote no confidence in the government, in which case the prime minister would have to submit the resignation of the entire government to the president, but the president, being directly elected, cannot be forced to resign.

In practice, the office of prime minister has traditionally been held by a close colleague of the president, someone being groomed for the office of president himself, or by a political rival of the president, who is nonetheless so powerful politically that the president must have his support. Each of these different relations has occurred: Michel Debré, a close confidant of de Gaulle, served as his first prime minister. Georges Pompidou also served as prime minister, later to become de Gaulle's successor as president. When Conservative Valéry Giscard d'Estaing served as president, his ally and rival, Jacques Chirac, leader of the Gaullist Party, was his prime minister from 1974 to 1976. So the relations between the president and the prime minister have been different over the years, depending to some extent on the political relations between the two men: they can have the relations of protector and underling, they may be uneasy allies, or they may be outright political opponents.

During periods of cohabitation, when the president and the prime minister come from different sides of the political spectrum and when there is, therefore, no question about their political rivalry, it has become clear that the powers of the prime minister are great, especially if he is backed by a strong majority in the National Assembly. While he must avoid a direct confrontation on an issue particularly important to the president, his freedom to act in other ways is considerable. This pattern was clear during the 1993–1995 period when the prime minister, Edouard Balladur, was riding a wave of popularity in the polls, supported by a huge majority in Parliament, and enacted a variety of reforms, such as the privatization of a number of French companies that had been nationalized by President Mitterrand in earlier years. On many matters, of course, the president and the prime min-

ister agree; this is especially the case in foreign and defense matters, where they are careful to ensure that France should only speak with a single, unified voice.

During the period when President Chirac served with a socialist prime minister, he and Lionel Jospin were careful to coordinate their statements and activities in the realms of foreign policy and defense, as previous French leaders have done. In domestic politics, however, Jospin "directed the operation of the government," just as Balladur did before him, and Chirac before that. In all three examples of cohabitation, the prime minister, controlling all the cabinet positions, has shown himself to be the most powerful domestic actor, with the president largely staying in the background (and waiting for the next election).

The dual French executive involves the president and the prime minister, but also the government. The French call their cabinet the *government.* Whereas the U.S. president names the members of the cabinet, in France it is the prime minister, not the president, who names the various ministers who head up each government ministry and who collectively form the government. The president is the head of state; the prime minister is the head of the government.

As in most parliamentary democracies, the government must retain the support of the Parliament, and its members are typically drawn from among the leaders of the majority parties in the National Assembly. The exact mix of partisan support, the organization of the ministries, and even the overall size of the government differs somewhat from time to time. Typically, however, there are thirty to forty-five government ministers. The government appointed by Lionel Jospin in 1999, for example, included thirty-three ministers drawn mostly, but not exclusively, from the Socialist Party. The "incompatability clause" of the French constitution requires that ministers resign their seats in Parliament if they are appointed to the government. (They are automatically replaced by designated seconds, called *suppléants,* whom they choose before the elections; these seconds replace any member who leaves Parliament for any reason, including death, retirement, or appointment to the government. Because of this system, by-elections are very rare in France; they are held only if the original replacement member must in turn be replaced.) Membership in Parliament is not a prerequisite for membership in the government, and successive governments over the years have included a number of "outside personalities"—prominent individuals who have distinguished records in their own particular areas, such as health, humanitarian actions, or science. Typically, however, the French government is made up of the leaders of the majority parties in Parliament.

The Jospin government of 1999, like the Raffarin government of 2005, consisted of a great number of faces familiar to the French, as well as a few newer ones; in this way it was typical of most governments. Familiar faces dominate, however, since the members are the leaders of the majority parties. There are only so many people to choose from; turnover in the politi-

cal class is very slow in France. The U.S. president chooses the members of his cabinet from various segments of society, often from the business community, and most of these people serve for a time and then leave government service altogether. There is much greater continuity in the French system, as in most parliamentary systems. The current government is listed at the prime minister's Web site (www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr). If you look at the biographies of the most prominent ministers (they are always listed in protocol order, most senior at the top, junior ministers at the bottom), you will see names long familiar to French people. Further, by serving in these high positions, they maintain their names and faces in the news and enhance their chances of perhaps running for president themselves one day. So whereas cabinet positions in the United States often go to people from outside government who expect to return to private life, in France they are almost exclusively reserved for professional politicians. The result is a slow turnover of the "political class" but a whole lot of experience as well. Senior officials of the French government have made a career in politics.

The typical government does not include only the same faces as previous governments, however: there is a mix of old and new. All in all, the composition of the French government, like that of any parliamentary system, is the product of many compromises: The prime minister searches for people with whom he can work and who have the relevant skills, but he is also constrained by the need to appoint a group that will gain the support of his parliamentary majority. Leaders in Parliament demand that the bulk of the government come from their own ranks; all are concerned to appoint a government that will retain the support of the public for the next elections. The biggest contrast between an American cabinet and a French government is that a French government contains many more people, especially in the senior positions, who have been active in politics for decades and who often have previously held a great number of senior government positions. American cabinets, by contrast, are often made up of people from other walks of life with limited experience in government.

The current government of Prime Minister François Fillon is highly unusual in many ways, though it reflects some continuity as well. First, it is very small, with only fifteen full ministers. Second, as mentioned before, seven of the fifteen ministers are women, a record proportion. Third, a number of "outside" personalities are included, reflecting perhaps President Sarkozy's sense that he, himself, is an outsider. Fourth, with Michèle Alliot-Marie as Minister of Interior, Rachida Dati as Justice Minister, and Rama Yade serving as a junior minister for human rights, the cabinet shows not only women in some of the most powerful positions in the government, but also includes its first women of North African and Subsaharan African origin. (Dati is of Morrocan and Algerian descent; Yade was born in Senegal.) Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign Affairs, also reflects a break with tradition as he is not a career politician, but was the founder of the French humanitarian organization, Doctors without

Borders. The cabinet is not made up completely of outsiders; familiar names include Alliot-Marie (former Minister of Defense under President Chirac) and Hervé Morin (the current Defense Minister), who had been the President of the UDF group in the National Assembly for the previous five years and was a strong supporter of President Sarkozy's election. President Sarkozy has clear goals of establishing new ways of doing things and breaking with certain long-standing traditions. A new generation has clearly come to power.

The Civil Service

The president and the prime minister are powerful because they sit at the apex of the executive branch of government. But what is the executive branch? It is a bureaucracy staffed by civil servants. From school teachers to electrical repair people to police officers to postal employees to college professors to judges and leaders of the armed forces, the French state is powerful because of the power of the civil service. Service in the public sector is seen in a much more favorable light in France than in the United States. The best schools in France are often reserved only for civil servants, in fact; some of the most powerful people in the country are not leaders of business, as in the United States, but heads of major government departments, or members of an elite corps of civil servants often dating their histories back to the monarchy.

At the top of each government ministry, each minister brings to office a team of personal collaborators. This group is called the *cabinet du ministre* (or "ministerial cabinet") and generally numbers between five and twenty members for each minister. The members of the ministerial cabinet are usually civil servants themselves, though some are longtime political associates of the minister. Their job is to oversee the civil servants in the ministry, to provide links, and to ensure that the minister is aware of the political repercussions of the ministry's actions. At the top of each ministry is a series of directors, followed by underdirectors, and bureau chiefs. This is the pinnacle of the French civil service, staffed by graduates of the elite *grandes écoles* and overseeing large staffs of administrators. At the Ministry of National Education, about 5,000 administrators in Paris oversee almost 1 million employees across all of France.

There are, of course, many types of civil servants. There is no more prestige associated with being a postal worker in France than in the United States, though both are civil servants. Category A of the French civil service is reserved for those with the highest administrative tasks; these people plan strategy, participate in large-scale decisions, and have considerable amounts of discretion in their jobs. Even above category A sits a still higher category, membership in one of the *grands corps de l'Etat* (state civil service corps). These are the specialized corps of elite decision makers, often graduating from the best schools in France. At the peak of the French civil service, then, are the specialized *grands corps* (great corps): the *corps des mines* (mining

corps) and the *corps des ponts et chaussées* (civil engineering corps); the diplomatic corps, the Finance Inspectorate, the corps of civil administrators, and the members of the Council of State, among others. To become a member of one of these groups it is usually necessary to attend a *grande école* (great school)—the most selective schools in France. Only graduates of the National School of Administration (ENA), for example, are typically allowed into the corps of civil administrators. To be a member of one of the civil engineering corps, it is best to attend the *Ecole des Mines* (School of Mines) or the *Ecole Polytechnique* (Polytechnic School, also known as *X*). The *grands corps,* in other words, are linked to the *grandes écoles,* so the graduates of the best and most prestigious schools in France typically become civil servants on graduation (if not on entry: in most of these schools, admission to the school constitutes acceptance into the civil service or the army, and the students are all paid a salary). Many of the *grandes écoles,* such as *Mines* and *X,* date from the eighteenth century, having been created either by the monarchy or by Napoleon. The prestigious *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (National School of Administration) dates only from 1946; it has quickly established itself as a formidable force in French public life, however. Not only are its graduates found throughout the leadership positions in various ministries and businesses, but both President Chirac and former Socialist Prime Minister Jospin are graduates. Part of President Sarkozy's profile that is so surprising in France is that he did not attend a *grande école,* but the normal university system.

The elite track to leadership in the French political system stands in sharp contrast to the situation in the United States. Whereas American politicians come from a variety of educational backgrounds, French politicians are more often the product of the nation's most selective and prestigious schools, and they often begin their careers as high-level civil servants—what Americans would refer to, disdainfully, as bureaucrats. For some examples of the career tracks of French politicians, read the biographies of the members of the current French government (available through the links beginning at the prime minister's site, www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr).

The huge administrative structure of the French executive branch, all neatly centralized in Paris, is thus firmly in the control of the government. The ministers, representing the majority parties in Parliament, sit atop their large ministries, and the prime minister negotiates, coordinates, and directs the actions of the various administrations. Given the instability of many ministers, however, the permanence of the civil service, and the size and complexity of the ministries that make up the French administration, it is clear that the directors, the technical experts who are members of the ministerial cabinets, and other nonelected officials will always wield great powers. In fact, the dominance of the executive branch over the legislative ensures that civil servants, graduates of the elite *grandes écoles,* will write the legislation eventually passed into law, often without amendment, and then will be

charged with implementing it. So the powers of the executive branch in France are great. They ensure that the country's government will be efficient, and they also allow for democratic control through elections.

The Role of the Judiciary

The judicial branch plays an important role in French government as in any democracy. Most importantly, it guarantees that the actions of the government and of Parliament are in conformity with the constitution. The role of the judiciary in reviewing the constitutionality of legislation is becoming more and more important in France. It is organized in a very efficient manner. Americans are accustomed to laws being declared unconstitutional only years after Congress passed them. This is because lawsuits and disputes do not reach the U.S. Supreme Court until they have begun at the lower levels and worked their way up the judicial system of appeals, a process that usually takes years. The French system is much quicker. Before a bill is submitted to the legislature for consideration (and, indeed, before the executive branch even issues any important decrees or executive orders), it is first submitted to the *Conseil d'Etat* ("Council of State"). This body of jurists finds its origins in the *Conseil du Roi* ("King's Council") of the old regime, established by the king to make recommendations on the legality of actions before they were taken. Napoleon reorganized it into the Council of State in 1799, and to this day the French government rarely acts before asking for the advice and getting the assurance from the Council of State that its proposed actions indeed conform with the constitution. Members of the Council of State can, therefore, play an important role in all areas of government, and membership is one of the most coveted and prestigious of all civil service positions.

The concern with legality and rationality does not stop there. Immediately after a bill has been passed into law, it may be sent to the *Conseil Constitutionnel* ("Constitutional Council," or Supreme Court) which declares it either in conformity with the constitution or not. In France the president, the prime minister, the president of either of the two parliamentary chambers, or a minimum of sixty members of Parliament may request a constitutional review of any new law. Such reviews occur immediately upon the passage of the legislation, before a new law is implemented. A notable incidence of such a decision was in 1993 when the interior minister, Charles Pasqua, had new legislation passed limiting the rights of immigrants and giving the police greater powers to crack down on illegal immigration. Armed with a large majority in Parliament and with many French people worried about the problems of immigration, the law was passed easily through Parliament. However, the Constitutional Council declared it unconstitutional almost immediately. Whereas in the United States such a law could have been adopted and implemented for several years before being declared unconstitutional, in France the procedures allow for a decision by the Council even before the law is implemented. In the spring of

2005, a major new education law was similarly declared unconstitutional; the minister was told that the law unconstitutionally included elements that should be handled through regulations, not laws passed in Parliament. In any case, whether the decisions are over form or substance, the Constitutional Council plays an important role.

The judicial branch includes criminal courts, administrative courts, and a variety of specialized jurisdictions. In contrast to the American system, each of these court systems has its own system of appeals, and the Constitutional Council, in contrast to the U.S. Supreme Court, does not function as an appeals court for the lower levels. In France, the normal system of justice is separated from the Constitutional Council, which deals only with elections, laws, and other constitutional matters. Criminal law eventually can be appealed to the *Cour de Cassation,* the highest level of appeal in the French criminal justice system (and therefore the equivalent of the U.S. Supreme Court for matters of criminal law). In this sense, it is as if the French had several different parallel legal systems.

The Strong French State

In this brief view of the structures of the French national government we have seen how it is organized for efficient use of power. The president, directly elected, has the authority to get what he wants. Generally speaking, he is assisted by a prime minister and by a government that enjoy the support of a majority in Parliament. In such a situation the French executive branch is powerful indeed. The legislation that it supports or needs is likely to be quickly adopted in Parliament, there are likely to be no or few amendments, and there is essentially no reason why the proposals of the president should not quickly be enacted into law. (In the case of cohabitation, things are somewhat more complicated, but still the prime minister retains the power of getting legislation through Parliament.) Once bills are passed into law, the executive branch enjoys a further advantage: its powerful administrative structure. Whereas an American president might fight to get a crime bill through Congress, for example, only to find that his ability to coordinate local police operations was limited, the centralized structure of the French administration translates into real power for the president and for the prime minister. In the case of a crime bill, for example, the services of the police, the gendarmerie, and all the security apparatus are directly under the control of the interior minister, the defense minister, or another member of the government. France is not only designed for power of the executive branch over the legislature, but the lack of federalism means that when decisions are made at the national level, there is little chance that provinces, departments, or municipalities will refuse to implement them, as can occur in the United States. The structures of government in France are truly organized to allow for the exercise of power, even while they guarantee democratic control.

The Role of the State in the Economy

As in many countries of western Europe, the government of France is heavily involved in the economy. The larger role of the state in the economy in France as compared with the United States stems from a variety of factors, including long-term historical tradition, ideology and culture, and the massive destruction of World Wars I and II. Historically, the state has always been important in the development of the French economy. The kings of France nationalized important industries of the time, including arms manufacturing, tapestries, and even porcelain. The development of the country's industrial economy came after a pattern of state intervention had already been established, in contrast to the United States. The successive regimes that have governed France have never altered the pattern of state intervention. Especially in areas such as defense, the state has felt the need to support, and often to control, domestic industry. This interventionism has not been limited to defense, however: Almost all areas of the French economy are affected by the actions of the state, either through banking (the vast majority of French banks are government-owned), taxation, regulation, or direct ownership.

Figure 1 shows the growth of the size of the French state since 1959, the first budgetary year of the Republic. Controlling for inflation, spending in 1959 was just over 100 billion Euros, and by 2006 this figure had increased to over 900 billion Euros (or about $1.2 trillion). Of course, much of the reason for this increase was population growth and the dramatic expansion of the economy, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. On the right scale, therefore, the figure shows the growth of public spending measured not in Euros,

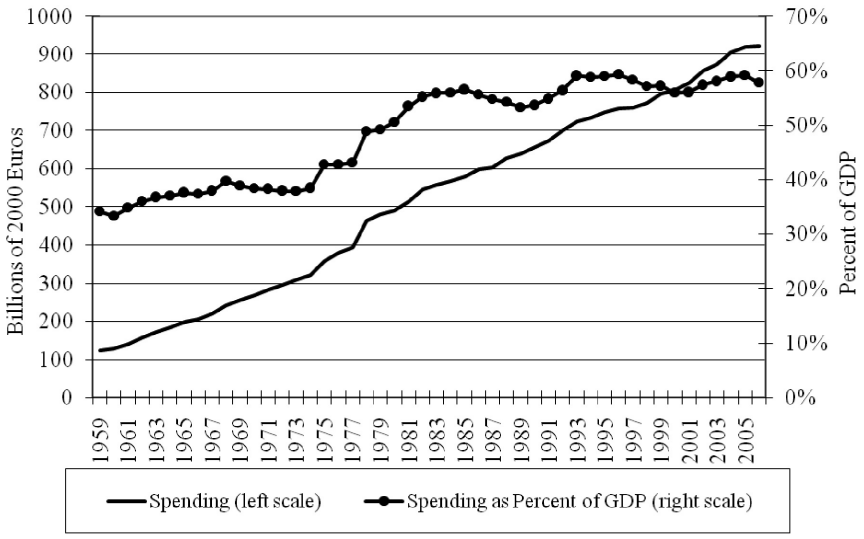

Figure 1
The Growth of the French Public Budget, 1959–2006.
(*Source:* Baumgartner, Foucault, and François 2007)

but as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product, or the size of the entire economy. That series starts out with a value of 34 percent in 1959 and increases to a maximum of 59 percent in 2005. The figure makes clear that the period of greatest expansion in the size of the state was in the early- to mid-1970s. Surprisingly, perhaps, this was a period when conservatives maintained power in both the executive branch and the legislature. The oil crisis beginning in 1973 clearly had a dramatic impact on state spending. While the state is much larger in the French economy than in the United States, France is not unlike most of her European neighbors. The state sector in France as in most of Europe has traditionally included such services as the trains, the national air-carrier (Air France), electricity, gas, and water utilities, and more. Since the 1980s, many state industries have been privatized, and the figure shows that the size of the state has stopped growing significantly in the past several years. It has not, however, declined substantially, either.

State ownership of business enterprises has a long history, but it got a large boost in the aftermath of World War II. Some businesses were nationalized as punishment for collaboration with the occupying Germans. This was the case with the Renault automobile firm. Other firms were nationalized because they were in ruins or were taken over as part of an effort to merge small and inefficient local companies into single, efficient, national ones. This was the case, for example, with the trains in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Where once there had been a variety of local train companies, each operating in a particular region, today they are all merged into the giant *Société nationale des chemins de fer* ("National Train Company," or SNCF). Similarly, hundreds of small natural gas and electricity companies were merged into the two large state monopolies: *Gaz de France* (GDF) and *Electricité de France* (EDF). The range of nationalized industries in France today goes from the normal state services (post office, trains, utilities, phones) to large military industries (Dassault, the maker of the Mirage fighter planes, nationalized in 1981) to the banks and to other industrial concerns, such as the oil giant Elf-Acquitaine.

State intervention in the economy is not only through direct ownership. Those who came to power after the Liberation in 1945 were convinced that the economy could not be rebuilt without strong direction from the central government. In this attitude, they were continuing in a long French tradition, but they were also supported by American planners and by what seemed simple common sense at the time. The physical destruction of the war was so great that no private company could possibly have thrived and rebuilt by itself. First, after years of occupation and bombing, there was little money available for investment. Second, simple items of infrastructure, such as roads, trains, ports, bridges, and electricity, had to be rebuilt. Third, American aid in the form of the Marshall Plan dictated that the money be allocated through public, not private, sources. All this added up to a situation where state planners played a key role in getting the French economy

back on its feet after World War II. This was sometimes by direct nationalization of key businesses, but sometimes by traditional state planning, where businesses remained in private hands but where the government helped coordinate their investment decisions.

If in 1948 or 1955 a private company wanted to rebuild a factory destroyed in the war or to make any other important investment decision, it would need first to look to the government to ensure that there would be electricity, roads, and train links. By controlling these important items of infrastructure and by deciding which regions and what types of industry would be helped first, the state directed and coordinated not only its own direct investment but also the vast bulk of investment by private companies. This process was formalized into a series of five-year plans. These are not directive plans as they were in the old Soviet Union, but rather were called *indicative plans,* in that they were meant to set goals and to indicate to the private sector where the government expected to make its own investments. These plans played a very important role in postwar reconstruction. However, since the 1970s, the power of the planning commission has weakened, and the plans do not have the power that they once had. Still, the French process of indicative planning reflects the degree to which the state is involved in the economy, even in the private sector.

An important participant in the process of encouraging economic growth and investment in the postwar years was the Bank of France, France's central bank. Like the American Federal Reserve, the Bank of France made no loans to individuals. Rather, it set monetary policies, intervened in international currency markets, and made other important decisions affecting the availability of credit to individuals and firms through the normal banking system. Unlike the American or the German central banks, which jealously guarded their independence from political powers, the French central bank traditionally showed a greater willingness to coordinate its strategies of credit availability with those of the government in power. Throughout the postwar boom years, it made sure that money was available, typically at reduced interest rates, to those interested in investments in industry. The French central bank played an important role, through its control of monetary policy, in the postwar economic boom. Its willingness to coordinate with officials from the planning commission, the Ministry of Finance, and other parts of the administration set it apart from the American or German federal banks. Recent reforms in the structure of the bank's board of directors have ensured for it greater independence from the prime minister, but compared to central banks in some other countries, the *Banque de France* has been a part of, rather than separate from, government policy toward stimulating domestic economic growth (on the central bank and its role in politics, see Hall 1986). When the European Union adopted the single currency in 2002, the power of the French national bank to set currency rates or affect the inflation rate by determining short-term interest rates disappeared; that is now done by the European

Central Bank in Frankfurt. But the French state maintains a great interest in these matters.

Another important priority, besides only physical reconstruction, animated the postwar economic planners in France. This was a belief in the need for a strong welfare system. All the French had suffered through the war, and misery was both great and widespread. Basic social services, such as health care, unemployment insurance, and public housing allowances, were considered necessary by those on all sides of the political spectrum. The foundations of the French welfare state also stem from this period.

As described earlier, the period from 1945 until about 1975 is known in France as the *trente glorieuses,* or the "thirty glorious years," because of the rapid economic growth, the tremendous improvements in the quality of life, and the low, almost nonexistent, unemployment. As with other Western economies, this period of bounty ended in the mid-1970s and has not been re-created since. However, France is different from the United States in the degree of change that it experienced during the postwar generation. Like many countries in Europe, France moved from a largely agricultural economy to an industrial one. By the 1970s, people had cars, improved housing, vacations, televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, telephones, and a standard of living several times higher than had been the case in the 1930s, before the war. The American economy grew rapidly during the postwar period as well, of course, but Americans were not subject to the destruction of the war. In France, as in other continental countries, the change for the better was much more dramatic. The transformation of the French economy was considered one of the greatest successes of the state in France, since it was state intervention that led to much of it.

The optimism and the use of the state to create economic growth and to promote social welfare that characterized the postwar period are remarkable for several reasons. First, it was all accomplished during a period when Conservatives controlled the French government. With the exception of the provisional government of 1944–1946, no leftists participated in any government in France until 1981. So the state intervention and the expansion of the French welfare state were the subject of a kind of national consensus, dictated by the severity of the economic and social problems left by the war. Socialists and Communists complained throughout this period that the government was not doing enough, but in fact successive governments of the right enacted policies that by today's standards must be considered leftist. Such is the power of historical context in politics: All French people realized the depth of the problems, and all looked toward the state to solve them.

The optimism that characterized the postwar generation contrasts starkly with the pessimism common in France today about the use of the state. In fact, since 1983, successive governments of the left and the right have voiced increasing skepticism about the use of state powers. As in the United States, Great Britain, and other countries, free-market economic

policies have become the rule. During his period as prime minister from 1993 to 1995, Edouard Balladur moved aggressively to privatize dozens of French companies, including banks, the air carrier Air France, and other major nationalized firms. President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Alain Juppé moved similarly to pare down state enterprises, limit taxes, and reduce public expenditures during the period 1995–1997, when they shared power. This often led to clashes with state employees and others who feared their working conditions, pensions, and access to health care might be threatened. During the period when Lionel Jospin was prime minister from 1997 to 2002, there were fewer efforts to cut back on state involvement, but no large expansions, either. Since 2002, Prime Minister Raffarin's successive governments, often with the support of the EU, pushed further to reduce state expenditures, sell nationalized companies, and reduce state regulation, and we can expect the same to be followed by Prime Minister Fillon. Much of the pressure to trim state expenditures has come from the European Union, an increasingly important (and controversial) determinant of economic policy. Optimism and pride in the benefits of the welfare state have given way in France, as in other countries, to concerns about high taxes and budget deficits. However, as in other countries, it is not likely that the French will move dramatically to reduce their access to health care, free education, or many of the other benefits of the welfare state. In fact, concern about what the French call their "social acquisitions" (that is, health care, paid vacations, worker rights, pensions, various welfare benefits) is mounting and leading to a backlash against some EU initiatives. It does not help the EU's reputation in France when political leaders use EU regulations as an excuse to slash benefits.

Unemployment and Current Economic Challenges

France went through a period of rapid economic growth from 1946 until the mid-1970s, but since that time there has been rising unemployment.

The number of unemployed reached 1 million for the first time in 1976; by 1983 it was at 2 million; and there were 3 million unemployed in 1994. Throughout the 1990s the unemployment rate hovered around 12 percent, or 3 million workers. Neighboring countries were not doing much better, as unemployment across the European Union was at the level of some 20 million workers during much of the 1990s. The decline of heavy industries such as steel, mining, and manufacturing has made ghost towns in many regions of France, much as the decline of agriculture left many small villages almost empty in earlier years. Successive governments of the left and the right have fought against these trends, but they involve worldwide economic changes, and no government has found their solution.

Figure 2 shows the French unemployment rate as of January 1 each year from 1959 to 2005. As is obvious, things began to change dramatically for the health of the French economy (as well as for France's neighbors) in 1974 with the oil price shock of that time. In the 1960s unemployment was

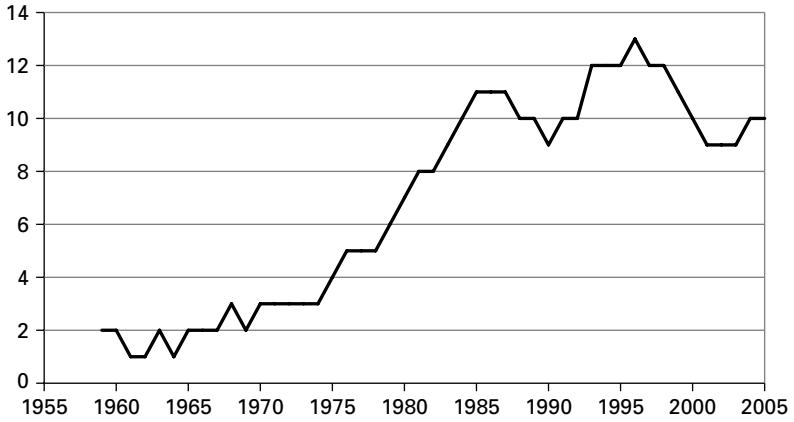

Figure 2
The Rise of Unemployment in France (in percent)
(*Source:* www.Insee. fr.)

regularly under 2 percent. Since the 1980s, on the other hand, it has regularly been in the range of 10 to 12 percent. No wonder that political problems are greater. The current generation of French workers has little sense that this unemployment problem will soon be alleviated by governments of either the left or the right, and the anxiety associated with the difficulty of finding a job exacerbates fears that globalization, and the growth of the European Union, will continue to make matters worse. During the debate over the ratification of the European Union Treaty in May 2005, many opponents of the Treaty focused on fears that the enlargement of the EU toward the East would lead to massive job losses. (One prominent point made by many partisans of the No vote was that the minimum wage in Poland, newly entered into the EU in the 2004 enlargement, was one-fifth of the French level; with the possible entry of Turkey, wages would be further depressed and jobs further exported to lower-wage countries. The fact that the Treaty had nothing to do with these enlargement questions did not alter people's great concern about the possible links they see between the EU and their own possible employment prospects. Statistically, it is clear that the growth of the EU has coincided with a long-term increase in unemployment.) A simple look at history shows why fears of unemployment are so great in France, and why it is a big problem.

The United States, of course, has also seen serious problems with unemployment, but jobs have appeared more plentifully there than in most European countries in recent years. Part of the reason for this may have to do with the more rigid work and layoff rules that make European employers less willing to hire extra workers even when they need a larger work force; they prefer to have their existing workers work overtime. The French government has recently been active in attempting to promote more flexible work rules, including a thirty-five-hour workweek. The law promoting the thirty-five-hour week (for forty hours of pay) was hotly debated but

passed by the Socialist-led Parliament. In those cases where it has been put into effect, businesses have taken advantage of it to promote greater flexibility in hiring and in work assignments. In June 2000, the government announced that the unemployment rate had fallen under 10 percent, to 9.8 percent, the lowest level in ten years and perhaps the reversal of a long-troubling problem in French politics. Martine Aubry, Minister of Employment, emphasized the combined effects of business expansion, the thirty-five-hour workweek law, and a youth employment program (*Le Monde* 2000). At this time, of course, American unemployment under President Bill Clinton had fallen to below 5 percent; still, the reversal of the long-standing stagnation with high unemployment levels in France was taken as a major accomplishment and merited front page coverage in all the newspapers.

The last two decades of the twentieth century were a period of remarkable change in France. In terms of politics, the combination of relative economic stagnation, stubbornly high unemployment levels, and increased immigration from North Africa has proved a volatile mix. Combined with these trends have come the growing importance of the European Union in economic policy and globalization of business of all kinds. These profound changes have led to dramatic shifts, often crises, within the French political system, especially in the political parties. From a situation where the Industrial Revolution and the class conflict that it engendered could neatly explain the cleavages of French society, a new, more complicated and more troubling set of issues has emerged—issues concerned with how to promote flexibility and innovation in the French economy while promoting the same values of sharing and solidarity that have worked in the past and have created fifty years of peace in Europe. International trade, the creation of a multicultural society, and the future of the European Union are growing areas of political discord in France. These new issues are tearing apart some of the old political parties, and providing opportunities for new parties to grow.

One traditional response to the challenges of international economic competition is protectionism. Countries simply tax imports greatly so that consumers will buy locally produced goods. This is a tempting economic strategy for many reasons, mostly because it allows government officials to say that they are "protecting the nation's workers" from foreign competition. Of course, protectionist policies also raise the costs of living for everyone, reduce the incentives of local companies to compete in global markets, and cause trade wars. The result can be a spiral of increasing taxes and a reduction in overall trade and quality of life. France has traditionally been a highly protectionist state, and examples of efforts to protect domestic farmers, steel producers, airplane manufacturers, grocery store owners, automobile makers, computer makers, and electronics manufacturers are easy to find. Until recently, for example, Japanese automobile manufacturers were limited to approximately 3 percent of the French domestic market, while they had gained almost 30 percent of the American market. Clearly, France has strong protectionist tendencies, as do many countries. A long

tradition upholds people's expectation that protest to government officials may very well cause them to enact protectionist tariffs or regulations.

Two recent trends make protectionism less powerful today than in the past, however. These are the development of the European Union and the world trade negotiations. While France is a hard bargainer in world trade negotiations, there can be no doubt about the greater openness of the French market to international competition today than a generation ago. Some of this is simply because of the increased globalization of world trade and the resulting importance of maintaining free trade. But much of it stems from conscious decisions dating back to the immediate postwar period to promote trade with neighboring countries. The European Union, after all, began simply as a free-trade association between the six countries that originally signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957: Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg all pledged to reduce barriers to trade. Progressively, this economic union has grown larger and stronger. Today, protectionist tendencies in France may be as strong as ever, but there are much more powerful forces in place to work toward the maintenance of free trade. Farmers still call for protection, and fishermen still complain about foreign competition in France just as in many countries. However, these days the government is often in a position where it must explain that global trade agreements or the rules of the European Union prohibit it from erecting tariff walls around the country as was it once did. Chief among the reasons for reduced protectionism are the institutions of the European Union. These trends also explain why the EU, often blamed by national leaders for problems no one can solve easily, has been heavily criticized and lost some of its previous luster in recent years. In 2002, the French barely passed a referendum to adopt the Maastricht Treaty (which reduced some internal borders within Europe), and in May 2005, the referendum over the European Union Treaty was soundly rejected, with unemployment concerns the single most prominent explanation for the No vote. French elites traditionally had been at the very core of the development of the institutions of the EU from the very beginning, so it is interesting to see how such an institution, which had France at its core, has become so controversial even in France.

France in the European Union

Since World War II, France has been one of the primary supporters of increased unification of Europe, through the institutions of the *European Union* (EU, formerly known as the European Community, or EC). Since the creation of the EC in 1958, France has been one of its strongest supporters. Increasingly, the Union plays an important role even in domestic affairs. Its agricultural policies determine in large measure the standard of living of French farmers, and its industrial standards and requirements for trade ensure that French industry cannot avoid competition with its European neighbors. France will never allow its national identity to be swallowed up

by a European state, but it supports increasing coordination of policies and integration of the countries' economies.

Increasingly since World War II, it has become apparent that a country the size of France cannot compete globally. However, together the countries of the EU constitute a huge economic and political force. There is no question about France's future. More and more, its policies will be coordinated with those of its European partners. Already, EU leaders, and not only the national leaders of the member countries, are discussing initiatives to take at the EU level to combat unemployment, a severe problem in all the member states. Similarly, foreign and defense policies are increasingly coordinated. While this coordination is not easy, since all the countries do not have identical interests, it is becoming more and more the rule rather than the exception. In the aftermath of the Cold War, with the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the reorganization of eastern Europe, France finds itself in a new international context. While maintaining its national identity, it will increasingly play a role as a leader, with Germany, of the European Union.

The European Union started as an international organization (IO), of course, and it remains one of the most important international organizations, developing coordinated policies in a variety of areas for its member states. But as the years have gone by the Brussels-based institutions have taken on so much importance that they have become the object of considerable debate in domestic French politics as in other countries. While few people question the value of the EU, there are numerous critiques. Countries have given up significant sovereignty (including their currency), various regulations affecting business and other concerns are made by distant bureaucracies in Brussels, and the internal institutions of the EU are quite closed to democratic input and discussion. An important voice was guaranteed to France as long as it was one of the few large countries in the EU; with Germany it was always considered the core of the smaller EU. But with the enlargement of the EU to twenty-five member states (and the end of unanimity rules in voting), it is no longer apparent that France will necessarily get its way in EU decision making. Important policies decided in Brussels are rarely the object of the kind of democratic debate and discussion that would accompany them if they took place in Paris (or Athens or Berlin or London). While the European Parliament has been directly elected since 1979, the Parliament plays a greatly reduced role in European affairs as compared to the executive branch institutions of the Commission and the European Council. Many refer to the "democratic deficit" of the institutions of the EU.

While the EU started with just six member states and was slowly enlarged to twelve over the decades, in 2004 a major enlargement took place that included Poland and other eastern European countries, bringing the number of member states to twenty-five. Following this, internal structures of the EU have come under tremendous strain; as is common in an international

organization, with sovereign states as members, major decisions have traditionally been taken by unanimity in Brussels. But with twenty-five members such a policy may render the institutions of Europe completely paralyzed. On May 29, 2005, France voted on a referendum to ratify a new Treaty of Europe that altered many of the internal functions of the institutions of the EU, including doing away with unanimity for major decisions and, among others, creating the post of Foreign Minister of Europe. If fully ratified by all the member states, the new treaty would have streamlined decision-making processes, strengthened the powers of the European Parliament, and given Europe a stronger voice in foreign affairs. (However, the treaty may never be ratified, for reasons discussed below.)

The debate surrounding the May 2005 ratification in France proved to be extremely contentious, and French voters rejected the treaty soundly by a vote of 55 percent to 45. Europe divides the French public in ways that do not correspond to the traditional left-right cleavages, and several of the major parties are themselves internally divided, as we discussed earlier. Further, as is always the case, the vote took on some aspects of a referendum on the incumbents in power: Those who wanted to show displeasure at President Chirac and Prime Minister Raffarin (both of whom were at extremely low points in the popularity polls at the time) found this an easy means to do so. In the 1998 referendum on a similar question (ratification of the Maastricht Treaty), Socialist President Mitterrand was in power. Socialist Party voters therefore were largely in favor of the policy as it was proposed by a government of their own, but many on the right voted against it in order to show displeasure with the government; this time the situation was reversed. In 2005, the Socialist Party was extremely divided over the issue, with most of the party leaders arguing strongly in favor of it, seeing no relation between the Chirac-Raffarin government and this international treaty, but the mass of voters was much more divided. However, former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, the number two leader of the party, and some other prominent Socialists, broke with the others, sensing substantial voter unease; in fact Socialist Party supporters voted about 60-40 against the treaty, according to polls, and this result may lead to long-term repercussions for the party itself, including the possibility of splintering. The Green Party was also very much divided on the issue. Parties included in the government coalition generally supported the treaty by substantial margins; opposition was virtually unanimous on the far left and on the far right. Those opposed to the treaty argued that the expansion of the EU to the countries of central and eastern Europe could depress wages and cause unemployment problems to worsen, and that the eventual admission of Turkey to the EU was a major threat (in fact, ironically, the treaty deals purely with internal functioning of the institutions of the EU, and has nothing to do with these questions). Opposition to the treaty was strongest from the Communist Party and the far left, from the National Front and others

on the far right, and from a number of Socialist Party figures fearful of losing a connection with those voters who see the EU as a new threat to their employment, working conditions, and the welfare state. For the most part, leaders of the UDF and UMP remained steadfastly in favor of the treaty (endorsed as it was by their incumbent president), though a few voices on the right expressed concern at the loss of sovereignty.

In sum, the EU was once an object of consensus, but no longer. Opinion polls on the day of the vote indicated that unemployment and dissatisfaction with the incumbent government were the two most important motivating factors for those who voted No. On May 31, just two days after the vote, Prime Minister Raffarin resigned and was replaced by Dominique de Villepin, a Chirac loyalist and member of the government who had seriously criticized Raffarin's leadership during the referendum campaign. Americans may remember Villepin mostly for the powerful speech he gave at the United Nations against the war in Iraq while serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs, as mentioned earlier. In any case, the surprise rejection of the treaty on European Union had immediate consequences for the French government, and will certainly have many longer-term consequences as well.

French leaders of two generations have participated in the development of the European Union with the idea that it offers the best chance of enhancing French powers on the world stage. In recent years, the beginnings of a backlash have developed in France, to the surprise of many observers. But the European Union was never a mass-based social movement. Rather, it was led from the beginning by a group of political leaders with an internationalist outlook who feared that war could again break out in Europe, and that by integrating the economies of the various countries ever more tightly they could make this impossible. And it has succeeded in this regard. But others contend that the integration of the national economies has served to make it easier for large business to move to those countries with lower wages, and the expansion of the EU to include such countries as Poland, where wages are much lower than in France or Germany, has stoked the fires of economic resentment. Now we see a much more engaged democratic debate about the values of the European Union. Like any debate, there are strong positions on each side. Two things are interesting about this new debate in France, however: First, it is new; Europe was once the object of almost a complete consensus among major political actors in France. Second, it is a cross-cutting cleavage, failing to correspond with the existing party structures and creating opportunities for new political voices to emerge as well as the danger that existing parties will increasingly seem irrelevant to the major political debates of the day.

► SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Ardagh, John. 1987. *France Today.* New York: Penguin. A general survey of French culture, politics, and society.

Baumgartner, Frank R. 1989. *Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press. Discusses how political controversies develop in France.

Bergmann, Barbara R. 1996. *Saving Our Children from Poverty: What the United States Can Learn from France.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation. A discussion of how France has such an advanced system of child care and other benefits that keep children in school and out of poverty.

Birnbaum, Pierre. 1982. *The Heights of Power.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. A sociological study showing the powers of the elite state bureaucrats who rule France.

Horowitz, Donald L., and Gerard Noiriel, eds. 1992. *Immigrants in Two Democracies: The French and American Experience.* New York: New York University Press. Discusses how France and the United States have handled the question of rising immigration.

Kolodziej, Edward A. 1987. *Making and Marketing Arms.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Discusses the power of the French military-industrial complex.

Mazur, Amy. 1996. *Gender Bias and the State: Symbolic Reform at Work in Fifth Republic France.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press. A discussion of women's rights and equality of the sexes in the work place in France.

Pierce, Roy, 1995. *Choosing the Chief: Presidential Elections in France and the United States.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. A comparison of how we elect our presidents.

Rohr, John A. 1995. *Founding Republics in France and America: A Study in Constitutional Governance.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas. An analysis of the differing philosophical foundations of the French and American constitutions.

Stone, Alec. 1992. *The Birth of Judicial Politics in France: The Constitutional Council in Comparative Perspective.* New York: Oxford University Press. A study of the role of the Constitutional Council in the Fifth Republic.

Web sites: www.france.diplomatie.fr is the official Web site of the French government, maintained by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris. From this site, a variety of information is available, in French and in English (as well as in other languages) about current French politics, economics, society, culture, tourism, and history. Information includes the text of the constitution, biographical information about major French politicians and office holders, descriptions of the political system and political parties, economic and social statistics, and historical overviews. Current French government policy statements are also available. The site of the prime minister, www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr, has links to the official sites of each of the government ministries of France. Each of these sites provides a wealth of information on its ministry's activities.

Wilson, Frank L. 1987. *Interest Group Politics in France.* New York: Cambridge University Press. A thorough study of the interest-group system in France.

► BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baumgartner, Frank R. 1987. "Parliament's Capacity to Expand Political Controversy in France." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 12:33–54.

Baumgartner, Frank R., Martial Foucault, and Abel François. 2007. Patterns of Public Budgeting in the French Fifth Republic: From Hierarchical Control to Multi-Level Governance. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Chicago IL.

Boy, Daniel, and Nonna Mayer, eds. 1990. *L'Electeur français en questions*. Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques. [Published in English as *The French Voter Decides*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.]
Bréhier, Thierry. 1993. "M. Chirac et M. Giscard d'Estaing s'opposent sur le maintien de M. Mitterrand à l'Elysée." *Le Monde,* 25 mars.
Brouard, Sylvain, and Vincent Tiberj. 2005. Français comme les autres? Enquête sur les citoyens issus de l'immigration africaine et turque. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
Crozier, Michel. 1963. *Le Phénomène bureaucratique*. Paris: Seuil. [Published in English as *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.]
Crozier, Michel. 1970. *La Société bloquée*. Paris: Seuil. [Published in English as *The Blocked Society*. New York: Viking, 1973.]
Daley, Suzanne. 1999. "Mayors Choose a New Model of Vehicle for la République." *New York Times,* 8 October.
Duhamel, Olivier. 1984. "Les Français et la V^{e} République." In Sofres, *Opinion publique: 1984*. Paris: Gallimard.
Ferenczi, Thomas. 1993. "Les Barouds d'honneur du PC." In *Les élections législatives du 21 mars–28 mars 1993*. Paris: Le Monde (Dossiers et Documents), p. 7.
Gastaut, Yvon. 2000. *L'Immigration et l'opinion en France sous la V^{e} République*. Paris: Seuil.
Hall, Peter. 1986. *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Héran, François. 1988. "Le Monde associatif." *Economie et statistique*. 208:17–31.
Hoffman, Stanley, et al. 1963. *In Search of France*. New York: Harper & Row.
Lewis-Beck, Michael S., ed. 2000. *How France Votes*. New York: Chatham House Publishers.
Le Monde. 1993. *Les Elections législatives du 21 mars–28 mars 1993*. Paris: Le Monde (Dossiers et Documents).
Le Monde. 2000. "Le Chômage sous les 10 %." 1 juin.
Paxton, Robert. 1972. *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Pickles, Dorothy. 1962. *The 5th French Republic: Institutions and Politics*. New York: Praeger.
Pierce, Roy. 1973. *French Politics and Political Institutions*. New York: Harper & Row.
Schmidt, Vivien A. 1991. *Democratizing France*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Schor, Ralph. 1996. *Histoire de l'immigration en France*. Paris: Armand Colin.
Sofres. 1984. *Opinion publique: 1984*. Paris: Gallimard.
Tilly, Charles. 1967. *The Vendée*. New York: Wiley.
Todd, Emmanuel. 1991. *The Making of Modern France*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
Wylie, Lawrence. 1964. *Village in the Vaucluse*. New York: Harper & Row.