

# France

## PROFILE

### Key Features of Contemporary France

Population:	65,630,692 (estimate, July 2012)
Area:	643,801 square kilometers
Head of State:	François Hollande (president, 2012–present)
Head of Government:	Jean-Marc Ayrault (prime minister, 2012–present)
Capital:	Paris
Year of Independence:	France was never formally colonized. Many date the consolidation of the French state to the era of Louis XIV (1643–1715) and the birth of modern France to the French Revolution of 1789.
Year of Current Constitution:	1958
Languages:	French
GDP per Capita:	\$35,600 (estimate, 2011)
Human Development Index Ranking (2011):	20 (very high human development)

Sources: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html>;  
UN Human Development Reports, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>.



- Roman Catholicism 83–88%
- Protestant Christianity 2%
- Judaism 1%
- Islam 5–10%
- Unaffiliated 4%

### Religious Affiliation in France

Source: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html>.

## Introduction

France has historically been situated at the center of Western Europe. This is true not only geographically but in terms of France's identity and culture. At least since Charlemagne united significant portions of Western Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries, presenting himself as heir to the Roman Empire, many have considered France the central carrier of European civilization.

Geographically, France extends from the English Channel in the north to the Mediterranean in the south. The Pyrenees divide it from Spain (and the tiny mountain country of Andorra) in the southwest, and it shares its eastern border with Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. In addition to its mountainous areas (both the Pyrenees and the Alps as well as the smaller Jura and Massif Central), it has good farmland, being most famous for the production of grapes and cereals. French agriculture has historically excelled in the production of wines, cheese, and other items considered by international consumers to be luxurious.

Today's France is interesting to scholars of comparative politics for numerous reasons. First, while some people tend to think of European societies as consistently stable and evidencing consistent, progressive development over time, France's passage to political modernity was extraordinarily rocky. It also played out in striking fashion the contrast between democratic-republican and authoritarian centralist forms of politics, settling on a "mixed presidentialist" system in the Fifth Republic (which still goes on today), that continues to stimulate much debate. France also showed us what conflict between civic republicanism and a monopolistic church could look like, pioneering a certain kind of secularism, often called *laïcité*.

It is difficult to estimate the relative share of the population comprised by different ethnic groups in France. This is because France places restrictions on national



statistical surveys that document the ethnic and racial identities of respondents, in part because of a strong cultural tradition proscribing such questions. The CIA World Factbook, the main source we have used here for data on the ethnic composition of the other countries considered in this book, does not list estimated percentages of ethnic groups in France. It notes simply that French ethnic groups include “Celtic and Latin with Teutonic” as well as “Slavic, North African, Indochinese, and Basque minorities.” Of these groups, the North African minority—many from France’s

former colony of Algeria—and Sub-Saharan Africans may be the most politically important.

Many in this group may list Islam as their religion, though the majority are probably non-practicing. We can only estimate the relative share of the French population who are officially Muslims. Adherents of Islam probably constitute somewhat less than 10 percent of the French population. In recent years there have been many questions about their assimilation (or discrimination against them, depending on one’s point of view). The majority of the French population is

## Historical Development

### Timeline

<b>800</b>	Charlemagne consolidates rule in much of Western Europe.	<b>1870</b>	The Second Empire ends shortly after Napoleon III’s forces are defeated by Prussia (under Bismarck) at the Battle of Sedan in September, 1870.
<b>1000s–1700s</b>	Rivalry between France and Britain through Middle Ages includes numerous wars.	<b>1870–1940</b>	The Third Republic
<b>1334–1453</b>	Hundred Years’ War between France and Britain	<b>1871</b>	Paris Commune
<b>1643</b>	Louis XIV becomes King of France, rules for over 70 years.	<b>1894</b>	Conviction of Alfred Dreyfus
<b>1789</b>	French Revolution begins with the storming of Bastille prison; self-proclaimed National Assembly issues Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.	<b>1906</b>	Dreyfus declared to be innocent
<b>1793</b>	The most violent part of the French Revolution begins, known as the Reign of Terror; King Louis XVI executed by guillotine.	<b>1914–1918</b>	First World War
<b>1799</b>	Napoleon’s Seizure of Power	<b>1936</b>	Short-lived “Popular Front” government
<b>1804</b>	Napoleon’s Coronation as Emperor	<b>1939–1945</b>	Second World War
<b>1812</b>	Russian invasion	<b>1940–1944</b>	Vichy Government, which collaborates with the Nazis
<b>1814</b>	Napoleon’s defeat and imprisonment	<b>1944–1946</b>	After the fall of the Vichy government, a provisional government is in place.
<b>1815</b>	Napoleon returns, but is soon defeated by British at Battle of Waterloo.	<b>1946–1958</b>	The Fourth Republic
<b>1814–1830</b>	Bourbon Restoration Louis XVIII (1814–1824) and Charles X (1824–1830)	<b>1954–1962</b>	War in Algeria, culminating in Algerian independence in 1962
<b>1830</b>	July Revolution	<b>1958–Present</b>	Fifth Republic
<b>1830–1848</b>	July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe (“Citizen King”)	<b>1958</b>	Constitution establishes “Mixed Presidentialist” system
<b>1848–1852</b>	Revolution of 1848 and the Second Republic	<b>1966</b>	France leaves NATO
<b>1848</b>	Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte elected President of the Republic	<b>1968</b>	Major student protests in Paris (and numerous other countries)
<b>1852</b>	Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte named Emperor Napoleon III, beginning the “Second Empire” (1852–1870)	<b>1981</b>	François Mitterrand is elected president (the only Socialist elected to this post during the Fifth Republic) and governs until 1995.
<b>1870–1871</b>	Franco Prussian War, in which France is soundly defeated	<b>1995–2007</b>	Presidency of Jacques Chirac
		<b>1999</b>	France adopts the euro.
		<b>2007–2012</b>	Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy
		<b>2009</b>	France returns to NATO.

at least nominally Catholic, but, as in much of Europe, most of the nominally Christian category are not regular church attendees. Some sources (e.g., Kuru 2009: 244) estimate that just more than half of the French population (55 percent) adheres formally to a religion.

## Historical Development

As noted, France has traveled a rocky road to political modernity. In 1789, France gave us what many consider the first modern revolution (Arendt 1963; Furet 1995), deposing the Bourbon monarchy, establishing a Republic, abolishing the nobility (*noblesse*), and opposing the power of the Roman Catholic Church and ultimately repressing it. The revolution even created a new calendar, with the beginning of the revolution the starting point from which future years would be counted. This revolution is discussed further in a case study later in the France country materials.

After a decade of radicalization and increasing confusion, Napoleon Bonaparte took power (see the discussion in Parry and Girard 2002: 7–24). Napoleon was an early example of what modern authoritarianism (with lots of references to “the people” and even plebiscites and other elements of democracy) might look like. He further spread modern politics through conquest, centralizing political authority and imposing Napoleonic law in numerous countries—it still serves as the basis for law in much of the world today—and also raising nationalism in the resistance he engendered. Ever since the time of Napoleon’s domination, people have debated whether his regime consolidated or reversed the revolution. The best answer is probably to say that it did both. On one hand he re-established order, proclaiming himself emperor, establishing a Concordat with the Church, and creating a new “nobility” that was distinct from the hereditary *noblesse* of the prior regime. On the other hand, he spread many of the revolution’s achievements to the rest of Europe and beyond.

Napoleon was once deposed after military defeat and sent to an island exile, but he escaped and briefly resumed his efforts before being defeated again at Waterloo. Following Napoleon’s demise, France saw the restoration of the old Bourbon monarchy that had lost power in the great revolution of 1789. Louis XVIII and Charles X governed as constitutional monarchs (Furet 1995: 270–272), however, even if they and some of their supporters might have preferred absolutism. In other words, there was no full return to the system from before the revolution.

In 1830, Charles X was replaced by Louis-Philippe (also a Bourbon but from the more liberal Orleans branch of the family) in the “July Revolution” (see Parry and Girard 2002: 55–59). Called the “Citizen King” because of his stronger and more consistent support for the “constitutional” in “constitutional monarchy,” Louis-Philippe would hold the throne until 1848, when a revolutionary wave shook Europe. In France, this brought about the “Second Republic.” By the end of the year, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was elected president. The nephew of the former Emperor, he declared *himself* Emperor Napoleon III in 1851, ending the Second Republic and ushering in the Second Empire. Napoleon III was known for encouraging industrialization and economic modernization, and Paris was redesigned under his watch, producing much of the infrastructure and plan for the city as it is known today (Parry and Girard 2002: 63–69; Schwartz 2011: 60–61). This was also a time of increasing French geo-political ambitions, as Napoleon III waged military campaigns, increased French colonial activity, and invaded Mexico, installing a member of the Hapsburg family as Emperor Maximilian there in the 1860s. Eventually, though, military activity was Napoleon III’s downfall. He was defeated by Bismarck’s Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and almost immediately lost power in France. This transition marked the beginning of France’s Third Republic.

The Third Republic—which would last up until World War II—is considered by some to have been a French “golden age,” the “Belle Epoque,” as it is often called (Parry and Girard 2002: 74). It was a period of great flowering in the arts and literature, but it also saw a great deal of political and social activity and controversy, and has been seen by many in France as a period of instability. Perhaps most famously, it witnessed the “Dreyfus Affair,” in which a Jewish officer was falsely accused of spying for Germany. It is hard to exaggerate how important this event was for intellectuals and politicians, who saw it as about more than just the guilt or innocence of one man, but rather about the nature of French culture and identity. Dreyfus’s accusers were thought of as conservative, even reactionary, often Catholic, and in some cases anti-Semitic. Some viewed them as heirs to the supporters of monarchy and empire from previous centuries. Dreyfus’s supporters were thought of as secular, and often socialists. Some viewed them as the heirs of the Republican tradition (for more on the Dreyfus Affair, see Begley 2009).

France was badly shaken by World War I. Like the rest of the participants in other countries, neither the army, the

politicians, nor the citizens fully anticipated the nature of trench warfare, with its enormous loss of life, terrible conditions, and seemingly infinite stalemates. France was eventually among the victors, but the conflict played an important role in producing the next European crisis. France insisted that Germany pay huge indemnities, and its preparatory strategy for the next possible war with Germany was based on its experiences in World War I, preparing a single, supposedly impenetrable, line of defense called the Maginot line.

The indemnity imposed on Germany contributed to the economic and social problems that conditioned Hitler's rise to power. While Hitler rose in Germany, France saw a different pattern, most notably with the left-wing "Popular Front" government headed by Leon Blum, which was formed in 1936 (Parry and Girard 2002: 163–169). The short-lived government was accompanied by strike and labor mobilization, but France was highly polarized in this period, and the Popular Front government was over by 1938. When war came, Germany bypassed the Maginot Line with relative ease. The French state collapsed, and the Vichy Government was established under Marshall Philippe Pétain, one of the leaders of the army that had just failed so miserably in stopping the German assault. This government was long seen as essentially a puppet of the German occupiers, though more recent historical evidence suggests that the

Vichy government played an active role in decision making and collaborated more willingly with the Nazis, even participating in the deportation of Jews. At the same time, many thousands of French men and women participated actively in the resistance, as well as in the Free French, led by Charles De Gaulle.

After the allied victory, De Gaulle would become president of the "Fourth Republic." During this period, France focused on reconstruction and economic development, assisted by the United States' Marshall Plan. De Gaulle soon left power, but he was called back in 1958, in the midst of crisis over French colonial affairs in Algeria. The new (and current) constitution was written, and France's contemporary "mixed presidential" system was established. France went through several decades of strong economic performance and *relative* political stability. In this same period France lost most of its imperial possessions, especially with decolonization in Africa in 1960.

A prominent feature of France's post-war politics has been the process of European integration, which has often been led by France in tandem with democratic Germany. The early years of integration were especially dramatic, because the two countries had been the central belligerents in continental European wars from Napoleon to Hitler. Beginning in 1950, France and Germany—along with Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg—agreed to free and open

## Regime and Political Institutions

<b>Regime</b>	Republic, democratic
<b>Administrative Divisions</b>	Twenty-seven regions (of which twenty-two are in "metropolitan France" and five are overseas); smaller divisions are departments, arrondissements, cantons, and communes
<b>Executive Branch</b>	Semi-presidential; president and prime minister
<b>Selection of Executive</b>	Direct election of president, in two rounds, with second-round runoff between top two candidates; appointed prime minister
<b>Legislative Branch</b>	Bicameral Lower chamber: National Assembly ( <i>Assemblée Nationale</i> ) Upper chamber: Senate ( <i>Sénat</i> )
<b>Judicial Branch</b>	Several top authorities: Court of Cassation ( <i>Cour de cassation</i> ) as court of final appeal for individuals; appointed Constitutional Council ( <i>Conseil constitutionnel</i> ) has authority to rule laws unconstitutional and invalid
<b>Political Party System</b>	Multiparty system with several parties in Parliament, generally with one large party on the center-right (currently the Union for a Popular Movement, UMP) and the Socialist Party on the center-left; also the National Front (far right), Communist Party (far left), and other moderate and fringe parties

trade in coal and steel. This was seen as economically significant, but even more important symbolically and politically, as it meant the two countries would be openly trading the raw materials needed for war. Further integration came in 1957, when the Treaty of Rome extended the economic cooperation to create a European Economic Community. Further extensions of the European project came with expansion to many other countries (now twenty-seven), and the deepening of integration through free trade, free flows of labor and capital, and the creation of today's common currency, the euro. The former European Coal and Steel Community of 1950 has now become the broader and deeper European Union (EU).

Today France is considered to be, with Germany, one of the two most powerful state-level actors in the EU. Yet it faces a number of significant questions. First, has its system of immigration and assimilation broken down? Second, what will happen to the French welfare state? Is it in need of reforms, and if so, which reforms, and will it be politically possible to produce them? Finally, what will France's role be in the Europe of the future, given the enormous questions that the EU now faces as it struggles to coordinate region-wide monetary policy with state-level fiscal policy? One of the intriguing facts about contemporary France is the degree to which many of these decisions will be taken at a European level. It should be noted, though, that France (like other countries in the EU) has a national veto on most important matters.

## Regime and Political Institutions

France has a *semi-presidential* system of government, also called a *presidential-parliamentary* system. This hybrid has both a directly elected president and a prime minister, with the former the head of state and the latter the head of government. Presidential elections are followed by elections to the legislature, after which the president nominates a prime minister to run the government. However, prime ministers serve at the discretion of the legislature, and the lower house (the *Assemblée Nationale*) may force resignation of the government at any time by a simple majority voting for censure. In practice, this has meant that the president appoints a prime minister only after consulting the leader of the largest party in the legislature to determine the latter's wishes. The upper legislative chamber, the Senate,

has nearly co-equal powers with the National Assembly, but the National Assembly takes the lead on most legislative debates and legislation. A sophisticated system of checks and balances includes the president's ability to dissolve the legislature and call new elections, but no more than once in any given year. By convention, the prime minister has greater power over domestic politics and the president more power over foreign affairs, but these lines can be blurred, especially when the president and the legislative majority are from different parties, a situation known as *cobabitation*. Finally, a judicial body known as the Constitutional Council has the power to review major laws before their passage and can rule them unconstitutional and thus invalid; this council may also hear appeals to laws and similarly rule on constitutionality. The Council is comprised of nine members, three each appointed by the president and the leaders of the two legislative houses, as well as all former French presidents not actively involved in politics.

## Political Culture

Probably the most distinctive feature of French political culture is the historical relationship between a left-wing, secularist, republican and a more conservative and less egalitarian alternative, often associated with Roman Catholicism. We do not wish to caricature the distinction between these two strands of French political culture. They have each changed a good deal over time, as has the relationship between them. For example, few on the French left today favor the direct assault on the church that many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revolutionaries did, and the French right is no longer royalist. Moreover, both traditions have favored political centralism, and some would say authoritarian centralism. Nevertheless, here follow ideal-typical sketches of the two traditions.

Both right- and left-wing thought in France had origins among the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, and the very designations "left" and "right" emerged in the French Revolution. From the beginning, the French left radically opposed hierarchy and royalty, promoting democracy and republicanism as alternatives. Viewing the Roman Catholic Church as linked to royal politics and the nobility (and indeed being the "First Estate" prior to the Revolution), and noting its substantial control over land, schooling, and much lawmaking, a radical left aimed to eliminate these "regressive" social actors. This tradition was largely critical

of Napoleon as well as the Second Empire of Napoleon III (1852–1870). Over the course of the nineteenth century, many of its proponents turned to socialism and communism. While by the middle of the twentieth century it was clear that communism on the Soviet model was not a viable option for France, the communists were important in the resistance against Hitler. Many communists were seen as national heroes of the Resistance, and aspects of communist ideology remained popular with intellectuals and the working classes. After the war, the larger French left favored social democracy and helped to construct the French welfare state.

The right-wing tradition is also quite heterogeneous and has also changed over time. Some of the supporters of the restoration monarchies of Louis XVIII and Charles X were out-and-out royalists, but even they were relatively few. In the nineteenth century the French right favored maintaining and even expanding the privileges of the Catholic Church. Supporters included not only the remnants of the old nobility but also wealthy industrialists. More than anything, they favored the maintenance of social order. Over the course of the late nineteenth century, as is discussed further in the nationalism case study later, an “ethnic” conception of the French nation developed, suspicious of “cosmopolitanism” and often anti-Semitic. Though most scholars think this was confined to a minority, it became important by the early years of the twentieth century. This tradition may have witnessed its most extreme expression in the collaborating Vichy regime during World War II. It lives on in the National Front party of Jean-Marie Le Pen (now run by his daughter, Marine Le Pen), a xenophobic party which is above all preoccupied with immigration, especially immigration by Muslims, while also being anti-Semitic. This group has been largely politically marginal; though the elder Le Pen did finish in second place in the presidential elections of 2002, the vast majority voted against him. Marine le Pen did well in the first round of the 2012 elections and, indeed, Nicholas Sarkozy moved to the right on immigration issues in the final round in an effort to attract her supporters, a move many commentators think was a strategic mistake, contributing to Hollande’s 2012 victory.

In general we could say that over the years French political culture has developed a strong center that builds on a compromise between the two traditions noted here. Historically, both the socialists and the leading right-of-center parties have supported maintaining the welfare state,

government involvement in the economy, and preserving the status quo in terms of church–state relations, though they disagree about some of the details.

## Political Economy

France has one of the world’s most advanced economies, and has for some time. Measured in terms of the Human Development Index, its citizens are the fourteenth-best off in the world. The French economy is the tenth-largest in the world, and it has the thirty-sixth-highest GDP per capita in the world. Moreover, citizens benefit from relatively generous welfare state benefits that are discussed further a bit later in this section. They also pay higher taxes than citizens in countries with less generous welfare states: Indeed, government revenues amount to nearly 50 percent of GDP. The French economy has historically privileged an important role for the state, through regulation, government ownership of firms, and redistributive efforts. In recent years, as societies with welfare states entered into a period of “retrenchment” following the economic crises of the 1970s, there have been some efforts to scale back this state involvement, particularly under conservative presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. The state has partially divested itself from some of its holdings, thought it has had a bit more trouble freeing itself from welfare obligations and deregulating the labor market, as it has faced public resistance when it has attempted to do so.

The French economy in some ways is a typical “post-industrial” economy. Note that this does not mean that there is no industry, but rather that services are dominant. Indeed, industry accounts for 18.8 percent of GDP (according to CIA World Factbook estimates for 2011). Agriculture only accounts for 1.8 percent, with services accounting for a full 79.4 percent of GDP (2011 estimate, per CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2012.html>). Within agricultural production, grains, wine, sugar beets, and dairy products are particularly important. Within industry, construction, “agrifood,” chemicals and pharmaceuticals, luxury goods, automotive production, and aerospace equipment manufacturing are particularly important, as well as steel, glass, plastics, and tires. The three most important areas within the service sector are financial services, tourism, and insurance (<http://www.diplomatie.gouv>

[.fr/en/france/economy/overview-of-the-french-economy/article/key-figures-of-the-french-economy/](http://fr/en/france/economy/overview-of-the-french-economy/article/key-figures-of-the-french-economy/)

France has relatively low income inequality, near the average for eurozone countries. Its Gini index (estimated as of 2008, per the CIA World Factbook), is 32.7, where 0 would mean perfect equality and 100 would mean perfect inequality. To put this in perspective, the United States has a Gini index of around 45, and some countries have figures around 70! France also has relatively low poverty. Historically it has suffered from relatively high levels of unemployment, which some analysts have attributed to the rigidity of its highly regulated labor market. Some would argue that this is a function of the French state's ongoing involvement in the economy. However, other advanced economies have, sadly, "caught up" with France in terms of unemployment, and some, notably its neighbor to the south, Spain, have far more serious unemployment problems.

The French welfare state has been resilient in the face of efforts to roll it back (Prasad 2006). It has, as noted previously, seen considerable privatization, and there have been pushes toward deregulation, but the state continues to play an enormous role in the French economy, employing numerous citizens and capturing a large share of the GDP. Moreover, state services continue to be fairly generous in comparative terms. Comparative analysts have identified several reasons for this. First, there is the French tradition of

statism that we have mentioned. Second, while the modern French welfare state had roots in the leftist Front Populaire alliance in the late 1930s, it is important to note that some important features of the French welfare state were created, expanded, and maintained precisely by conservatives. In the Fifth Republic, De Gaulle established a long tradition of conservative electoral success. Indeed, while in the United Kingdom and the United States the 1980s saw attacks on the welfare state as conservative parties returned to power, in France, the Socialists finally took power in 1981 when François Mitterrand was elected (1981–1995). Thus, on one hand, the conservatives were identified with the welfare state, and on the other, during the moment when the right was attempting to dismantle aspects of the welfare state in other countries, the left held power in France. Another key feature of the French welfare state that may help to preclude attacks on it is that (1) many of its benefits are not radically redistributive (Esping-Anderson 1990: 27) and (2) a significant portion of state revenues come from a consumption tax called a Value-Added Tax (or VAT, similar to state-level sales taxes found in the United States). Why would this matter? According to some scholars (Prasad 2006), consumption taxes are less likely to be perceived as unfair by political opponents of the welfare state, and thus less likely to generate strong opposition.

## CASE STUDIES

### The State in France

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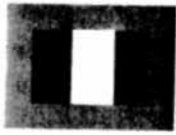
Within the comparative European context France is thought of as having historically had a strong state. While we would not recognize the French state of the seventeenth century as "strong" in the twenty-first-century world, in its time it was more unified and more consistently controlled its territory than many of its competitors. For this reason many historians have thought of the French state of Louis XIV

as serving as the epitome of European absolutism. It is perhaps as a result of this strong absolutist state that the modern French state has been so centralist. The French Revolution had a well-institutionalized, if fiscally unsound, state to transform, and in the post-revolutionary years the state was expanded, with new layers of administration added. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the

state's reach and dominance over local society increased slowly but surely (Weber 1976).

The French economy has featured a prominent role for the state for many years, especially when contrasted with its northern neighbor, Great Britain, and with the United States. This has been true at least since the time of Colbert (that's the seventeenth-century economic thinker





## The State in France

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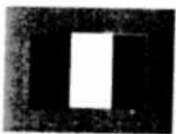
Jean-Baptiste, not Comedy Central's Stephen, though the last name is pronounced in the same way). France was one of the earliest of economic modernizers and was a great economic power in the eighteenth century. The modern French economy with its significant state involvement—known as *dirigisme*—is a product of the immediate aftermath of the second world war. President Charles de Gaulle nationalized key industries and used the state to promote recovery from the damage of the war, while American aid in the form of the post-war Marshall Plan contributed to reconstruction. The program was successful: France achieved solid growth and marked improvements in the standard of living in the three decades from about 1945 to about 1975, known as the *trente glorieuses* ("glorious thirty"). Under recent president Nicolas Sarkozy there was great debate about the role that the state would continue to play in the economy. On one hand, there is the question of whether future economic

competitiveness can co-exist with the general support of workers' rights that state regulation makes possible. On the other hand, there is the ongoing question of the state's ability to make economic policy. Monetary policy is already carried out at the EU level, and there is now some talk of the centralization of European fiscal policy as well, though it is too early to tell whether this will take place.

Heir to a revolutionary tradition that figures prominently in its national consciousness, the French state has often aimed to present itself as the defender of "the people," including workers. The French state has heavily regulated the labor market, for example by implementing a thirty-five-hour work week and by establishing strong protections against layoffs and firings. The state directly employs a relatively large proportion of the workforce, totaling 5.3 million workers and over 20 percent of the total workforce (<http://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/files/files/statistiques/>

[chiffres\\_cles/pdf/chiffres\\_cles\\_2011.pdf](http://chiffres_cles/pdf/chiffres_cles_2011.pdf)). It has also provided generous stipends to the unemployed. Perhaps as a result, France has often struggled with higher levels of unemployment than some other developed countries. Former president Sarkozy has tried to overturn some of these regulations but was stymied by public protests.

As is discussed further in the case study on French nationalism, the French state has historically played a critical role in French national consciousness. Citizenship, understood as a kind of relationship that an individual has with the state, has historically been key to French national identity (Brubaker 1992; Greenfeld 1992). This is reinforced by the strongly centralist institutional structure of the French state. Loyalty is owed to the central state as the institutional embodiment of the nation, and not to other identities or institutions that mediate between citizens and the state.



## Authoritarian Persistence in Nineteenth-Century France

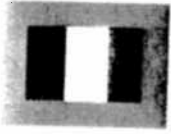
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Nobody doubts France's democratic credentials. In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it is among the world's leading democracies. Moreover, its 1789 revolution was and remains a source of inspiration to pro-democracy forces everywhere (even if it did not immediately

culminate in a democracy). Indeed, it is precisely because of the country's democratic achievements that it is worth reflecting on the challenges that France faced in institutionalizing its democracy. If France, of all countries, encountered such difficulties, should we expect anything

less for today's democratizers. In short, the French case underscores the difficulty of democratic consolidation.

We will not repeat the sequence noted in the Historical Development section in the country profile (students needing a refresher should quickly read



## Authoritarian Persistence in Nineteenth-Century France

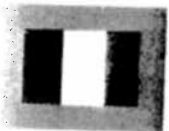
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that section). It is enough to note that the revolution, which deposed the monarchy, passed through a republican period, to the "terror," and eventually to Napoleon's rule, which was despotic by any modern definition. This was followed by the restoration of the previous monarchy, and then the "July Monarchy" of the "Citizen-King," Louis-Philippe, and finally by the Second Republic (1848–1852). The Second Empire (of Napoleon III) lasted from 1852 until 1870, when, following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, the "Third Republic" began (for an authoritative overview of this period, see Furet 1995). Indeed, even in the twentieth century France saw considerable conflict between democratic and authoritarian tendencies, finally put to rest in the post-World War II period.

In short, French political history in the nineteenth century presents us with a range of political and social models, instability, and considerable authoritarian persis-

tence. Why did these occur? One hypothesis might be the collapse of the existing order. Perhaps the elimination of well-established, if flawed, political models left the political arena too open to contestation. Indeed, if the monarchy could be abolished, was anything beyond question, negotiation, or dispute. Another idea comes from Alexis de Tocqueville, the great observer of both American and French society. As we saw elsewhere in this book, he found much to admire about the participatory-democratic habits and decentralization of American politics. In contrast, he thought that a key problem in France was the lack of these habits (because institutions had not encouraged them), alongside a centralized state and a revolution that had awakened a passionate distrust of all inequalities without providing opportunities for French citizens to develop democratic freedoms (see Tocqueville 2002[1856], esp. pp. 310–311). Another approach might emphasize the

legacies of inequalities themselves: The revolution aimed to abolish the nobility, but of course privilege lived on, and both old and new social elites and the church did what they could to protect their interests as they saw them (for one variation of this argument, see Marx 2007[1852]). If it was clear to such actors that their opponents meant for their elimination, this would have major implications for their strategic decisions. The same is true of their opponents. Think about how a rational choice approach (e.g., that of Lichbach 1995, or Kuran 1991) might model the situation in which these actors found themselves and how such an approach might try to explain the sequence of unstable politics found in nineteenth-century France. Then think about the implications of the French case for contemporary democratizers. Can we compare such cases over time? And if so, are there any limits on our ability to do so?



## Electing the French President: What Do Runoffs Do?

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In France in 2002, most voters were shocked as the results came in for the first round of presidential voting. In this first round of French elections, the nationwide popular vote is tallied for the many candidates, and a candidate is elected only if he or she secures an outright majority, which is uncommon. In the absence of a majority, the top two candidates have a runoff to determine

the winner. This system allows citizens to vote for their most preferred candidate in the first round, then vote for an "electable" candidate in the second round. Typically, the runoff had amounted to a showdown between the leading candidate of the center-right (often called the "Gaullist" candidate after French war hero and later president Charles de Gaulle) and the candidate of the center-left Socialist

Party. But in 2002, with the first-round vote split between many candidates on the left, the Socialist performed poorly and came in third with 16 percent behind center-right candidate Jacques Chirac (just under 20 percent) and the far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the National Front, who took just under 17 percent of the vote. The runoff came down to the right versus the far right.

## CASE STUDY (continued)

## Electing the French President: What Do Runoffs Do?

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For some, Le Pen's first-round success served as a condemnation of the French practice of having elections with a "runoff" between the top two candidates: It gave a huge platform and political spotlight to a candidate on the fringe. What happened next had the opposite effect, though it was predictable: Jacques Chirac won 82 percent of the vote in the runoff, and Le Pen won less than 18 percent. Chirac thus took nearly all of the vote that had gone to all other candidates in the first round and won the presidency overwhelmingly, and Le Pen barely increased his tally at all despite the elimination of all other candidates. Turnout also increased in the second round, despite the fact that Chirac's win was near-certain, as French voters turned out overwhelmingly (while also taking to the streets in protest) to vote against Le Pen.

This raises the issue of whether runoffs are good or bad for representation and democracy. While anomalies such as the Le Pen result can emerge in the first round, proponents of the system can argue that it performed exactly as

intended: It allowed French voters to express their initial preference, then weeded out the more extreme candidate. It also signaled the frustration of voters with the Socialist Party, which allowed that party to reshape its platform for the future, rather than simply resting on its laurels as the presumptive leader of the left. As importantly, the runoff ensured that the individual elected president ultimately received more than 50 percent of the votes in a presidential election. That is, the president ends up with a clear mandate of over half of French voters electing him or her. This contrasts with the American model, for example, in which it is relatively common for presidents to win the presidency with less than 50 percent of the popular vote. It should also be noted that voter turnout is much higher in French elections than in the United States and many other countries, at about 80 percent in most presidential elections and 60 percent in parliamentary elections ([http://www.idea.int/vt/country\\_view.cfm?CountryCode=FR#pres](http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=FR#pres)).

For these reasons, runoffs are currently used in elections in a large number of countries, including for parliamentary districts in France itself. The runoff features frequently in elections in Latin America and Africa, where presidentialism is common. In these countries, there are particular historical and social reasons that can make the runoff appealing. In Chile in 1970, the Marxist Salvador Allende was confirmed president by Congress after receiving less than 37 percent of the vote; three years later, a military coup to overthrow the elected president resulted in nearly two decades of brutal dictatorship. And in Africa, presidential elections can result in voting along ethnic lines in the first round, but broader coalition building across ethnic lines to win in the second round. It is worth considering how history might have been different—and whether violence and democracy would be affected—if a French-style runoff system had existed in Chile in 1970 or did not exist in some African countries today.

## CASE STUDY

## The French Revolution

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The French Revolution took place amid major structural problems in eighteenth-century French society (Furet 1996; Doyle 2003). In this period France, like much of early modern Europe, remained an "estate society," divided into three groups: a nobility with special privileges, the

clergy, and commoners. The social status of the nobility, however, was weakened by the ongoing efforts of the centralizing, absolutist crown. As the monarchy and its state grew stronger, the nobility felt increasingly marginalized. At the same time, the French absolutist state, largely

through its involvement in foreign wars (especially the American Revolution), faced major fiscal difficulties (Doyle 2003). Indeed, by the late eighteenth century it was nearly bankrupt. Meanwhile, periodic problems in food distribution and rural poverty ensured that much of France's



## The French Revolution

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rural population felt discontent. Finally, the spread of the Enlightenment and of nationalism provided the bases for an intellectual critique of the old regime (Greenfeld 1992; Bell 2001).

The revolution began as a series of efforts to reform the French state. The crown called an "Assembly of Notables," but the assembly declared that the Estates General, which had not met since the early seventeenth century, needed to be called. When the Estates General convened, it was divided in the customary manner into the three estates mentioned previously. However, before long, politics and propaganda forced representatives of the first two estates to join the latter one, the core idea being that the French nation shouldn't be divided by estates, since all of its members should be equal. The third estate was the nation, as Sieyès declared (Furet 1995: 45–51). In other words, the Estates General was reinterpreted as being something like a modern, national legislature (though the leaders of

the Estates General remained bourgeois and nobles, along with some clergy, and not "popular" actors). Reform quickly devolved into a novel form of collective behavior that was surprising even to its most central participants and those who attempted to lead and control it. Street actions began, and mobs attacked the Bastille prison on July 14, 1789, wishing to destroy a reviled symbol of the arbitrary authority of the monarch to imprison opponents at will. By 1792, the monarchy had fallen amidst increasing violence—much perpetrated by mobs known as the "*sans culottes*"—opening a period known as the "Terror," in which perceived enemies of the revolution were murdered in large numbers. Robespierre was a key figure in this period, perpetrating the paranoid violence that ultimately consumed him. This was followed by a period of relaxation known as the "Thermidorian reaction" and, finally, by the rise of Napoleon. On one hand Napoleon appears a conservative figure, since, for

example, he declared himself emperor. But on the other hand he can be viewed as a revolutionary whose mission was to spread the French Revolution to the rest of Europe, through an imperial war.

What struck so many contemporaries was the Revolution's *destructive* nature. It seemed intent upon an eradication of the old society, and the replacement of all of its forms by new, "revolutionary" ones. This included the creation of a new, revolutionary calendar, the efforts to destroy the Church and its teachings, the war on the nobility, the destruction of many architectural sites, and so forth. The French revolution subsequently became the model for many later revolutionaries and its ideals inspirational for nationalists and republicans everywhere. At the same time, it surprised nearly everyone involved, and those who attempted to control it quickly learned that they had helped to unleash social forces beyond their ability to lead (Arendt 1963).



## Civic Nationalism in France?

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French national identity is typically treated as the clearest example of the civic variety, often juxtaposed to the German case, which is frequently taken as the quintessential example of ethnic nationalism (Brubaker 1992; Greenfeld 1992). There is considerable evidence in support of this view. French nationalists have, from at least

the days of the revolution, often promoted the idea of French nationality as open, independent of one's ethnic background. What matters, rather, is whether one is willing to identify with French cultural traditions. Narrowly conceived, this has often meant civic republican political values. But it often has also meant

acquiring a French cultural style. Of course, there is a potential "slippery slope" here. One can easily discriminate on such a basis, and it is possible for ethnic distinctions to be expressed in seemingly less objectionable or "coded" language. As we discuss in another case later, this idea of civic nationalism in France has in many

## CASE STUDY (continued) Civic Nationalism in France?

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ways been put to the test in recent years. France has faced significant social tensions related to the incorporation of Muslim populations. To some, these tensions are products of those groups' alleged unwillingness to assimilate. To others, such arguments are a mask for subtle racism. This issue is made more complicated by the rhetoric of right-wing groups like the National Front, which sometimes blurs the subtle distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism.

More generally, the French case raises for comparative politics the fascinating question of how types of nationalism, if

indeed they can be identified, persist over time (and how they spread, as discussed by Weber 1976). One view is that French nationalism's civic tendencies are lodged in the imaginations of the French people: that civic nationalism is located at the level of public opinion, so to speak, and transmits itself inter-generationally at that level. Another view, though, focuses on the centrality of institutions in holding onto and transmitting civic national identity across generations. Thus the state's educational apparatus, its citizenship laws, and the symbolic proclamations of the government might be expected to

exercise a key role in the maintenance of civic nationalism. If this is the case, then we would expect institutional changes to potentially affect national identity. Finally, theories that posit types of identity need to account not just for stability but also for change. French national identity in the twenty-first century may have common features with late-eighteenth-century French national identity, but these identities certainly are not identical. Indeed, even the civic character of the identity is not unchanged. For cultural phenomena like national identity, then, both persistence and change are in need of explanation.

## CASE STUDY Religion and Secularism in France

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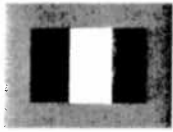
France is the society most closely associated with the idea of *laïcité*, though one encounters it prominently in a number of other societies as well, including parts of Latin America (Blancarte 2008). France was historically a Catholic society. For a time, there had been a relatively large Protestant minority (the "Huguenots") but they were repressed and most fled after 1685, when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes that had granted freedom of conscience and practice to Protestants. France's Catholicism was central to its early modern identity.

Most scholars see French secularism as having its origins in the eighteenth century. Religion and politics had been closely linked in continental Europe for a long time, but

the church and the state had experienced considerable tension at certain points in the history of their relationship. As the French absolutist state rose, a theological position known as Jansenism, and a political theory known as Regalism, helped the king to exert greater control over the church. Despite these tensions, after the French Revolution began in 1789, republicans and revolutionaries identified the church with the "old regime" (Kuru 2009) and thus repressed it, murdering many priests. The French Revolutionary regime tried to create its own, secular religion, and to replace religious symbols with its own, secular ones. This was changed by Napoleon, who concluded an agreement (known as a "concordat") with the church,

but even then the state dominated the church, and the church never returned to its former powers. Subsequent French history witnessed multiple struggles between monarchy/empire and democratic republicanism (Furet 1995), with the former being more closely associated with a pro-Church position. Democratic republicanism was eventually triumphant, though, and over time French Catholicism (along with other, minority religions) was "privatized" (on privatization, see Casanova 1994). In today's France the view that the Catholic Church should have an expanded rule in politics is marginal.

In recent years this has been linked to great controversy, particularly because immigration has notably increased the



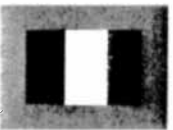
## Religion and Secularism in France

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Islamic share of the French population. Great debates have been held over whether religious garb (in particular, the Muslim *hijab*) can be worn in schools and other public organizational spaces (Scott 2007). Opponents of traditionally Islamic symbolism in public have drawn

on long-standing national mythology about *laïcité*, though their critics suggest that this is a cover for unspoken ethnic discrimination. The fundamental conflict has concerned not whether members of religious groups should be able to practice their religion, but whether they should be

able to engage in religious expression (including clothing) in public institutions. It is worth further noting that to some extent this issue cuts across the French political spectrum.



## Globalization and Culture in France

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France's relationship with globalization has been complex. In the late nineteenth century, France was a lead "globalizer." If you travel in the developing world today, you may learn that the architecture built in the nineteenth century had a marked French influence; this is a visible indicator of French influence at one point in time. French ideas were extraordinarily influential around the globe in this period, at least in more cosmopolitan social sectors in many societies. Especially influential was the idea of positivism, that science and reason could contribute to the betterment of society. In the late nineteenth century, the culture with the broadest global reach was almost certainly French, though the British Empire ensured global expansiveness for British culture as well.

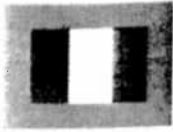
In the twentieth century, though, France grew more ambivalent about globalization. Perhaps this is because rather than being a net exporter of cultural forms, it began to import them. France continued to be influential in global culture, especially in its former colonies, but in many ways its leading position

was overtaken by the United States. Globalization has taken on new forms and grown, with new media and new patterns of communication, and the influence of American ideas and culture has spread. One indicator of this rise of "Anglo-Saxon" culture has been the replacement of French, which was long the language of diplomacy, with English as the dominant language in international affairs. Less formally, but perhaps more consequentially, cultural forces from Hollywood to hip hop have reshaped French film, literature, music, and the arts.

French ambivalence about globalization also reflects economic ideas, especially about global capitalism. This dates back centuries. In the early modern period, royal ministers exhorted nobles to engage in commerce, but many rejected this idea, convinced that commerce would "disparage" (*déroger*) nobility (Furet 1992; Greenfeld 2001). Important early socialist works, many of which predated and anticipated Marx, developed in France. In the late eighteenth century, Rousseau and others developed the critique that

modern social relations are corrupting; this later found expression on both left and right, and in both radical democratic movements and with more extreme opposition to capitalism and democracy. Within the French economy itself, there has often been an emphasis on craftsmanship and small-scale production. At the same time, France in the twentieth century did establish major corporations, but often did so with state support; examples of major French companies that were state-owned or nationalized at one time include the car company Renault, the oil giant Total, and several major banks and utilities.

A common refrain in France has been the need to develop in a "French way," resisting Americanization and globalization. Economically, this is linked to common tropes in French culture: Societies fully immersed in global capitalism "live to work," whereas some French citizens would argue that the French "work to live." France has thus been somewhat skeptical of multinational businesses and of the consequences of international trade agreements, and it has even tried to limit the



## Globalization and Culture in France

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spread and use of English words in French business. This is not simply a matter of the French government, but important segments of the citizenry as well. One example is José Bové, an activist and “farmer” who destroyed a McDonald’s restaurant under construction in 1999. This action was well received by many members of the French public, and Bové is a well-known figure in France, though his popularity has its limits; when he later ran for president, he received less than 2 percent of the vote. On the other hand, he is not a typical “French farmer.” His parents were university researchers, and he spent part of his childhood in California. In any case, some took his stance to be a fairly extreme expression of a common sentiment.

While ambivalent about some aspects of globalization, France has also been a

key mover of deeper integration in continental Europe in the period since World War II. It has sought to develop strong economic ties to Germany and other economies while developing in a way that relies heavily on elements of free markets yet continues to guarantee an active role for the state in the economy. It has been a strong supporter of the European Union, and in 2011 France, along with Germany, exercised a considerable influence over how the EU responded to the fiscal crises in Greece, Italy, and worries over Portugal and Spain as well. France also retains major global linkages to former colonies, particularly in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. North African migrants—especially from Algeria and Morocco—constitute an important group in French society, one which pushes the boundaries of cultural

change, given that some members of that group are perceived to be less than receptive to traditional French notions of *laïcité* (see the Introduction and the box about Religion and Secularism for more information on this).

Together, these debates about economics and cultural identity suggest a society that has conflicting and perhaps contradictory views about the desirability of globalization; in this, France shares many challenges with other countries—including the United States—that grapple with the tough issues of how to respond as nations in an international twenty-first century.

### Research Prompts

1. France has runoff elections, and the United States does not. What are the major consequences of this difference? Would you expect the consequences of this difference to play out in the same way in a wider range of comparative cases? Why or why not?
2. France is a society that has had many revolutions, and one in which revolution has become a key idea in the culture. Brazil is a society that, despite promoting social change in important, novel, and influential ways, has largely been free of revolutions as such. Can you explain this difference?
3. The French state captures a considerably larger share of its GDP as revenue than other countries. Why might this be?
4. The French welfare state has survived “retrenchment” more successfully than a number of others, despite some changes, including the privatization of a number of formerly state-owned enterprises. How do you explain its staying power? Will it likely remain strong in the future?
5. Scholars have often claimed that French nationalism is “civic” and German nationalism “ethnic.” If this is true, why is it so?
6. The United Kingdom has a fairly small extreme, xenophobic right wing (represented by the British National Party) whereas in France, this group has been a bit larger (though the National Front still represents a minority of French citizens, with its presidential candidate, Marine Le Pen, winning nearly 18 percent of the first-round vote in 2012). Is this difference a function of different ideas of nationhood, different historical experiences, different patterns of decline of traditional left-wing parties, different political institutions, or something else?