GLOBAL EDITION

Comparative Politics Today

A World View

ELEVENTH EDITION

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ALWAYS LEARNING

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A WORLD VIEW

33 percent claimed to belong to one or more associations. This percentage has increased slowly during the last thirty years.[9]

The pattern of association membership, however, has changed considerably. The traditional advocacy and political groups, politicized unions, and professional associations suffered sharp declines in absolute (and proportional) membership. Sports associations, self-help groups, and newly established ethnic associations now attract larger numbers of people. Membership tends to increase with income, education, and age. As more middle-class people have joined associations, working-class people have dropped out. A higher percentage of workers now belong to sports associations than to unions.

To some extent, these changes reflect shifting attitudes about political commitment in France. Although associational life remains strong, the old kind of *militantisme* (voluntary work, with its implication of deep and abiding political commitment) has clearly diminished. Nevertheless, it is now clear that a newer kind of nonpolitical commitment is emerging. On average, about two-thirds of members of voluntary associations participate regularly, and more than half of members volunteer their services. New legislation has also produced changes. A 1981 law made it possible for immigrant groups to form their own organizations. This encouraged the emergence of thousands of ethnic associations. Decentralization legislation passed a few years later encouraged municipalities to support, with public funds, the creation of local associations, some to perform municipal services.

Education

One of the most important ways a community preserves and transmits its values is through education. Napoléon Bonaparte recognized the significance of education. Well into the second half of the twentieth century, the French educational system remained an imposing historical monument in the unmistakable style of the First Empire. The edifice Napoléon erected combined education at all levels, from primary school to postgraduate professional training, into one centralized corporation: the imperial university. Its job was to reinforce the national doctrine through uniform programs at various levels.

As the strict military discipline of the Napoléonic model was loosened by succeeding regimes, each discovered that the machinery created by Napoléon was a convenient and coherent instrument for transmitting the values—both changing and permanent—of French civilization. The centralized imperial university has therefore never been truly dismantled. The minister of education presides over a ministry that employs more than a million people and controls curriculums and teaching methods, the criteria for selection and advancement of pupils and teachers, and the content of examinations.

Making advancement at every step dependent upon passing an examination is not peculiar to France (it also occurs in Japan and other countries). What is distinctly French is an obsessive belief that everybody is equal before an examination. The idea that education is an effective weapon for emancipation and social betterment has had popular as well as official recognition. The ***baccalauréat***—the certificate of completion of the academic secondary school, the *lycée*—remains almost the sole means of access to higher education. Such a system suits and profits best those self-motivated middle-class children for whom it was designed.

Nevertheless, during the Fifth Republic, the structure of the French educational system has undergone some significant changes, even while the basic features have remained in place. The secondary schools, which trained only 700,000 students as late as 1945, now provide instruction for 5.5 million. Between 1958 and 2012, the number of students in higher education rose from 170,000 to more than 2.3 million. The proportion of twenty- to twenty-four-year-olds in higher education (40 percent) is comparable to that in any other European country.

The introduction of a comprehensive middle school with a common core curriculum in 1963 altered the system of early academic selection. Other reforms eliminated rigid ability tracking. However, the implementation of reforms, whether passed by governments of the right or the left, has often faced difficult opposition from middle-class parents and from teachers unions of the left. Although 72 percent of the eligible student age cohort passed the baccalauréat in 2011 (more than triple the proportion of 1970), education reforms have altered only slightly the vast differences in the success of children from different social backgrounds. Blue- and white-collar workers comprise more than half the workforce, but their children comprise fewer than a third of the candidates for the baccalauréat.

Because of the principle of open admission, every holder of the baccalauréat can gain entrance to a university. As in some American state universities, however, there is a rather ruthless elimination at the end of the first year (particularly for students in such fields as medicine) and sometimes later. Students of lower-class backgrounds typically fare worse than the others. In addition, the number of students from such backgrounds is disproportionately large in fields in which diplomas have the lowest value in the professional market and in which unemployment is highest.

The most ambitious attempt to reform the university system came in the wake of the student rebellion of 1968, followed by other reforms in the 1970s and 1980s. They strove to encourage the autonomy of each university; the participation of teachers, students, and staff in the running of the university; and the collaboration among different disciplines. The government subsequently withdrew some of the reforms. Others failed to be implemented because of widespread resistance by those concerned. Administrative autonomy has remained fragmentary, as the ministry has held the financial purse strings as well as the right to grant degrees. After 2007, the autonomy question was once again on the agenda, this time with the objective of making French universities more competitive on the European and the global level. Perhaps the most important reform of the Sarkozy years was the increase of funding for universities (more than 20 percent), and the provision of incentives for private financing of university research. Nevertheless, the widely lamented crisis in the university system has hardly been alleviated, although the size of the student population appears to have stabilized.

Since 2003, the most important symbolic change in French higher education has been the introduction of affirmative action programs ("positive discrimination") for students in "priority education zones"—schools in poor areas, generally in or near larger cities. Some of the elite institutions of higher education (Sciences Po in Paris, for example) have created links to some of these schools and have established special conditions of admission for their best students. Although these programs involve only a handful of students, these experiments are important because they represent the first affirmative effort to integrate potential leaders from immigrant communities into the French system (which we will discuss later).

An additional characteristic of the French system of higher education is the parallel system of ***grandes écoles***, a sector of higher education that functions outside of the network of universities under rules that permit a high degree of selectivity. These schools include the most prestigious schools of higher education in France. While most are state institutions, some are private and fee paying. As university enrollment has multiplied, the more prestigious grandes écoles have only modestly increased the number of students admitted upon strict entrance examinations.[10] For more than a century, these schools have been the training ground of highly specialized elites. They prepare students for careers in science, engineering, business management, and the top ranks of the civil service, and, in contrast to university graduates, virtually all graduates of the grandes écoles find employment and often assume positions of great responsibility.

Socialization and Communication

The political effectiveness of the mass media is often determined by the way in which people appraise the media's integrity and whether they believe that the media serve or disturb the functioning of the political system. In the past, business firms, political parties, and governments (both French and foreign) often backed major newspapers. Today, most newspapers and magazines are owned by business enterprises, many of them conglomerates that extend into fields other than periodical publications. Nevertheless, every major newspaper and news magazine in France is subsidized by the state. During the Sarkozy years, subsidies doubled. A report in 2013 estimated that state subsidies between 2009 and 2011 were about 5 billion euros (or 6.6 billion dollars). Interestingly, the largest subsidies during this period, when the right was governing, went to the Communist newspaper, *l'Humanité*, and to several other publications of the left.

In spite of a growth in population, the number of daily newspapers and their circulation has declined since World War II. The decline in readership, a common phenomenon in most European democracies, is due to competition from other media, such as television, radio, and the Internet.

Television has replaced all other media as a primary source of political information in France and other Western democracies.[11] It is increasingly the primary mediator between political forces and individual citizens, and it has an impact on the organization and substance of politics. First, a personality that

plays well on television is now an essential ingredient of politics. As in other countries, image and spectacle are important elements of politics. Second, television helps set the agenda of political issues by choosing among the great variety of themes, problems, and issues dealt with by political and social forces and magnifying them for the public. Finally, television now provides the arena for national electoral campaigns, largely displacing mass rallies and meetings.

Confidence in various sources of political information varies among different groups. Young people and shopkeepers are most confident in radio and television information, while managers are more confident in the written press than in television for political information.

Until 1982, all radio and television stations that originated programs on French territory were owned by the state and operated by personnel whom the state appointed and remunerated. Since then, the system of state monopoly has been dismantled. As a first and quite important step, the Socialist government authorized private radio stations. This move attempted to regularize and regulate more than a thousand existing pirate radio stations. Inevitably, this vast network of 1,600 stations was consolidated by private entrepreneurs who provide programming services and, in some instances, control a large number of local stations.

The 1982 legislation also reorganized the public television system. It granted new rights of reply to government communications and allotted free time to all political parties during electoral campaigns. During the following years, however, even greater changes were produced by a process of gradual privatization and globalization of television broadcasting. Today, more than 900 television channels from throughout the world are available to French viewers (depending on the system that they choose) compared with 3 in 1980 and 30 in 1990.

With stunning rapidity, the Internet has challenged all other media. France pioneered online communication in 1981 with telephone-linked computer service—the Minitel—that, by the late 1990s, provided over 25,000 video services to 20 percent of the households in France. The Internet rapidly overtook the Minitel after 2000, however. In 2000, about 14 percent of the French population used the Internet, compared with 41 percent four years later, and 69 percent in 2010, just below Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Germany, but well above the European average. Although many French households still have their Minitels stored in the closet, they use the Internet on their computers for communication, information, and entertainment.

Recruitment and Style of Elites

9.7 Discuss the makeup and recruitment of France's "political class."

Together with members of Parliament, elected officials of municipalities, departments, and regions, some local party leaders, and a few journalists of national renown are counted among what is known in France as the **political class**. All together, they comprise not more than 15,000 or 20,000 people. From about 1879 on (the Third Republic), professionals (lawyers, doctors, and journalists) and farmers dominated the Chamber of Deputies, now the National Assembly. The vast majority were "local notables," trained in law and experienced in local administration, who benefited from the ability to hold local and parliamentary offices at the same time (see below).

A substantial change in political recruitment occurred during the Fourth Republic, when the percentage of professionals, self-employed, and farmers became a minority. Then, during the Fifth Republic, the number of blue- and white-collar workers declined due partially to the professionalization of parliamentary personnel, as well as to the decline of the Communist Party.

A large number of legislators now come from the public sector—about a quarter of the deputies in 2007 and 2012 were either civil servants or teachers. Although the majority of high civil servants usually lean toward parties of the right, more than 40 percent of those who sat in the National Assembly elected in 2012 were part of the Socialist group. In addition, the vast majority of teachers were Socialists. What is striking about the deputies in the last two National Assemblies is the growth of two categories, private managerial executives and retired people. The former are even more numerous in the 2012 assembly of the left than in the previous assembly of the right. The growth of retired people no doubt reflects the early age of official retirement in France.

Even more important than their number is the political weight that high civil servants carry in Parliament. Some of the civil servants who run for election to Parliament have previously held positions in the political executive, either as members of the ministerial staffs or as junior ministers. Not surprisingly, they are frequently candidates for a post in the Cabinet.

More than in any other Western democracy, the highest ranks of the civil service are the training and recruitment grounds for top positions in both politics and industry. Among the high civil servants, about 3,400 are members of the most important administrative agencies, the five ***grands corps***, from which the vast majority of the roughly 500 administrators engaged in political decision making are drawn.[12] The recruitment base of the highest levels of the civil service remains extremely narrow. The knowledge and capability required to pass the various examinations give clear advantages to the children of senior civil servants. As a result, the ranking bureaucracy forms something approaching a hereditary class. Past attempts to develop a system of more open recruitment into the higher civil service have been only marginally successful.

The **École Nationale d'Administration (ENA)** and the **École Polytechnique**, together with the other grandes écoles, play an essential role in the recruitment of administrative, political, and business elites. Virtually all the members of the grands corps are recruited directly from the graduating classes of the ENA and the Polytechnique. What differentiates the members of the grands corps from other ranking administrators is their general competence and mobility. At any one time, as many as two-thirds of the members of these corps might be on leave or on special missions to other administrative agencies or special assignments to positions of influence.

They might also be engaged in politics as members of Parliament (thirty-four in the National Assembly elected in 2012), local government, or the executive. Twelve of the nineteen prime ministers who have served since 1959 were members of a grand corps and attended a grande école. The percentage of ministers in any given government who belong to the grands corps has varied between 10 and 64 percent—64 percent of the ministers in 2009. Thus, the grandes écoles–grands corps group, though small in membership, produces a remarkable proportion of the country's political elite.

The same system is increasingly important in recruiting top-level business executives. Members of the grands corps can move from the public sector to the private sector because they can go on leave for years, while they retain their seniority, their pension rights, and the right to return to their job. (Few who leave do in fact return to serve as civil servants.)[13] In 2007, 75 percent of the members of the executive boards of the forty largest companies in France were graduates of a grande école. The relationship between the grandes écoles and the grands corps on the one hand and politics and business on the other hand provides structure for an influential elite and survives changes in the political orientation of governments. While this system is not politically monolithic, the narrowness of its recruitment contributes to a persistent similarity of style and operation and to the fairly stable—at times rigid—value system of its operators.

For outsiders, this tight network is difficult to penetrate. Even during the 1980s—the period when industrial restructuring and privatization of state-run enterprises encouraged a new breed of freewheeling businesspeople in the United States and in Britain—a similar process had a very limited impact on the recruitment of new elites in France.

The Importance of Gender

The representation of women among French political elites is almost the lowest in Western Europe. Women make up well over half the electorate, but made up 26 percent of the deputies in the National Assembly in 2012 and only 22 percent of Senate members in 2012. The percentage of women in politics is higher at the local level, where they made up 32 percent of the municipal councilors and almost 14 percent of the mayors in 2008, 40 percent more than seven years earlier.

Political parties structure access to political representation far more in France than in the United States. The left has generally made a greater effort to recruit women than has the right, although President Sarkozy made an effort to recruit women for cabinet posts. President Hollande has established a principle of parity for his cabinet appointments.

In contrast to the United States, political advancement in France generally requires a deep involvement in political parties, with a bias in favor of professional politicians and administrators. However, only recently have women begun to make this kind of long-term

commitment to political life. One woman who has is **Ségolène Royal**. A graduate of the ENA and a member of the Council of State (one of the five grands corps), she has also been a Socialist government minister, a deputy (member) in the National Assembly, and president of one of the regions of France. She was the (unsuccessful) Socialist candidate for the presidential elections in 2007.

Periodically, governments and the political parties recognize this dearth of women in representative institutions, but little has been done about it. By the 1990s, leaders of all political parties favored amending the Constitution to permit positive discrimination to produce greater gender parity in representative institutions. Thus, with the support of both the **president of the Republic** and the prime minister, and without dissent, the National Assembly passed an amendment in December 1998 stipulating that "the law [and not the constitution] determines the conditions for the organization of equal access of men and women to electoral mandates and elective functions." Enforcement legislation requires greater gender parity, at least in the selection of candidates. More recently, President Sarkozy recruited record numbers of women for ministerial posts, and President Hollande has established a rule of parity for ministerial posts. This is a significant departure for the French political system, which has resisted the use of quotas in the name of equality.

Perhaps the most important change in the political behavior of French women is in the way they vote. During the Fourth Republic, a majority of women consistently voted for parties of the right. However, as church attendance among women declined, their political orientation moved from right to left. In every national election between 1986 and 1997, a clear majority of women voted for the left. By 2002, however, the pattern of voting among women changed once again. In 2002 and 2007, a majority of women supported the right in both presidential and legislative elections, even though Sarkozy's opponent in 2007 was a woman. In 2012, a majority of women supported the left, but in slightly lower proportions than men. To some extent, this is related to stronger support for the right among older women, as well as to an increase in the abstention rate among younger women (and men). It is also related to a decline in support for the left among the youngest age cohorts. On the other hand, women have given far less support than men to the extreme right.[14]

Interest Groups

9.8 List the three major types of interest groups in France and describe the ways they influence government.

The Expression of Interests

As in many other European countries, the organization of French political life is largely defined within the historical cleavages of class and religious traditions. Interest groups have therefore frequently shared ideological commitments with the political parties with which they have organizational connections.

Actual memberships in most economic associations have varied considerably over time by sector, but they are generally much smaller than comparable groups in other industrialized countries. In 2013, no more than 8 percent of workers belonged to trade unions (the largest decline in Western Europe over the past twenty-five years). About 50 percent of French farmers and 75 percent of large industrial enterprises belong to their respective organizations.[15] Historically, many of the important economic groups have experienced a surge of new members at dramatic moments in the country's social or political history. But memberships then decline as conditions normalize, leaving some associations with a membership too small to justify their claims of representativeness.

Many groups lack the resources to employ a competent staff, or they depend on direct and indirect forms of state support. The modern interest group official is a fairly recent phenomenon that is found only in certain sectors of the group system, such as business associations.

Interest groups are also weakened by ideological division. Separate groups defending the interests of workers, farmers, veterans, schoolchildren, and consumers are divided by ideological preferences. The ideological division of representation forces each organization to compete for the same clientele in order to establish its representativeness. Consequently, even established French interest groups exhibit a radicalism in action and goals that is rare in other Western democracies. For groups that lack the means of using the information media, such tactics also become a way to put their case before the public at large.

The Labor Movement

The French labor movement is divided into national confederations of differing political sympathies, although historical experiences have driven labor to

Pressure from Protest
Demonstration by medical interns in Paris in early 2003.

avoid direct organizational ties with political parties.[16] Union membership has declined steeply since 1975, although union membership is declining in almost every industrialized country (refer back to Figure 3.1). The youngest salaried workers virtually deserted the trade union movement in the 1990s. Although the decline in membership has slowed slightly in recent years, recruitment of young workers has lagged. In addition, after 1990, candidates supported by nonunion groups in various plant-level elections have attracted more votes than any of the established union organizations.[17] In fact, unions lost members and (electoral) support at the very time when the French trade union movement was becoming better institutionalized at the workplace and better protected by legislation.

Despite these clear weaknesses, workers still maintain considerable confidence in unions to defend their interests during periods of labor conflict. Support for collective action and confidence in unions and their leadership of strike movements remain strong. Indeed, during the massive strikes, public support for the strikers was far higher than confidence in the government against which the strikes were directed.[18] Nevertheless, strike levels have declined over the past thirty years, and most strikes are limited to the public sector. Moreover, their impact has been limited by legal requirements to provide minimum service.

The decline in union membership has not encouraged consolidation. Unlike workers in the United States, French workers in the same plant or firm may be represented by several union federations. As a result, there is constant competition among unions at every level for membership and support. Even during periods when the national unions agree to act together, animosities at the plant level sometimes prevent cooperation.

Moreover, the weakness of union organization at the plant level—which is where most lengthy strikes are called—means that unions are difficult bargaining partners. Unions at this level maintain only weak control over the strike weapon. Union militants are quite adept at sensitizing workers, producing the preconditions for strike action, and channeling strike movements once they begin. However, the unions have considerable difficulty in effectively calling strikes and ending them. Thus, unions depend heavily on the general environment, what they call the "social climate," in order to