



## Source 1: Introduction to the Socio-Political Environment of France in 2002

MEMO FROM THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT TO THE NEWLY APPOINTED U.S.  
AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE DECLASSIFIED --- DATED 20 March 2002 ---

Greetings,

The French government extends its most sincere congratulations on your nomination. My members of staff and I have been given the privilege to compile this report to serve as an informal briefing of the current state of France in terms of its political, economic, and social environment. While you may have been previously briefed on the details, we would like to provide this as reference for you to use at your leisure. You may regard it as reading material for the flight. We will be in touch.

### POLITICAL

President Chirac has been in office since 17 May 1995. This is the final year of his first term in office, meaning he will be seeking reelection in this coming May. This election year, like the many before it, have caused suppressed political ideals to emerge in a cacophony of opinion and anger. A prominent area of emphasis in recent French political discourse was of the government's role in assuaging fears of national insecurity. Global security, needless to say, remains a nerve-wracking subject in the public and the government. The senseless attacks perpetrated against your country in September of last year have left France more conscious of international and domestic security threats. A dialogue has emerged condemning violence across France, and has offered some solutions on how to deal with the zones within France where this threat is most likely to arise. These areas, populated primarily of recent immigrants, have been addressed by Chirac's administration and the media, who are very efficient at exposing the potential threats against French citizens. In turn, these new sentiments have fueled the emergence of a new politically Far Right leaning among many traditionally moderate voters. The allure of simple solutions to security are overwhelming at this time, and the political parties with a Far Right bias are eager to offer such solutions.

### ECONOMIC

Rampant unemployment, particularly among young educated men, has caused growing concern over the government's handling of economic initiatives, including improved control over retirement age and unemployment benefits. A recent effort to reduce maximum working hours to 35 per week has been implemented with mixed results. While the program has been hailed as a success for providing immediate employment to half of the estimated 500,000 unemployed individuals, some small companies fell victim to the high cost of appointing new members to their workforce. Additionally, France has demonstrated a decline in available health benefits in recent years, due to the state's inability to compensate those in need. This is caused by the traditional approach to welfare in France, which generally relies on direct tax funding from individuals who are not currently in need. Since there has been an influx in health issues, primarily due to high unemployment and an aging population, there are not as many individuals capable of paying into the welfare system through taxation. The same conundrum is found when considering retirement benefits. Retirement security benefits through the *retraite par répartition* system is funded by tax money from employed taxpayers, and the latter's need currently outweighs the former's ability to pay. This has caused a majority of the French public to demand the reevaluation of current health and retirement benefit systems. Finally, reports suggesting the French educational system favors those from educated families and perpetuates cycles of poverty have emerged, causing most parents to demand a restructuration of the educational system.

### SOCIAL

The disturbances in the political and economic realms have very marked impressions on the social wellbeing of the French nation. With increased tension concerning national security and the role of immigration, the defining features of French social values have come under scrutiny. Concepts borne from the *Lumières* (Enlightenment) movement in 18th century France, including that of *laïcité* (state-mandated right to practice any religion and receive funding for it so long as it does not affect another's ability to do so), have also entered the discussion in French society, for fear that they are being misconstrued by current politicians who claim *laïcité* justifies action against religions associated with immigrants. Certain politicians claim an "Islamification" of France is occurring, all the while many French citizens are voluntarily becoming non-practicing Catholics. French values that traditionally dictate the French identity have become overwhelmingly incompatible with the 21st century, and French society is taking note.

We hope that this brief introduction will assist with your new position.  
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**This source is to serve as an introduction to the Socio-Political Environment of France at the beginning of this RTTP game.**