

# *Who Has the Power?*

**2.3**

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

## ***Political Parties: Traditional “Political Families”***

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

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

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

### ***The Right***

Historically, the political right was characterized by its identification with the status quo. It favored monarchism and deplored the Revolutions of 1789 and 1848. Inclined toward authoritarian rule, the right evolved from support of Bourbon kings to that of Napoleon Bonaparte and other “heroic” leaders. It favored an elitist social structure, defined society in organic and hierarchical terms, had contempt for the masses, and invested the state with an aura of sanctity. Traditionally, the right was supported by the established classes: the aristocracy, the landed gentry, the clergy, and the military, and, as the economy developed, big business. After World War I, it allied with fascism. At the end of

World War II, fascism was discredited and monarchism was almost extinct, but a new extreme-right party, the Poujadist movement, made its appearance. That movement, named after its founder, Pierre Poujade, appealed to shopkeepers, farmers, and others who suffered from the consequences of modernization. It had a significant antiparliamentary and anti-Semitic component.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

Gaullists never put forth a clear domestic policy program, and, at least in the beginning, they did not seem to show great interest in economic reform or social justice and therefore failed to receive significant support from the working class. Yet Gaullists would vehemently reject the label of "right-wing" because, they argued, nationalism is not incompatible with social reform, and because the first Gaullist party, the Rally of the French People (Rassemblement du Peuple Français [RPF]), established in 1947, was intended to be a movement that would appeal to all social classes. The RPF, however, did not become a mass party until the collapse of the Fourth Republic.

### ***The Left***

Leftism and socialism have been particularly important in modern French political history because they have stood for progress, equality, and democratic government—themes associated with the Revolution of 1789. In response to the gradual extension of

the suffrage and the growing electoral importance of the working class, many parties appropriated the label “socialist.” Socialist parties have been inspired by different traditions—utopian, revolutionary, and reformist—some of them dating to the eighteenth century, but all have shared an emphasis on the importance (and claims) of society as a whole and a belief that economic, political, and social structures are intimately related.

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

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

### ***The Center***

For at least a century, one political family has represented the broad interests of the *petite bourgeoisie*—the shopkeepers, artisans, and certain farmers—as well as portions of the intellectual and free professional classes. It has occupied the “center” position in French politics insofar as it has rejected both the elitism of conservatives and the egalitarianism of the left. It has favored selective social reforms, but it has rejected collectivism. It has been committed to republicanism and to a democratization of political institutions, which has meant, among other things, greater power for parliament and for local authorities. The political center has been difficult to pin down with precision, because many centrists have pretended to adhere to a more fashionable “leftism” and have used misleading labels, and because the center has been fragmented.

There are two basic kinds of centrism: Radical-Socialist and Catholic. Officially founded in 1901, the origins of the Radical-Socialist Party can be traced to the beginning of the Third Republic and, as some would insist, to the French Revolution. During the Third and Fourth Republics—that is, between the 1870s and 1950s—the party was led by local notables. It was “radical” in the sense that it favored—and helped to achieve—elimination of

the Catholic Church's participation in politics and the promotion of a secular school system. It viewed the state as the enemy and argued strongly for civil rights, especially property rights. But this stand did not prevent the Radicals from asking the state to protect that segment of their electorate that felt its livelihood threatened by economic consolidation at home and competition from abroad.

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

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

Under the system of proportional representation in use in the Fourth Republic, all these parties were represented in parliament. But no party achieved a majority of seats in the national legislature, leaving unstable government coalitions made up of several parties. With the inauguration of the Fifth Republic, the number of parties was sharply reduced, largely due to changes in the electoral system and the overpowering personality of General de Gaulle. In due course, the number of parties with national significance was further reduced by an evolving consensus about the constitutional system and a growing programmatic convergence between the mainstream right and left. Since the 1980s the number of parties having realistic prospects of participating in governance has not changed much except for their labels.

### ***Elections in the Fifth Republic***

The return of de Gaulle to power produced a temporary eclipse of all political parties that the public associated with the discredited Fourth Republic. The virtual guarantee of representation under proportional representation enabled most of the mainstream parties, in particular those located in the center of the spectrum, to turn toward the right or left, or

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

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

In France, the details of the electoral system are not fixed by the constitution; rather, they are changed periodically by an organic law, usually based on partisan considerations. In 1986 proportional representation was reintroduced by the Socialists for elections to the National Assembly to minimize the representation of Gaullists and their allies. When the Gaullists captured control of that chamber, they promptly passed a law returning the country to the former single-member constituency system. The most recent changes were related to the method of regional elections: It provided for the mixed use of proportional representation and the single-member constituency system with two rounds, the mixture depending on the size of departments.<sup>2</sup> Under reforms enacted in 2003 and used in 2004, an election is on the basis of party lists (*scrutin de liste*) in two rounds. In the first round, a party list receiving an absolute majority of the votes receives a quarter of all seats. The other seats are distributed on the basis of proportionality among all the lists receiving at least 5 percent of the votes. If no party achieves an absolute majority, a second round of voting is held a week later in which all parties that received at least 10 percent of the first-round votes can participate. In the second round, these parties can join those that failed to receive 5 percent of the first-round votes. In this round, the party list receiving a plurality of the votes gains a quarter of all seats; the other seats are distributed among the parties that received at least 5 percent of the votes.

Parliament also changed the dates of elections. Because the presidential and National Assembly elections were scheduled for April and May 2007, respectively, the government introduced a bill to move the dates of senatorial, municipal, and cantonal elections from 2007 to 2008 in order not to overcrowd the electoral calendar. It did this on the advice of the Council of State and the Constitutional Council. Moreover, the bill extended the terms of the members of general councils elected in 2004 to 2011 to preserve the triennial cycle of renewal of half of the membership of the general councils.<sup>3</sup>

How have France's political parties responded to changes in the electoral system over the course of the Fifth Republic? The French are fond of saying that "on the first ballot one votes, and on the second, one eliminates." Electoral realism has dictated that to maximize its chances a political party must join forces with another party by means of preelection deals and second-round withdrawal, or mutual support, agreements. Such activities have produced polarizing tendencies: fewer political parties, and their grouping into two opposing camps, much as in the United States and Great Britain (see Table 2-6).

### ***Reduction and Rearrangement***

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

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

The Socialists then decided to restructure their organization, rejuvenate their leadership, alter their platform, and project an image of dynamism. One idea they advocated for years was *autogestion*, a form of self-management of industrial firms by workers. At the same time, the party enrolled many members of the bourgeoisie: shopkeepers, white-collar employees, and even devout Catholics. Encouraged by its new position of strength, the PS

rebuilt its alliance with the Communists. In 1972 the two parties signed a joint platform, the "Common Program of the Left," and agreed to support each other in national elections.

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

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

### ***Bipolarization and Fragmentation***

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

This group, the Independent Republicans, articulated a pragmatic approach to a policy of industrial modernization and a reorientation toward free-market economics as distinct from the Gaullist emphasis on the directing hand of the state. Giscard d'Estaing also differed from the Gaullists in taking a stronger stand in favor of an enlarged role for parliament. Finally, he opposed the Gaullist-sponsored referendum of 1969 for the restructuring of the Senate, and he was instrumental in its defeat, thereby bringing about de Gaulle's resignation. Giscard d'Estaing's background, his youthful image (he was born in 1926), his selective non-Gaullist policy positions, his promises of social reform, and his apparent sympathy for close intra-European cooperation—all these factors secured for him the support of most Democratic Centrists and most Radicals. They were persuaded that Giscard d'Estaing was a centrist himself and that he would pursue policies that would be neither Gaullist nor collectivist.

**Table 2-6 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections: France, 1958–2012 (percent of total votes cast)**

Parliamentary Elections	Presidential	Communists	Socialists	Radicals and Left Radicals	MRP	Democratic Center	Independents & Moderates	Gaullists	National Front	Others
1958 (1) (2)		18.9 20.7	15.5 13.7	11.5 7.7	11.6 7.5	9.6 8.9	19.9 4.4	17.6 23.6	5.0 26.4	0.4
1962 (1) (2)		21.7 21.3	12.6 15.2	7.5 7.0	5.3	7.8 1.6	4.4 1.6	31.9 40.5	0.4 40.5	0.4
1965 (1) (2)		22.5 21.4	32.2 <sup>a</sup> 24.1 <sup>a</sup>	45.5 <sup>a</sup> 18.8 <sup>a</sup>		15.8 <sup>b</sup>		43.7 <sup>c</sup> 43.7 <sup>c</sup>	8.3 43.7	8.3
1967 (1) (2)		20.0 20.1	16.5 <sup>d</sup> 21.3 <sup>d</sup>	5.1 <sup>d</sup> 5.1 <sup>d</sup>		17.9 7.8	10.8 23.4 <sup>d</sup>	37.8 46.4	— 43.8 <sup>d</sup>	3.0 4.4
1968 (1) (2)		21.5 <sup>e</sup> 20.6	20.1 25.1	21.3 <sup>d</sup> 43.2 <sup>a</sup>	21.2 49.2 <sup>a</sup>	13.1 <sup>f</sup> 6.1 <sup>f</sup>	42.4 <sup>b</sup>	57.6 <sup>g</sup> 36.4	6.1 46.2	— 7.8
1973 (1) (2)		21.5 20.6	20.5 25.1	22.5 43.2 <sup>a</sup>	23.3 <sup>k</sup> 49.2 <sup>a</sup>	32.6 <sup>j</sup> 50.8 <sup>j</sup>		15.1 22.6	— 26.1	2.0 10.1
1974 (1) (2)		20.5 18.6	22.3 <sup>m</sup> 28.3 <sup>m</sup>	23.3 <sup>k</sup> 23.3 <sup>k</sup>	22.8 <sup>i</sup> 28.3 <sup>j</sup>	23.9 <sup>j</sup> 24.8 <sup>j</sup>		— 22.6	— 26.1	— 10.3 <sup>p</sup>
1978 (1) (2)		15.3 <sup>m</sup> 16.2	25.8 <sup>a</sup> 51.8 <sup>a</sup>	22.0 <sup>n</sup> 37.5 <sup>q</sup>	19.2 <sup>i</sup> 18.6 <sup>i</sup>	19.2 <sup>i</sup> 48.2 <sup>j</sup>		— 21.5 <sup>r</sup>	— 17.9 <sup>g</sup>	— 15.1 <sup>l</sup>
1981 (1) (2)		6.9 9.8	31.0 34.1 <sup>a</sup>	49.3 <sup>q</sup> 0.4 <sup>k</sup>	8.3 <sup>j</sup> 16.6 <sup>j</sup>	28.3 <sup>j</sup> 48.2 <sup>j</sup>		— 21.5 <sup>r</sup>	— 17.9 <sup>g</sup>	— 15.1 <sup>l</sup>
1986		6.7 <sup>s</sup>	54.0 <sup>a</sup>	54.0 <sup>a</sup>	16.6 <sup>j</sup>	19.2 <sup>i</sup>		— 21.5 <sup>r</sup>	— 17.9 <sup>g</sup>	— 15.1 <sup>l</sup>
1988 (1) (2)		11.3 3.4	37.5 <sup>w</sup> 48.7 <sup>w</sup>	31.3 <sup>aa</sup> 23.3 <sup>ae</sup>	19.2 <sup>w</sup> 47.4 <sup>ee</sup>	40.4 <sup>x</sup> 46.8 <sup>x</sup>	40.4 <sup>x</sup> 46.8 <sup>x</sup>	20.8 <sup>o</sup> 12.4 <sup>o</sup>	9.7 <sup>u</sup> 12.4 <sup>o</sup>	6.3 <sup>v</sup> 2.7 <sup>v</sup>
1993 (1) (2)		9.2 8.6 <sup>ad</sup>	48.7 <sup>w</sup> 47.4 <sup>ee</sup>	31.3 <sup>aa</sup> 23.3 <sup>ae</sup>	19.2 <sup>w</sup> 47.7 <sup>q</sup>	39.7 <sup>y</sup> 18.6 <sup>ef</sup>	55.0 <sup>ab</sup> 52.5 <sup>o</sup>	14.9 <sup>an</sup> 20.8 <sup>o</sup>	9.7 <sup>u</sup> 15.0 <sup>o</sup>	0.9 <sup>v</sup> 2.6 <sup>v</sup>
1995 (1) (2)		8.6 <sup>ad</sup> 9.8	25.7 <sup>q</sup> 39.1 <sup>q</sup>	6.7 <sup>aq</sup> 5.6 <sup>aq</sup>	25.7 <sup>q</sup> 39.1 <sup>q</sup>	14.9 <sup>an</sup> 21.2 <sup>an</sup>	14.9 <sup>an</sup> 23.6	16.5 <sup>o</sup> 23.6	15.2 <sup>o</sup> 5.7	11.2 <sup>v</sup> 1.2
1997 (1) (2)		3.6								

2002 (1)	3.4 <sup>a†</sup>	16.2 <sup>a†</sup>	2.3 <sup>a†</sup>	6.8 <sup>a‡</sup>	3.9 <sup>a†</sup>	19.9 <sup>a</sup>
(2)	4.8	24.1	8.3 <sup>am</sup>	4.8 <sup>a‡</sup>	0.4 <sup>a†</sup>	82.2 <sup>a</sup>
	3.3	35.3	6.7 <sup>am</sup>	3.9 <sup>a†</sup>	33.3 <sup>a†</sup>	17.8 <sup>a</sup>
2007 (1)	1.9 <sup>ap</sup>	25.8 <sup>aq</sup>	18.6 <sup>ar</sup>	47.3 <sup>a†</sup>	31.1 <sup>as</sup>	11.3
(2)		46.9 <sup>aq</sup>			53.1 <sup>as</sup>	1.9
2007 (1)	4.3	24.3	6.5 <sup>at</sup>	7.6 <sup>au</sup>	39.5	4.3
(2)	2.3	42.2	2.5	0.5	46.3	13.0
		28.6 <sup>aw</sup>	2.3 <sup>ax</sup>	91.0 <sup>ay</sup>	27.2 <sup>az</sup>	4.0
2012 (1)	1.1 <sup>av</sup>	51.0 <sup>aw</sup>			48.4 <sup>az</sup>	
(2)	69.0 <sup>bb</sup>	29.4	7.1 <sup>bc</sup>	0.8 <sup>au</sup>	27.1 <sup>ac</sup>	
	1.1 <sup>bb</sup>	40.9	5.9 <sup>bc</sup>	0.5 <sup>au</sup>	38.0 <sup>a†</sup>	13.6
				2.2 <sup>bd</sup>	2.5 <sup>bd</sup>	3.7
						33.0

Source: Compiled by the author.

Note: (1) = first ballot; (2) = second ballot; horizontal arrows (↔, →, ←) = extent of support; MRP = Popular Republican Movement. Occasionally columns do not align to indicate instances in which parties moved further left or right.

<sup>a</sup> François Mitterrand.

<sup>b</sup> Jean Lecanuet.

<sup>c</sup> Charles de Gaulle.

<sup>d</sup> Federation of Democratic and Socialist Left.

<sup>e</sup> Jacques Chirac.

<sup>f</sup> Gaston Defferre.

<sup>g</sup> Alain Poher, Christian-Democratic Centrist.

<sup>h</sup> Georges Pompidou.

<sup>i</sup> "Reformers."

<sup>j</sup> Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

<sup>k</sup> Left Radicals (MRG).

<sup>l</sup> Union for French Democracy (UDF) and "presidential majority."

<sup>m</sup> Georges Marchais.

<sup>n</sup> Michel Crêteau, a Left Radical.

<sup>o</sup> Jacques Chirac.

<sup>p</sup> Including 3.9 percent for Brice Lalonde, the environmentalist candidate.

<sup>q</sup> Including Left Radicals (MRG).

<sup>r</sup> Gaullist-UDF combined list.

<sup>s</sup> André Lajoinie.

<sup>t</sup> Raymond Barre, UDF.

<sup>u</sup> Jean-Marie Le Pen.

<sup>v</sup> Including 3.8 percent for ecologists (Greens) and 4.4 percent for miscellaneous left.

<sup>w</sup> Including Left Radicals (MRG) and other allies.

<sup>x</sup> Union of the Rally and of the Center (URC), an electoral alliance

<sup>am</sup> Includes Greens, Citizens' Movement, and other democratic-left parties.

<sup>an</sup> Liberal Democracy.

<sup>ar</sup> Union for a Popular Movement (UMP).

<sup>at</sup> Maria-Georges Buffet.

<sup>au</sup> Ségolène Royal.

<sup>av</sup> François Bayrou.

<sup>aw</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy.

<sup>az</sup> Radical Left, Greens, other Left.

<sup>ba</sup> MoDem.

<sup>bb</sup> Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Left Front).<sup>†</sup>

<sup>bc</sup> François Hollande.

<sup>ad</sup> Eva Joly (Europe-Ecology-Greens).

<sup>ae</sup> François Bayrou (MoDem).

<sup>af</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP).

<sup>ag</sup> Marine Le Pen.

<sup>ah</sup> Left Front.

<sup>ai</sup> Europe Ecology & Left Radicals.

<sup>aj</sup> New Center.

<sup>ak</sup> Lionel Jospin.

<sup>al</sup> François Bayrou (UDF).

<sup>am</sup> Alain Madelin, Liberal Democracy.

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

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

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

### ***The Elections of 1981***

Early in 1981, as the presidential election approached, the Common Program had been shelved, the unity of the left was near collapse, and the Socialist and Communist Parties each ran its own candidate, Mitterrand and Georges Marchais, respectively. Before the first round of balloting in April, Marchais was almost as critical of Mitterrand as of

Giscard d'Estaing, but after obtaining only 15 percent of the popular vote (the lowest for the Communist Party since the end of World War II) compared with Mitterrand's more than 26 percent, Marchais endorsed Mitterrand in the second round. The mutual support agreement between the Socialist and Communist candidates also held in the second round of the parliamentary elections that followed Mitterrand's accession to the presidency, and Socialist candidates were the principal beneficiaries.

While the Socialist Party emerged with an absolute assembly majority for the first time since 1936, the Communist Party, with barely 9 percent of the seats, was reduced to a marginal status. There were a number of reasons for this decline: the excessive Stalinism of its leadership; the deteriorating public image of Georges Marchais, its general secretary; the party's refusal to condemn Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and elsewhere; the widespread blame placed on the party for the defeat of the left in 1978; and the lack of internal democracy. In any case, the Communist Party had become a supplicant; in exchange for several lower-level ministerial posts, the party accepted the conditions imposed on it by Mitterrand: condemnation of Soviet actions in Afghanistan and Poland, commitment to the Western alliance, respect for public liberties, and adherence to a policy of gradually transforming the economy by means of democratic methods.

Within the camp of the Gaullist and centrist-conservative alliance, the complications were far greater. In the first round of presidential balloting, both Giscard d'Estaing and Chirac found themselves competing for the same bourgeois and right-of-center electorate. While criticizing each other's personalities and policy preferences, both candidates stressed the disastrous consequences for France of a victory for the left. During the runoff between Giscard d'Estaing and Mitterrand, Chirac gave only a halfhearted endorsement of Giscard d'Estaing. In the end, Giscard d'Estaing believed that his reelection was sabotaged by Chirac's refusal to issue a clear call to his Gaullist supporters to vote for him.

During the parliamentary elections, the erstwhile majority of Gaullists (RPR) and Giscardists (UDF) reestablished an uneasy electoral alliance. The optimistically named Union for the New Majority (Union pour la Nouvelle Majorité [UNM]) decided to support common first-round candidates in more than 300 constituencies and made the usual mutual support agreements for the second round. The alliance was virtually buried by a Socialist landslide, which significantly altered the complexion of the parliament and, indeed, of the whole political party system for the first time since the founding of the Fifth Republic.

Of the various reasons for the defeat of the Gaullist-Giscardist forces, the first was the lack of unity: The incessant infighting between Giscard d'Estaing's friends and the "Chiraquists" had sapped the strength of both. Second was the widespread conviction that Giscard d'Estaing's policies were inadequate for dealing with the growing inflation and unemployment. Third, several scandals had erupted involving some ministers and, in fact, Giscard d'Estaing himself. The feeling that Giscard d'Estaing had been corrupted by power was exacerbated by his increasingly "monarchical" behavior: his contempt for parliament; his unsatisfactory press conferences, which in terms of their stage-managed character began to resemble those of de Gaulle; the tightening of presidential control over the news media; and what many considered to be an unscrupulous use of presidential patronage.

Many French voters were uneasy about the prospect of having Giscard d'Estaing as president for another term. But the Gaullists and Giscardists argued that a transfer of power to the left would be too dangerous because the Socialists would be held hostage by the Communists. That argument proved less convincing as the PS reinforced its position in relation to the PCF, and it lost most of its scare value after the first round of the presidential elections in which the Socialists received nearly twice as much support as the Communists.

After the parliamentary elections of 1981, the now leaderless UDF was reduced to a demoralized vestige of some sixty deputies, or about half of its previous strength. Some of the UDF politicians were hoping that at some time in the future Giscard d'Estaing would come out of retirement, as de Gaulle had once done, and revive their party. Several leaders of the CDS, the Christian Democratic component of the UDF, were examining the possibility of autonomous measures, including a rapprochement with the new majority. The Radical-Socialist Party, however, had been so decimated that it seemed to have no credible options left. Chirac now prepared to assume leadership of the combined centrist-conservative (or Giscardist-Gaullist) opposition forces. Although he finally achieved his ambition of eclipsing Giscard d'Estaing, it was a hollow victory, because the Gaullist contingent in the assembly had itself been cut in half.

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

The new strategy alienated the Communist Party, whose ministers opted out of the government. A more serious consequence was the Socialists' slippage in public support in response to the government's failure to solve the problems of unemployment, a rising crime rate, and the presence of masses of North African immigrants—all three phenomena widely believed to be interrelated. One symptom of the growing public concern with these problems was the sudden rise of the National Front (Front National [NF]), an extreme-right party led by Jean-Marie Le Pen.

At the same time, the popularity of the RPR and UDF was growing, and opinion polls predicted that in the next parliamentary elections the Socialists would lose their majority. To limit the damage, the Socialist government reintroduced a variant of the Fourth Republic system of proportional representation. It was thought that under such a system the NF would get enough votes to gain representation in the assembly, but in so doing would take enough electoral support away from the Gaullists to make the victory of the latter less certain and less crushing.

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

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

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

### ***The First “Cohabitation” Interlude***

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

Chirac's power to govern turned out to be less than absolute. It was limited by the need of the Gaullists to collaborate with the Giscardists, who were not always in a cooperative mood. They were unhappy not only about some of Chirac's policy choices but also about an inadequate sharing of political patronage. Furthermore, there were rivalries between the leaders of the RPR and UDF as well as disagreements between them—and within the RPR itself—about the posture to be adopted toward the NF. The moderates wanted to have nothing to do with Le Pen, whom they regarded as a danger to democracy, but the hard-liners—notably among the Gaullists—advocated a selective embrace of the NF positions, especially on immigrants, in order to strengthen their base of support within the National Assembly and, more important, to retrieve the support of former Gaullist voters who had crossed over to the NF and to prevent

further attrition. Because of these conflicts, Chirac's leadership suffered, and he became the major target of popular discontent. Mitterrand, by contrast, looked like a conciliatory, unifying statesman.

### ***Consensus and Convergence: The Elections of 1988***

The presidential elections of April and May 1988 pitted Mitterrand against three major rivals on the right: Chirac (RPR), former prime minister Raymond Barre (UDF), and Le Pen (NF). Several months before the elections, cohabitation, at first welcomed by most French citizens, appeared to be of dubious worth as the president and the prime minister sought to draw electoral advantage by discrediting each other. The reelection of Mitterrand suggested that he had succeeded better than his rival. But his impressive margin of victory must also be attributed to the disunity among the right. The outcome of the first round reflected that disunity as Barre and Chirac publicly criticized one another. In addition, Le Pen, the leader of the NF, drew votes from the mainstream right, especially from the RPR, and made a surprisingly strong showing.

Mitterrand's decision just after the presidential election to dissolve the National Assembly and to call for new elections was made in the hope that the delicate power-sharing pattern of the previous two years would be replaced by a more normal relationship between president and parliament. The result of the legislative elections, however, was ambiguous. Although the RPR and UDF, which put up joint candidates in most constituencies, lost control of the assembly, the Socialists failed to get the absolute majority the pollsters had predicted. Several explanations account for the outcome of that election in which the abstention rate (more than 34 percent) was the highest since 1962. Some traditional Socialist voters had abstained because Mitterrand, running as a statesman above parties rather than as a Socialist, had not made great efforts to appeal to them or even to mobilize the party activists. Others had been so sure of a Socialist victory that they believed their votes to be unnecessary. And still others were tired of voting so often. In addition, there were those who had supported Mitterrand but did not want a clearly Socialist regime, hoping instead that Michel Rocard, the new prime minister, would construct a pragmatic center-left government.

Rocard did not disappoint them. His government, as reconstituted after the legislative elections, included twenty-five Socialists and twenty-four non-Socialists, among them six centrists of the UDF. In an attempt to show that he paid as much attention to "civil society" as to the political establishment, he also included fourteen nonparty people.

Rocard's overture toward the political center was a reflection of the changes in France's party system, in which some parties had lost their traditional supporters, others their credibility, still others their ideological coherence, and all of them many dues-paying members.<sup>4</sup> Just as the victory of Mitterrand was not quite a victory for the Socialist Party, the reestablished dominance of the party in the political arena and in the National Assembly was not quite a victory for socialism. Under the pressures of electoral reality and, later, of government responsibility, the PS had given up most of its Marxism and had transformed itself into a moderate party resembling the social democratic parties of Scandinavia or Germany. During the 1988 election campaigns, it presented a minimum platform whose planks—social justice, productivity, solidarity among various segments of French society, and the construction of Europe—did not differ sharply from the equally

vague generalities of the RPR/UDF about liberty, economic progress, and patriotism. This platform was designed to paper over continuing disagreements among the major party personalities, including Mitterrand, Rocard, and former prime ministers. These disagreements were not only matters of personal ambition but also related to the tactical and long-term orientations of the Socialists. While Rocard sought to distance himself as much as possible from the Communists, Mitterrand continued to advocate keeping the left as united as possible and the door open to traditional Communist voters.

These disagreements were echoed at the Socialist Party congress in Rennes in 1990. The nationalists were pitted against the Europeanists; the Jacobins—the believers in a France “one and indivisible”—against the pluralists and decentralizers; the statists against the liberals; and the growth-oriented productivists against those favoring redistribution and socioeconomic equality. This war of party factions was hardly resolved by a document that aimed at a synthesis of these diverse positions.<sup>5</sup> The internal divisions were aggravated during the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf crisis, which set Mitterrand and his loyalists, who supported the US war effort, against a faction led by Jean-Pierre Chevènement that favored a foreign policy that combined Gaullist independence-mindedness with hysterical anti-Americanism. These divisions and the conflict between tactical and programmatic orientations were reflected in the government of Prime Minister Edith Cresson, who was accused of “conducting a policy of the right while positioning herself on the left.”<sup>6</sup> She prepared a rapprochement with the Communists and alienated the centrists, while abandoning the Socialists’ infatuation with developing countries and even appearing to adopt the kind of hard-nosed stance toward immigrants that previously had been associated with the right. Nevertheless, the various factions decided to suspend their disputes until the National Assembly elections of 1993.

The Communist Party, too, was divided. In 1987 the Communists who rejected the rigid Stalinism of the party and held that outlook—and its leader, Georges Marchais—responsible for its steep electoral decline set up a rival party of “Renovators,” and in 1988 they put up their own presidential candidate. After the elections, the Communist Party alternated between a desire to remain in opposition and a readiness to support the government on specific issues. How much the Communist leadership would be influenced by perestroika in the Soviet Union remained to be seen. The twenty-seventh congress of the Communist Party in 1990 saw an expression of interest in a pluralistic communism instead of a bureaucratic and authoritarian one, and a more open discussion than ever before. Yet Marchais’s autocratic leadership was reconfirmed.

The RPR was torn between the nationalism and populist statism of the disciples of de Gaulle, on the one hand, and a pro-European neoliberalism, on the other. Moreover, although some Gaullist politicians were still considering rapprochement with the NF, most of the Gaullist leadership had come to reject collaboration with that party on any level. The UDF (from which the RPR had copied much of its neoliberalism) was divided between the elitism of the Republican Party, its largest component, and the moderate progressivism of some Christian Democratic (CDS) and Radical-Socialist politicians. In a confusion of strategies, some Giscardists wanted to align themselves closely with the RPR and harden their opposition to the new government; others, including Giscard d’Estaing himself, who had become the official leader of the UDF, wanted to signal that party’s centrist views by a “constructive opposition.” Still others, including Barre, held

out the possibility of an eventual power sharing with the Socialist-led government. Meanwhile, the CDS, which had increased its National Assembly representation from thirty-five to fifty in the 1988 elections, reconstituted itself as a separate parliamentary party while formally remaining a component of the UDF. Finally, while the RPR and UDF were preparing their lists of candidates for the elections to the European Parliament in 1989, younger politicians in both parties made abortive attempts to oust Giscard d'Estaing and other veterans from leadership positions.

To maintain the integrity and influence of their organizations while achieving a measure of unity—and, incidentally, to be better equipped to face Le Pen and his NF—in 1990 the RPR and UDF founded a confederation called the Union for France (Union pour la France [UPF]). The UPF began issuing joint communiqués and discussing the adoption of primaries for designating a common candidate for the presidential election of 1995. This common approach would, it was hoped, be used for future legislative elections as well.

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

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

By the early 1990s, the popularity of the Socialists was beginning to decline. This decline was evident in the regional and cantonal elections of 1992, in which less than 20 percent of the electorate voted for that party. The Socialist Party was held responsible for various problems and failures: persistent unemployment, crime and urban violence, financial scandals involving Socialist politicians, the revelation that the government allowed the use of blood products contaminated with the AIDS virus, and the Habbash affair, in which a Palestinian terrorist leader was secretly flown to France for medical treatment and after a public outcry was spirited out of the country. The Socialist Party was not helped by its continuing internal divisions—between the radical egalitarians and the pragmatists, between those favoring development of European integration and those against it, and between those advocating closer collaboration with the Communist Party and those opposed to it.

The other major parties did not fare much better; the RPR and UDF together gained only 33 percent of the votes in the 1992 cantonal elections. The two right-wing parties

suffered from internal divisions and a lack of credibility. The major gainers were the NF and the environmentalist parties, which made significant inroads into regional councils. But the ecologists were hurt by a division of this movement into two parties, the Greens and the Ecology Generation (Génération Écologie), whose leaders sniped at one another while proclaiming a desire for unity.

### ***Punishing the Incumbents: Elections in the 1990s***

The results of the elections just described signaled a disenchantment with the political class. This disenchantment was reflected in the steeply falling approval ratings not only of Prime Ministers Cresson and Bérégovoy but also of President Mitterrand. Public impatience with the government was starkly manifested in the results of the 1993 parliamentary elections, which constituted a virtual rout of the Socialist Party and its allies, the Left Radicals. Gaining only 57 seats, compared with the 472 seats obtained by the RPR and UDF combined, the Socialists were left with the lowest National Assembly representation since 1968. The outcome threatened to fragment, if not destroy, the party as a whole, and it reduced the role of Mitterrand, already a lame-duck president, to a marginal and symbolic one. The new government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur began with high popular opinion ratings and a parliamentary majority of more than 80 percent—the largest majority enjoyed by any group in more than a century. These ratings, which held for several months, reflected the public's perception of Balladur as a calm and reasonable political leader, and they improved as Balladur's government chalked up some policy successes, among them the international trade negotiations of 1994.

In preparing for the presidential election of 1995, the Socialist Party was in a much weaker position than the right-wing parties. The party, which had been in power too long, had to bear the brunt of attacks for policy shortcomings and for scandals involving a significant number of Socialist politicians. Because Mitterrand had been president for nearly fourteen years, many French voters decided it was time for a change. Still, there were indications that the Socialists might win the presidential race if Jacques Delors, the outgoing president of the European Commission, became the Socialist candidate. But he declined to run, so the Socialists hurriedly chose Lionel Jospin, a former minister of education, as the alternative candidate. Jospin did not have the enthusiastic support of all Socialist politicians, and Mitterrand gave him only a perfunctory endorsement.

These developments would normally have guaranteed the election of a Gaullist candidate. The RPR and its ally, the UDF, were reasonably united. The disagreement over the Maastricht treaty on the European Union, which had split the two conservative formations and divided the RPR internally, seemed to have been resolved. Meanwhile, there was an informal understanding that Chirac, the mayor of Paris and the president of the RPR, would be that party's candidate again, as he had been in 1981 and 1988. But public opinion polls throughout 1993 and 1994 were so favorable to Balladur that he decided to run for the presidency himself. The Gaullists, then, had two presidential candidates. As late as January 1995, polls showed Balladur considerably ahead of Chirac, and it was widely assumed that Balladur would easily be elected president. But suddenly the French electorate's enthusiasm for him began to sour. He was held responsible for mishandling several problems, among them education and employment, and his patrician demeanor suggested an inability to identify with the problems of ordinary people.

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

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

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

The second round produced a kind of electoral recomposition: Jospin secured the support of most of the left-of-center to extreme-left electorate, while Chirac reassembled most of the right-of-center electorate. Exit polls, however, indicated that more than 40 percent of the 4.6 million citizens who had voted for extreme-rightist Le Pen in the first round abstained or cast blank ballots in the second round.

Chirac's second-round victory could not be interpreted as a victory for the Gaullist Party (the Socialist Party did almost equally well in terms of popular votes) but rather as that of a person who had not been a national decision maker for several years and could not be blamed for recent policy failings.

The election results indicated that the right-left distinction in French politics retained some meaning and that more than 50 percent of the working-class electorate had opted for one of the parties of the left. Nevertheless, about one-third of the various parts of the population classified as underprivileged had voted for Le Pen in the first round. The results also showed that Chirac had transcended the limitations of previous Gaullist presidential candidates by broadening his electoral base. In the second round, Chirac had captured the votes of 43 percent of workers, 54 percent of students, 60 percent of the retired, and half of eighteen- to twenty-one-year-olds. According to an exit poll, 68 percent of voters interpreted the election of Chirac as the electorate's desire for change and reform, and only 26 percent saw it as a victory of the left over the right.<sup>7</sup>

The election results also suggested that the NF had achieved sufficient respectability to be seen by many as having entered the mainstream of French politics. It had attracted

members of the urban working class who had traditionally supported left-wing parties and had increased its appeal to the educated electorate. Conversely, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and a change in the party leadership, the Communist Party, although not able to widen its appeal beyond the working class, was no longer feared as the tool of a foreign power.

Chirac's victory proved to be short-lived, however; it was abruptly undermined by the unexpected victory of the Socialists and their left-wing allies in the National Assembly elections of 1997.<sup>8</sup> As noted earlier, that election was a needless miscalculation. It discredited not only Prime Minister Alain Juppé but President Chirac as well, and it weakened the authority of both within the Gaullist Party. That party was thrown into disarray as internecine conflicts broke out not only about the leadership but also about the party's future direction and its relationship with other right-wing parties. Some Gaullists favored a more rapid evolution toward the market and a more positive stance toward European integration, including a common European currency. Others, reacting to the victory of the left, were pressing their party to return to its traditional statism (and a concern with the protection of national sovereignty) and to adopt a more "social" orientation. Some Gaullists argued for a merger with the UDF; others favored a rapprochement with the NF, or at least a more systematic effort to capture that party's electorate. Still others argued for a change of name to give the party a new image. And others again—notably former prime minister Balladur—favored a fusion of all right-of-center formations into a single party, with the RPR as the nucleus. This last outcome remained an unlikely prospect, largely because of the rival personal ambitions of the leaders of these factions. Some of the RPR politicians, including Chirac himself, were no longer Gaullists in the traditional sense. Other politicians were still nostalgic for the old nationalist rhetoric that made little sense in an age of transnationalism and globalization. This group included Gaullist nationalists who opposed the surrender of sovereignty to the European Union—among them, Charles Pasqua, who, together with Philippe de Villiers, formed a new party, the Rally for France, which incorporated de Villiers's Movement for France. De Villiers soon abandoned that party, however, claiming that Pasqua wanted to dominate it.<sup>9</sup>

The UDF was particularly disoriented. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, its former leader and the original *raison d'être* of that electoral umbrella organization, had aged and become politically marginalized. At the same time, the major component parts of the UDF, especially the Republican Party, now relabeled Liberal Democracy (Démocratie Libérale [DL]) and the CDS, henceforth known as the Democratic Force (Force Démocrate), maintained their respective individualities. In 1998 the DL left the UDF altogether.<sup>10</sup>

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

As the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2002 loomed on the horizon and Jospin began to lay the groundwork for a second attempt to gain the presidency, the

Socialist Party maintained its unity. To be sure, factionalism was not entirely eliminated.<sup>11</sup> It was, however, moderated by the readmission of the party's "elephants" (veteran politicians, including followers of Mitterrand) into leading government positions, a reduction of policy options, and the need to present a solid front in face of Socialist Party relations with other parties in the "pluralist left" government: the Citizens' Movement (Mouvement des Citoyens [MDC]), the Greens, and the Communist Party.<sup>12</sup> The Communist Party had become more moderate, except for a small group among the rank and file that retained its radicalism, but the Greens were increasingly articulating policy differences.

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

### ***The Elections of 2002: A Political Earthquake***

A stark illustration of the bipolarization that had overtaken elections was provided by the 2002 national elections. The two rounds of the presidential election were scheduled for April 21 and May 5, to be followed in June by two rounds of parliamentary elections. Sixteen candidates competed in the presidential election, more than in any previous presidential election in the Fifth Republic. They ranged from Le Pen on the extreme right to nominees of three different extreme-left (Trotskyist) parties—the Workers' Struggle (Lutte Ouvrière), the Communist Revolutionary League (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire), and the Workers' Party (Parti des Travailleurs). During the campaign, it was widely assumed (and predicted by public opinion polls) that Chirac, the incumbent president, and Jospin, the incumbent prime minister, would emerge as the two top vote-getters and would confront each other in the second round.<sup>13</sup>

The first-round result, however, was an unexpected upset: Chirac came in first, and Le Pen came in second after edging out Jospin by less than one percentage point. There were several explanations for this shocking outcome. Only three months before the election, the polls had shown Jospin clearly ahead of Chirac, who was regarded as a politician without a clear program and interested in political power for its own sake. Moreover, Chirac had been accused of corruption both as mayor of Paris and as president, and he might have been indicted but for the fact that the incumbent presidency gave him immunity. By contrast, Jospin was considered one of the best prime ministers of the Fifth Republic. Unfortunately, he lacked the charisma of Chirac, who was an excellent campaigner.

More important, the government of the "pluralist left" led by Jospin was riven by disagreements between the Socialist Party and its coalition partners as well as by rivalries within the party. Traditional leftist voters criticized Jospin both for abandoning the working class—in mid-campaign he had asserted that his program was not socialist—and for downplaying a rapidly growing crime rate. Many of these voters therefore opted for candidates of the smaller leftist parties—the PCR, the MDC, and the Trotskyist parties—and even for the NF. They did so not to help these candidates to win, but to warn Jospin. As it turned out, they prevented Jospin from figuring in the second-round runoff.

The dissatisfaction with both major candidates was attested by the low voter turnout, by the electoral indecision—more than 40 percent of the electorate remained undecided two weeks before the election—and by both Chirac and Jospin garnering fewer popular votes than they had received in 1995.

The unusually high vote for marginal parties as well as the high abstention rate reflected a widespread belief that the mainstream parties were not responding to the needs of the people.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the poor performance of the Socialist Party and that all the left-wing parties together got only 43 percent of the working-class vote in the first round (compared with 63 percent in the presidential elections of 1988) seemed to confirm the thesis that “the privileged relationship of a century between the world of the worker and the parties of the left” had ended.<sup>15</sup>

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

In the ensuing National Assembly elections, voters provided Chirac with a clear majority (see Table 2-7). Most voters were pressing for legislative action and did not want to continue the power sharing between a president belonging to one party and an assembly controlled by an opposing party. The victory of the political right in this election was also due to the fact that it had capitalized on Chirac’s victory. Several months before the presidential elections, Chirac had created the Union in Movement (Union en Mouvement [UEM]), an electoral alliance of various right-of-center formations, led by the RPR, that would support him. Immediately after the first round, the UEM was transformed into the Union for the Presidential Majority (Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle [UMP]), an umbrella party that soon swallowed up both the RPR and several smaller parties, including Liberal Democracy (Démocratie Libérale) and most of the UDF. Just before the parliamentary elections, the acronym UMP was retained, but it now stood for Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire). A rump of the UDF, led by François Bayrou, held out for independence, but because the UMP had gained an absolute majority of seats in the National Assembly, UDF influence in that chamber would amount to little if anything. Yet even though it distanced itself from the UMP—and voted with the opposition against the budget bill in 2005—the UDF refused to join any alliance with the left.

The political left was in a state of disorganization and demoralization. The Communist Party was near collapse—it obtained its lowest vote in national elections since the end of World War II—but it won enough assembly seats to constitute itself as a parliamentary group. The Greens lost most of their support, ending up with only three seats. The MDC, which was rebaptized during the election campaign as the Republican Pole (Pôle Républicain), was finished, as was, so it seemed, the political career of Chevénement. The Socialist Party survived as the largest formation of the left, but it was beset with uncertainty about its leadership and its future orientations. There was a tug-of-war between the more ideological leftists, who wanted to return to the traditional redistributive policies of the Socialist

**Table 2-7 Composition of the National Assembly: France, 1956–2012**

Parliamentary elections	Communists	Socialists and allies	Radicals and allies	MRP and center	Conservatives, Moderates, Independents	Gaullists	Miscellaneous and unaffiliated	Total seats
1956	150	99	94	84	97	22	50	596
1958	10	47	40	56	129	206	64	552
1962	41	66	43	55		268 <sup>a</sup>	9	482
1967	73		121 <sup>b</sup>	41 <sup>c</sup>		242 <sup>a</sup>	10	487
1968	34		57 <sup>b</sup>	34 <sup>c</sup>	344 <sup>d</sup>		18	487
1973	73		100 <sup>e</sup>	34 <sup>f</sup>		270 <sup>d</sup>	13	490
1978	86	105	10 <sup>g</sup>	123 <sup>h</sup>	9 <sup>i</sup>	153	5	491
1981	44	286 <sup>e</sup>		62 <sup>h</sup>		88	11	491
1986	35	214 <sup>e</sup>		132 <sup>h</sup>		158	38 <sup>j</sup>	577
1988	27	277 <sup>e</sup>		130 <sup>h</sup>	129	14 <sup>m</sup>		577
1993	23	70 <sup>e</sup>		213 <sup>k</sup>		247	24 <sup>n</sup>	577
1997	36	250		113 <sup>k</sup>		140	5 <sup>p</sup>	577
2002	22	141 <sup>q</sup>		29 <sup>h</sup>		365 <sup>r</sup>	20 <sup>s</sup>	577
2007	24 <sup>t</sup>	204 <sup>u</sup>		23 <sup>v</sup>		320 <sup>r</sup>	6 <sup>w</sup>	577
2012	10 <sup>x</sup>	333 <sup>y</sup>		22 <sup>z</sup>		209 <sup>ab</sup>	3 <sup>ac</sup>	577

Source: Compiled by the author.

Note: MRP = Popular Republican Movement. Occasionally columns do not align to indicate instances in which parties moved further left or right.

<sup>a</sup> Gaullists and Independent Republicans.

<sup>b</sup> Socialist and Radical alliance.

<sup>c</sup> Progress and Modern Democracy.

<sup>d</sup> Gaullists, Independent Republicans, and pro-government centrists.

<sup>e</sup> Socialist and Left Radicals (MRG).

<sup>f</sup> Reformers (moderate radicals and opposition centrists).

<sup>g</sup> MRG.

<sup>h</sup> Union for French Democracy (UDF).

<sup>i</sup> National Center of Independents and Peasants.

<sup>j</sup> Identified only (and directly) with UDF rather than one of its components.

<sup>k</sup> UDF Republicans, CDS, and moderate Radical-Socialists.

<sup>l</sup> Including thirty-two National Front and six affiliated.

<sup>m</sup> Including thirteen miscellaneous right and one National Front (who has since left the party).

<sup>n</sup> National Center of Independents and Peasants (CNP), and others affiliated with center-right coalition.

<sup>o</sup> Including one National Front and one Movement for France.

<sup>p</sup> Including one apparenté.

<sup>q</sup> Union for a Popular Movement (UMP).

<sup>r</sup> Including Left Radical, miscellaneous left, Greens, and miscellaneous right.

<sup>s</sup> Including fifteen Communists, four Greens, and five miscellaneous left.

<sup>t</sup> Including eighteen apparenté (among them Left Radicals and Citizens' Movement).

<sup>u</sup> Including twenty Nouveau Centre.

<sup>v</sup> Including three Modem.

<sup>w</sup> Includes 10 Front of the Left (of which 8 are Communists).

<sup>x</sup> Includes 280 Socialists, 22 miscellaneous left, 17 Europe-Ecologie, 12 Left Radicals, 2 Regionalists.

<sup>y</sup> Includes 2 MoDem, 2 Centrist Alliance, 12 New Center, 6 Radicals.

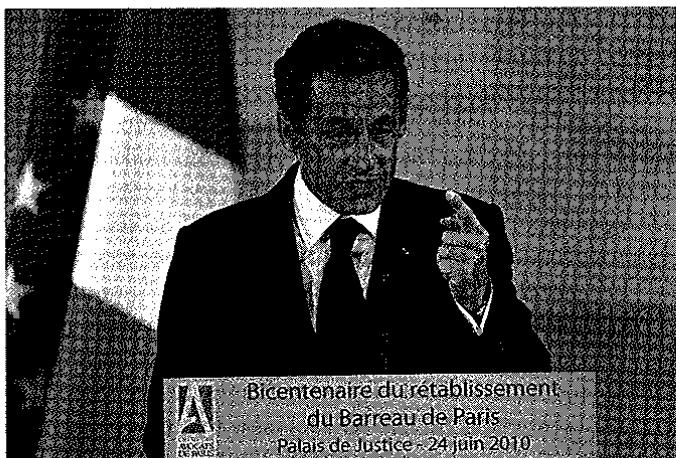
<sup>z</sup> At 194 UMP, 15 miscellaneous right.

<sup>aa</sup> Includes 2 National Front, 1 extreme right.

<sup>ab</sup> Includes 2 MoDem, 2 Centrist Alliance, 12 New Center, 6 Radicals.

<sup>ac</sup> Includes 2 National Front, 1 extreme right.

<sup>ad</sup> Includes 2 National Front, 1 extreme right.



The election of President Nicolas Sarkozy, shown here addressing the Paris Bar Association on June 24, 2010, represented something of a break with the past in French elections.

*Source:* Reuters/Philippe Wojazer.

Party and retrieve the lost working-class support, and the pragmatic moderates, who wanted to embrace the market more fully and widen the party's appeal to the bourgeoisie.

Both the NF and its extreme-left rival, the National Republican Movement, were left out in the cold, gaining no seats at all. Although it appeared that about one-third of the French electorate shared many of the NF views—for example, on immigrants, on law and order issues, and on Europe—its future prospects did not seem promising because of the age of its leader (Le Pen was nearly seventy-four) and the bipolarizing effect of the national electoral system.

### ***The Elections of 2007: A Post-Gaullist Rupture?***

In many respects, the presidential election of 2007 resembled earlier contests between the right and the left. It revolved around the issues of the cost of living, unemployment, taxation, and education, and it engaged the usual contestants on both sides of the political spectrum. A dozen candidates competed in the first round, and the second round was a runoff between Nicolas Sarkozy, the candidate of the UMP, and Socialist Ségolène Royal. Both candidates had been chosen in primary elections in which active members of their respective parties had taken part. As the leader of his party, Sarkozy was certain to be the nominee. The only credible rival was Dominique de Villepin, Chirac's last prime minister, but he had lost popularity because of his haughty behavior toward parliament and his mishandling of an employment bill. The choice of a Socialist candidate was more problematic. There were three major contenders for the nomination: Laurent Fabius, a former prime minister; Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a former finance minister; and Ségolène Royal, a former minister for the environment who had held other minor ministerial posts. Fabius presented himself as a leftist, but he was distrusted in this role because as minister of economics under Mitterrand he had pursued rather moderate policies, and Strauss-Kahn was distrusted by the more leftist politicians for his “social-democratic” (i.e., insufficiently leftist) orientation. Royal emerged as a compromise

choice, and for the first weeks of the campaign she was comfortably ahead in the polls.<sup>16</sup> Her candidacy, however, was beset with numerous problems. Her campaign was poorly organized, and her own performance was inept; many of her public statements were ill-informed and contradictory; and she received only half-hearted support from the party leadership.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the PS was marked by internal division and programmatic incoherence.

Sarkozy waged an aggressive campaign in which he portrayed himself as both a loyal Gaullist and an innovator who was prepared to “rupture” the status quo in order to achieve much-needed reforms.<sup>18</sup> In several respects, Sarkozy’s presidential nomination was a break with the past: He had originally not been considered suitable for the presidency because he was not a graduate of ENA or any of the other grandes écoles, he was the son and grandson of immigrants, and he was short of stature. But he had held important cabinet posts; and as minister of the interior, he had developed a reputation as being tough on criminals. His hard-line position during the rioting of October and November 2005 sharply increased his popularity within the party, which had gained many new adherents, in part because it was seen as a credible alternative to the NF on issues of law and order.

A complicating factor was the candidacy of François Bayrou, the president of the UDF, who had served as a minister in the conservative governments of Juppé and Balladur. But during the second term of the Chirac presidency, he had selectively distanced himself from the UMP and in 2007 announced that he would be the UDF candidate for president. Bayrou hoped to profit from the electorate’s dissatisfaction with both the UMP and the PS, and for a while he appeared to be a serious alternative. But in the end, Bayrou came in third in the first round, and in the second round, Sarkozy won the presidency. Bayrou used his strong first-round performance to create a new party, the Democratic Movement (Mouvement Démocrate [MoDem]), which would field “centrist” candidates in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. This new party included most of the former UDF politicians. The group of holdovers of the UDF renamed itself the New Center (Nouveau Centre [NC]) and continued its alliance with the UMP.

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

### ***The Elections of 2012: Socialist Reemergence amid Crisis and Pessimism***

More than a year before the presidential elections of 2012, the Socialist Party had reason to be optimistic about its prospects. President Sarkozy had become increasingly unpopular because of his “unpresidential” behavior. The electorate had become impatient with his ostentatious flirting with wealthy people; his impulsive and often blunt public statements; his policy pronouncements not followed by action; his pro-Americanism; his open admiration for Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, and his apparent yielding to her preference for a regime of austerity to reign in public expenditures, which made France appear subordinate to Germany. Above all, there was the global financial crisis, which contributed to France’s indebtedness, due in large measure to the country’s generous

social disbursements and inflated public sector; and there was a continuing loss of jobs due to delocalizations of industries, a consequence of excessive labor costs.

The Socialists had a putative presidential candidate, Dominique Strauss-Kahn. A professional economist, a former minister of finance, and the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he had the stature to win the next elections and the experience to solve France's economic problems. However, owing to charges of sexual misconduct he declined to participate in the party's two-round primary in October 2011. The two finalists for the nomination were Martine Aubry, a former minister of labor and the mayor of Lille, and François Hollande. After his selection as the PS candidate, Hollande promised to provide France with a "normal" presidency.

To confront France's challenges, Sarkozy had stressed competitiveness—by working harder and reducing labor costs; in contrast, Hollande advocated economic growth (by means not entirely clear), while François Bayrou, the candidate of the political center, focused on the reduction of the budget deficit as a priority. Despite favorable polls, Hollande's victory was not a foregone conclusion: on the one hand, he was faced with a loss of working-class support to Marine Le Pen, the candidate of the NF, who had embraced a populist (or "welfare-chauvinist"<sup>19</sup>) rhetoric and had become respectably "republican";<sup>20</sup> on the other hand, he had to reckon with competition from Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a left-wing Socialist who had bolted from the PS to form the Party of the Left (Parti de Gauche) in 2008 and had become the candidate of the Front of the Left (Front de Gauche), an electoral alliance of his own party, the Communist Party, and smaller extreme-left groups. Hollande was ahead in the first round, which took place on April 22, 2012, and he won decisively in the second-round runoff with Sarkozy on May 6.

The parliamentary elections that followed in June resulted in a clear victory for the left. The mainstream right received only one-third of the votes; and the NF did poorly, despite the support of several smaller nationalist and extreme-right formations.<sup>21</sup> The Socialists now had an absolute majority in the National Assembly and no longer needed to propitiate other left-wing parties, notably the Front of the Left. It enabled Hollande and his government to pass a number of bills without difficulty.

### ***Bipolarity and Multiplicity in Subnational Elections***

The bipolar tendencies of electoral outcomes in the National Assembly and the presidency do not necessarily apply to other elective bodies in France: the regional, departmental, and municipal councils, nor to the Senate, which reflects subnational partisan realities. Furthermore, the names of the parties or alliances in these bodies may differ from those in the National Assembly. The use of proportional representation in subnational and supranational elections, such as for regional councils, the Senate, and the European Parliament, explains why there are many more parties in the game, including those of purely local interest, and why alliances are more diverse and unpredictable.<sup>22</sup>

Subnational systems of election are frequently subjected to reforms by ordinary acts of parliament. Normally, such reforms are designed to favor the party in power and reduce the chances of the opposition. Partisanship, however, does not usually enter into the redrawing of assembly electoral constituency boundaries, as this is done by bipartisan committees that take into account population shifts. In the most recent redrawing, which took place in 2009, the main loser in the suppression of thirty-three seats in France's

metropolitan areas was the PS, while in the reduction of assembly constituencies of Paris from twenty-one to eighteen the UMP lost two seats.

As Tables 2-8 and 2-9 indicate, multipolarity—specifically, a significant representation of the left, the center, Gaullists, and the traditional right—can still be seen in the Senate, the general (departmental) councils chosen in cantonal elections, and the regional councils. In the municipal elections that followed the presidential contest in June 1995, there was no Chiraquist carryover for Gaullist candidates: most of the mayors belonging to left-wing parties were reelected, and the NF secured control over one fairly large city (Toulon) and three smaller towns. Regional and local elections correspond to parliamentary elections neither in form nor alliance-building. In the Senate elections of 2004, prominent leftist politicians were elected or reelected.

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

**Table 2-8 Regional Elections 2010 (percent of total vote)**

	First round (March 14)	Second round (March 21)
Extreme left	3.40	
Communists and allies	5.84	0.26
Socialists	23.52	3.11
Miscellaneous left	3.06	3.30
Greens	12.18	0.98
Union of the Left	5.62	46.40
Other lists	1.88	
Regionalists	0.75	0.56
Center-MoDem	4.20	0.84
UMP and allies	26.02	35.38
Miscellaneous right	1.24	
National Front	11.42	9.18
Other extreme right	0.89	
Registered voters	43,642,325	43,350,204
Voters	20,219,958	22,201,265
	(46.33%)	(51.21%)
Abstentions	23,422,367	21,148,939
	(53.67%)	(48.79%)

Sources: Ministry of Interior, *Le Monde*, various issues, and Anne Muxel, "Les élections régionales de 2010," *Regards sur l'Actualité* 362, June-July 2010, 63–64.

**Table 2-9 Composition of the Senate: France, 1959–2011 (selected years)**

	Communists	Socialists	Democratic Left <sup>a</sup>	Democratic Center	MRP / Independents	Gaullists	Unaffiliated	Total
1959	14	51	64	34	92	41	11	307
1965	14	52	50	38	79	30	11	274
1968	17	54	50	40	80	29	13	283
1981	23	63	38 <sup>b</sup>	67 <sup>c</sup>	51 <sup>d</sup>	41	15	298
1989	16	66	23 <sup>e</sup>	68 <sup>f</sup>	52 <sup>d</sup>	91	5	321
1992	15	70	23 <sup>e</sup>	66 <sup>c</sup>	47 <sup>d</sup>	90	10	321
1998	16	78	22 <sup>e</sup>	52	47	99	7	321
2004	23	97 <sup>f</sup>	15 <sup>e</sup>	33 <sup>g</sup>	0	156 <sup>h</sup>	7	331
2010	23 <sup>i</sup>	116	17 <sup>e</sup>	29 <sup>g</sup>	0	151 <sup>h</sup>	7	343
2011	21 <sup>j</sup>	131	10 <sup>j</sup>	16 <sup>k</sup>	31 <sup>l</sup>	132 <sup>l</sup>	7	348

Source: L'Année politique, 1959–2004; Le Monde, various issues; and Regards sur l'Actualité, various issues.

Note: MRP—Popular Republican Movement. Figures for each party include affiliated appartenants.

<sup>a</sup> Mainly Radical-Socialists.

<sup>b</sup> Includes Movement of Left Radicals (MRL).

<sup>c</sup> Center Union.

<sup>d</sup> Republicans and independents.

<sup>e</sup> Democratic and European Social Rally.

<sup>f</sup> Including Greens.

<sup>g</sup> Union for French Democracy (UDF).

<sup>h</sup> Union for a Popular Movement (UMP).

<sup>i</sup> Communist, Republican and Citizen Group (CRC).

<sup>j</sup> Europe, Ecology—the Greens.

<sup>k</sup> European Democratic and Social Rally.

<sup>l</sup> Centrist Union—UDF.

In the municipal elections of 2001, local issues predominated. At the same time, these elections had national significance, insofar as the outcome reflected the national image of the major political parties and served as a political “weather vane” for their prospects in the national—that is, presidential and parliamentary—elections scheduled for 2002. On the one hand, the victories of right-wing parties in many of the provincial towns were encouraging to the Gaullists and their right-of-center allies. On the other hand, the victories of the left in two of the three largest cities—Paris and Lyons—were good news to Prime Minister Jospin and the Socialist leadership. The election of a Socialist, Bertrand Delanoë, as mayor of Paris for the first time in a century, however, stemmed less from ideology or policy than from the fact that the outgoing Gaullist mayor, Jean Tibéri, had been charged with acts of corruption that dated back to the time when Chirac was the mayor. These acts included the appointment of phantom municipal employees whose salaries went into the coffers of the Gaullist party, as well as the maintenance of electoral registers that included nonexistent voters. In the regional and cantonal elections of 2004, the tables were turned: the victory of left-wing parties over the right-of-center parties represented a loss of credibility of the Raffarin government. The municipal elections of 2008 revolved around local issues as well, but they also allowed citizens to express their views of the Sarkozy presidency. As it turned out, the right and left gained approximately equal numbers of votes; but it was a setback for Sarkozy, because the Socialist mayors were reelected in Paris and Lille and the PS captured the mayor’s offices in Toulouse, Strasbourg, and a dozen midsize cities. The overall turnout of two-thirds of the electorate was fairly typical. The regional elections of 2010 signaled a further decline in Sarkozy’s popularity. In those elections, the Socialists, in alliance with the Communists, Left Radicals, and Greens, received 46 percent of the vote in the second round and won control of twenty-two of France’s twenty-five regions. In the cantonal elections of March 2012 the parties of the left won decisively in both rounds, with the Socialists gaining by far the most seats (820 out of 2,026) on the general (departmental) councils.<sup>23</sup> Although the abstention rate in this election (55.7 percent) was high, as it is typically in other subnational contests, it augured well for the Socialists’ prospects in the forthcoming presidential elections.

### ***The Future of Political Parties: Rivalries, Divisions, and Uncertainties***

Despite its victories, the Socialist Party continues to be concerned about its future. It had been so demoralized after being defeated in three successive presidential elections that some observers argued that it was exhausted, others had suggested that its members should permit the party to die and start a new one, and still others had wondered whether it was already dead.<sup>24</sup> The PS has remained the largest party of the left, but it is beset with a number of problems. It does not have a coherent program, nor does it have a credible alliance strategy. It has no new ideas to convince voters that it is a useful alternative to the UMP. Its leadership, embodied by Hollande, is not unchallenged. Before the elections, the only position that seemed to unite the party’s “elephants,” the younger politicians, and the various factions was anti-Sarkozism.<sup>25</sup> But since his defeat there appears to be little to hold the party together.

In pursuit of electoral victory, various Socialist politicians had tried to construct rival parties<sup>26</sup> or create possible electoral coalitions by appealing to a variety of small parties.

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In pursuit of electoral victory, various Socialist politicians had tried to construct rival parties<sup>26</sup> or create possible electoral coalitions by appealing to a variety of small parties.

Since her electoral defeat in 2007 and the collapse of her support network, Royal had toyed with a number of incompatible alliance strategies in her pursuit of a rematch in the 2012 presidential elections without the backing of the PS or Martine Aubry, the party's general secretary. Royal had proposed a broad coalition ranging from Olivier Besancenot, the leader of the New Anticapitalist Party (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste [NPA])<sup>27</sup> to Bayrou's MoDem—in other words, from the extreme left to the center. The PS favored an enlarged and more unified Left, but the NPA preferred to go it alone, as did the PCF.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, Royal proposed an alliance with MoDem exclusively, to begin with the first round of the regional elections of 2010 (for which she promised five places to that party on her candidate list of Poitou-Charentes, the region she presided over), but Bayrou's poor performance in the European Parliament elections of 2009—his fourth defeat<sup>29</sup>—raised doubts about whether an alliance with him was worth making.

Bayrou's options, too, were limited. He had burned his bridges to the UMP, but he could not easily turn to the left; also, an arrangement with environmentalists was equally unrealistic. These were a component of the European Ecology-Green (Europe-Écologie-les Verts [EELV]) coalition, founded in 2008. That formation was an alliance led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit of the Green Party and José Bové, a leader of the radical-left Federation of Peasants (Fédération Paysanne), who opposes the cultivation of genetically altered food and has been a voice against globalization. It was a strange alliance because Bové was against the European Union in 2005, and Cohn-Bendit in favor. The alliance ran neck and neck with the PS in the European Parliament elections in June 2009.

A more recent challenge to Bayrou has been posed by Jean-Louis Borloo, another centrist with presidential ambitions. Borloo, who had occupied five different ministerial posts, was president of the Radical Party (2007) and vice-president of the UMP (2009) and after the elections of 2012 founded a new parliamentary party, the Union des Démocrates et Indépendants. This formation, an alliance of eight political mini-parties with a claimed membership of 50,000, is located ideologically somewhere between the left of the UMP and the right of the PS.

Before the elections of 2012, the UMP seemed to be much better placed for the foreseeable future than the left. It was reasonably united, and its electoral prospects were promising enough to gain the support of parties to its right. These included the Hunters' Party (Chasse, Pêche, Nature et Traditions [CPNT]), which, despite its narrow electoral support, has had considerable clout in southwestern France and has been able to pressure the government to alter its environmental policies.<sup>30</sup> For reasons of self-preservation, the CPNT allied with the UMP for the regional elections of 2010, as did Philippe De Villiers's nationalist MPF, even though the anti-European attitudes of these parties were in conflict with Sarkozy's pro-Europeanism.

There have always been divisions within the UMP—between Gaullists and post-Gaullists, statists and market liberals, nationalists, and Europeanists—but they were kept under control while the party was in power. As soon as Sarkozy left the political scene the fight for the shape and leadership of the UMP began, and with it, a contest over the party's orientation and strategy. The major controversy pits the “social liberals” against the “nationalist conservatives,” whose negative positions on national identity, immigrants, Muslims, and same-sex marriage closely resemble those of the NF, and who are open to a rapprochement with that party. The former are led by François

Fillon, Sarkozy's prime minister, and the latter by Jean-François Copé, the current secretary-general of the UMP. In February 2013, Fillon created the Force républicaine, a group of his political supporters. Based on a think tank formed in 2002 to reflect his ideas, it is devoted to promoting his candidacy for the leadership of the UMP and ultimately for the presidency of the Republic. But given the gulf between the two sides, doubts have been raised whether the party can survive until the next presidential elections—and whether a new party would (or should) take its place.<sup>31</sup>

In future elections, the NF is likely to play an increasingly important role for the following reasons: a widespread belief that the two mainstream parties have lost interest in ordinary citizens and are incapable of retrieving political power from the financial market, the belief that the FN no longer represents a danger for the republic,<sup>32</sup> and the fact that the FN is the only party with electoral prospects that expresses public concerns about the growth of Islam and the crime and urban violence that are often associated with it. Still another reason is the lack of unity within the UMP, which is marked by the existence of six factions (*courants*), some of them organized into informal parliamentary groups. One of these is the Popular Right (la Droite populaire), whose orientation is fairly close to that of the NF in regard to immigrants, Muslims, and law and order. As a consequence, the NF will either maintain itself in three-party contests, as a deal-maker (for the most part with UMP candidates), or winning seats outright in the second round. The FN will be supported by other extreme-right parties, who share the FN agenda, but who are unlikely to run their own candidates.<sup>33</sup> In June 2013, Marine Le Pen (with 40 percent approval rating compared to Hollande's 21 percent) was the most popular political personality in France.

Since the founding of the Fifth Republic many marginal parties have appeared over the political spectrum. Some have been created as vehicles for personal advancement and others as a means of exerting influence on a mainstream party. Their electoral successes have tended to be variable and temporary, but they have sometimes functioned as spoilers. This has been true most notably of Jean-Pierre Chevènement's MDC,<sup>34</sup> which prevented Jospin from competing with Chirac in the second round of the 2002 presidential elections.

The NF has been the most important of the marginal parties. But it, too, has had problems of internal cohesion. With the virtual collapse in 2004 of Bruno Mégret's National Republican Movement, the NF has lost its most important rival on the extreme right; but there is a conflict between the relatively moderate position of Le Pen's daughter, Marine, and the adamant xenophobia of others in the party leadership. One indication that the NF had attained respectability was the invitation of one of its representatives to the office of a prime minister (Villepin) in 2005 for the first time since the party's founding.

The rising fortunes of the Europe-Green formation and the continued existence of MoDem raise the question whether the traditional ideological divide between right and left is still relevant. By and large, these distinctions continue to have meaning—the conservative right stressing authority and traditional social distinctions and the left favoring equality and the collectivity. But the mainstream right has accepted the welfare state; and Socialist party and other democratic left groups no longer advocate the class struggle, the blanket nationalization of industries, imperative (Soviet-style) economic planning, or the abolition of capitalism, and do not seriously fight religion.<sup>35</sup> The ideological divide is

often eclipsed by issues on which there is an overlap, such as Europe, decentralization, multiculturalism, and the reform of the electoral system. In addition, there are new divisions, such as environmentalism versus productivity and protectionism versus globalization.<sup>36</sup> Equally important, policy issues are often subordinated to the personal ambitions of politicians, who shift from one party to another.

Moreover, there are issues that cause disagreements *within* both major parties. In the UMP, there are differences of opinion about European integration, immigration, law and order, and most recently about policies regarding ethnoreligious minorities who are unemployed, inhabit suburban slums, and are involved in street violence. In the PS, there are sharp divisions between those favoring further European constitution and those opposed. Some of these problems have surfaced at the various congresses of the Socialist Party since the early 1980s. Instead of facing them, the PS took up a variety of clashing propositions introduced by competing factions (*courants*) with names such as Ségolène Royal's "Désirs d'avenir" and Bertrand Delanoë's "Clarté, courage, créativité" and ended up with seeming "syntheses" and vague and sometimes contradictory slogans, such as "collective values," "renaissance of the individual," and "facing up to the challenges of the twenty-first century." Apart from the conflicts of orientation, there were disagreements about a more practical question: whether to have primaries for PS presidential candidates, and when, at what level and location, and how.

Debates within and between political parties have often been informed by ideological rigidities as well as political rivalries, which have resulted in recombinations, scissions, and changes of party label. In contrast to political parties in other countries, parties in France frequently change their names, as if by so doing they can improve their images and electoral fortunes. But another reason is to suggest that the party has expanded its base, as in the case of the transformation of the SFIO into the PS and the successive name changes of the Gaullist and post-Gaullist parties from RPF to UNR, UDR, RPR, UNM, and UMP. In the past half-century, all parties have changed their names, with the single exception of the PCF. Moreover, there has been a tendency to use a designation other than *parti*, such as *mouvement*, *rassemblement*, *force*, *union*—each with its own factions, slogans, program, and, more recently, websites. Some of these formations are microparties within existing larger parties; they are created to obtain separate funding. In some cases, a political party may reflect a purely personal agenda—as, for example, La France Solidaire, which was created by Dominique de Villepin to fill a space between a weakening MoDem and a UMP made vulnerable by a growing criticism of Sarkozy's presidency.<sup>37</sup>

Labels, however, have meanings and evoke associations. MoDem was created by François Bayrou out of the old UDF as his personal path to the presidency. Similarly, a rump of the UDF reorganized as Nouveau Centre to support Sarkozy in the 2007 elections; but at end of 2009, its few politicians spoke of reclaiming the label UDF and even envisaged running a separate candidate in the presidential elections of 2012.

In summary, right and left divisions still roughly define the French political party system, but the nature of the bipolar arrangement has changed, especially since 1974, when the Gaullist dominance that began in 1958 came to an end. For about twenty years—from the election of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1974 to that of Jacques Chirac in 1995—there was a sort of "bipolar quadrille," with the Gaullists and the UDF on one side and the Socialists and the Communists on the other. Since 1995, bipolarity has been

simplified in the sense that each side is clearly dominated by a single party—the UMP on the right and the Socialist Party on the left, with each party maintaining a solid membership base.

The cleavages between these two parties have been moderated by a growing convergence on a number of goals: reducing the gap between rich and poor (increasingly difficult to achieve), retaining the welfare state (which has had to be restrained), reforming the judiciary, and promoting a greater role for civil society and the market. Sarkozy, in pursuit of making the UMP more inclusive, called upon it to embrace “social liberalism.”<sup>38</sup> For her part, Martine Aubry, who became general secretary of the PS in 2008, declared that “[the party] must invent postmaterialism.”<sup>39</sup>

In view of this convergence, *alternance*—the electoral rotation between the right and the left—has been less about clear policy alternatives than about punishing the incumbents for perceived poor performance, at least since the early 1980s. The 2007 presidential election was an exception, for it constituted the Socialists’ third defeat in a row, but the reasons for that were not programmatic. The same was true in 2012: Hollande’s election was a rejection of the incumbent rather than a clear choice for the Socialist candidate, whose program was vague. Since the mid-1980s, electoral changes have not led to abrupt changes of policy. Mitterrand’s presidency had begun with redistributive socioeconomic measures, but they were gradually adjusted toward market liberalism; Chirac’s presidency was noted for its tactical and non-ideological opportunism; and Sarkozy has veered considerably from orthodox Gaullism and co-opted politicians and policies from the left—all in the interest of reform, sometimes pursued impulsively. This activity led some to wonder whether Sarkozy was a closet leftist.<sup>40</sup> But it was also a manifestation of his “catch-all” strategy: to co-opt as many sectors of the electorate to fortify his party and buttress his presidency.<sup>41</sup> Hollande had campaigned for a return to more traditional socialism, but circumstances forced him to continue some of the policies of his predecessor. Sarkozy’s fall from grace (with more than 70 percent negative opinions) three years after his election and his defeat in 2012 and Hollande’s steep decline in popularity a year after he became president suggests that, in an era of limited policy options, incumbent political leaders and their parties are readily punished by the electorate for their inability to solve problems.<sup>42</sup> Thus, as a candidate for the presidency, Hollande had promised to do everything to save France’s industries while protecting the purchasing power of wage earners, but once in office, he was unable to put a stop to continuing delocalizations or the real decline in wages. He had promised to save the system of retirement pensions by increasing the number of years of contributions to pension funds and raising the retirement age; but—under intense pressure from the trade unions—produced only minimal results.<sup>43</sup>

### **Interest Groups**

French citizens who become disillusioned with political parties, finding them confusing or doubting their effectiveness, can voice their demands more directly through interest groups. Originally, French political thinkers with centralizing perspectives were as suspicious of economic and professional associations as of political parties. After the Revolution of 1789, organized groups were banned for nearly a century. A law enacted in 1901 permitted the creation of interest groups without prior official authorization; nevertheless, a tradition of distrust of interest groups persisted, and lobbying was seen as incompatible with

the public interest. In recent years, lobbying has come to be regarded just as normal as the work of political parties.<sup>44</sup> Today, France's many interest groups are freely organized, and they play a significant role in the country's political life. On a national level, groups represent every conceivable sector and interest: labor, business, agriculture, the free professions, teachers, and proponents of diverse outlooks or policies such as Catholicism, antiracism, women's rights, and environmental protection. Interest groups in France participate in the political process in much the same way they do in the United States. They lobby with the executive, the leadership of political parties, and (to a limited extent) individual members of parliament;<sup>45</sup> they participate in electoral campaigns, and they seek to influence the higher civil service. They engage in collective bargaining, in tripartite negotiations at the national level, in social administration and adjudication, and in numerous permanent as well as ad hoc consultative committees, appointed both by the government and parliament. These activities have focused on a variety of subjects, among them the media, retired persons, highway safety, and pollution. In 2009 there were more than 700 such committees. Some are quite important, but many others have outlived their usefulness and rarely meet.<sup>46</sup> Some are periodically abolished; others live on. After his election, Sarkozy appointed a number of ad hoc consultative committees, whose recommendations led to a number of innovative policies. The foremost example is that of the Balladur committee, whose proposals formed the basis of the constitutional reforms of 2008 and 2009.

The number of national, regional, and local voluntary associations has grown incessantly, reaching more than thirty thousand and attesting to the growth of pluralism rather than to a decline of state authority.<sup>47</sup> The state is involved in regulating, legitimating, and sometimes subsidizing interest groups and delegating public-administrative tasks to them.<sup>48</sup>

Two of the more important characteristics of French interest groups are their ideological fragmentation and their linkage to political parties. These characteristics are clearly evident in the several competing organizations that represent labor. The oldest, and once the largest, is the General Federation of Labor (*Confédération Générale du Travail [CGT]*). Essentially a federation of constituent unions such as the automobile, chemical, metal, and transport workers' unions, it has had a revolutionary ideology—that is, the conviction that the interests of the working class can best be promoted through direct political action. In its belief in the class struggle and its opposition to the capitalist system, the CGT has shown a clear affinity for the Communist Party. Many of the CGT's members, which today number about 900,000, in the past voted Communist, and a significant proportion of its leaders were prominent in the Communist Party hierarchy. Indeed, the relationship between the CGT and the Communist Party was sometimes so close that the union was described as a "transmission belt" of the party. In that role, the CGT frequently engaged in strikes and other political action for the Communists' political purposes, such as opposition to NATO, to French policy in Algeria, to German rearmament, and, more recently, to the Socialist government's overall socioeconomic policies. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the dramatic weakening of the Communist Party, the CGT began to assume a more autonomous and somewhat more moderate stance.<sup>49</sup>

Another labor union is the French Confederation of Labor (*Confédération Française Démocratique de Travail [CFDT]*), which has about 800,000 members. Originally

inspired by Catholicism, it split in the mid-1960s from the French Confederation of Christian Workers (Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens [CFTC]), which continues to exist, and “deconfessionalized” itself. One of the most dynamic trade unions, it is closely related to, though not formally affiliated with, the Socialist Party. An important idea of the CFDT, the promotion of self-management (*autogestion*), was incorporated into the Socialist platform in the 1970s.

The Workers’ Force (Force Ouvrière [FO]) and the General Confederation of “Cadres” (Confédération Générale des Cadres [CGC]) are two other unions of some importance. The FO, with its about 1.1 million members, is an industrial workers’ federation noted for its preference for union autonomy in relation to political parties, for its staunch anticommunism, and for its emphasis on US-style collective bargaining. The CGC, which has about 450,000 members, is not very ideological in orientation; it represents supervisory, middle-echelon technical, and other white-collar employees. Finally, there are several teachers’ unions, which are fragmented by professional level or ideology.<sup>50</sup>

This fragmentation, coupled with the relatively feeble extent of unionization—fewer than 8 percent of French workers are unionized today—has added to the predicament of organized labor. Traditionally, unions have been at a disadvantage whenever their “patron” parties, notably the Communists and Socialists, were in the opposition. To overcome that disadvantage, unions learned to cooperate in practical matters. They often present common demands to employers and the government and join in demonstrations and strikes. During the Socialist government of 1981–1986, trade unions gained important concessions under legislation (the Auroux laws) that strengthened their right to organize and bargain collectively at plant levels. But these concessions have in part been nullified by developments that weakened the position of unions: the “scab” effect of immigrant workers; the growth of the tertiary sector in which unionization has been weak; and the decline of traditional “smokestack” industries and the concomitant reduction in total union membership. Finally, the bargaining power of unions has been dramatically reduced by the privatization of industries, mandated by EU rules, and delocalization, a consequence of globalization. Yet unions are able to disrupt economic life by short nationwide strikes, especially in large cities.

Divisions among trade unions persist, although the ideologies that differentiated them have become less relevant and their former linkages to political parties have loosened. Various unions have evolved ideologically: the FO has become more radical, and the CGT has become more moderate and has even accepted capitalism, although with reservations. The CGT’s once close relationship with the PCF has largely disappeared. Bernard Thibault, who headed the CGT until 2013, had a fairly reasonable approach to economic policy, and his relationship with Sarkozy was friendly.<sup>51</sup> For that reason, Thibault was criticized by the more radical rank and file who remain committed to the class struggle and who often challenged his leadership. Despite the reduced relevance of ideological divisions between trade unions, they compete with one another for representation on enterprise and national levels.

Organized business is much more unified than organized labor. The major business association is the Movement of French Enterprises (Mouvement des Entreprises de France [MEDEF]), which was known until 1998 as the National Council of French Employers (Conseil National du Patronat Français [CNPF]). This umbrella organization

of more than eighty manufacturing, banking, and commercial associations represents more than 800,000 firms. In its lobbying efforts, this employers' group has been fairly effective. Many of its leaders have old-school ties with the government's administrative elite, it is well-heeled financially, it has provided ideas and other kinds of assistance to the right-of-center parties that have ruled France intermittently since 1958, and it has been an important partner of the government in the push toward economic modernization. At the same time, there are internal disagreements among leaders of business regarding wage structures, government subsidies, and, more recently, the size of bankers' bonuses.

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

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

Farmers once constituted an important source of political power, but with the constraints of the European Union and the decline of the agricultural sector to less than 4 percent of the active population in 2012 and to 2.3 percent of the electorate, farmers have continued to lose their political clout. Yet they retain a measure of support in the Senate, and they periodically call attention to their plight by mass demonstrations in Paris and the provinces.

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

One of the important features of French interest group politics is the institutionalized relationship that most groups have with government authorities. Numerous advisory councils—on education, immigration, the environment, highway safety, and so on—are attached to ministries. These councils, composed largely of representatives of interest groups, furnish data that may influence policy suggestions and regulations that emanate from ministries. Similarly composed councils are attached to the highly differentiated national and regional organisms that administer statutory health care, unemployment insurance, pension schemes, and family subsidy programs. The implementation of pricing

policies takes place with the participation of farmers' groups (within the limits imposed by EU rules); the application of rules on apprenticeships involves employers' associations; and the adjudication of labor disputes takes place in specialized tribunals (*conseils de prud'hommes*), which include trade union and business representatives, the major "social partners." Interest group delegates to these bodies and to regional professional, agricultural, and commercial chambers, and factory councils are elected by the groups' rank-and-file members without the mediation of political parties. On occasion, interest groups "colonize" parliament in the sense of having their officials elected (via a sympathetic party) to the National Assembly. Finally, interest group leaders may be co-opted into official positions in a ministry with which they have clientelistic relations.

Such institutional involvement has given rise to a debate over pluralism and corporatism. If corporatism implies that the state ultimately wins in contests with the private sector, and especially interest groups, then why does the state often capitulate in the face of strong action by organized interest groups or anomie groups such as transport workers, teachers' unions, farmers, and truck drivers, who engage in social movements (*mouvements sociaux*) such as strikes and other forms of protest?<sup>52</sup> In the end, pluralism prevails, especially when freedom of group action or rivalry between interest groups is the issue. Still, the government is involved in legitimating specific interest groups that seek consultations with the public authorities and participation in elections to social security boards and labor relations tribunals.<sup>53</sup>

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

To many observers, the events from May to June 1968 suggested that the access of interest groups to the authorities was too underdeveloped and inadequate to influence political decisions. Students and workers, in a rare display of unity, engaged in a massive general strike that paralyzed the country for two weeks and threatened to bring down the government and endanger the republic itself. These events had several causes: for workers, dissatisfaction with de Gaulle's economic and social policy that seemed to favor big business and permitted wages to lag woefully behind prices; for students, disgruntlement over the government's failure to modernize, with sufficient speed and thoroughness, a university system whose curriculum was antiquated and not relevant to the labor market, whose physical facilities were cramped, and whose administration was too rigid. The general strike, an example of anomie political behavior, achieved certain reforms that formalized interest group relations with the government had failed to achieve: the partial democratization of university governance, enormous wage increases for workers, improved trade union rights, and a loosening of relations between social classes. In the process, however, de Gaulle's leadership was discredited and his image severely tarnished.

Similarly, the massive strikes of public transport workers in 1995 and of the private truckers in 1996, while not directly bringing down the government, succeeded in derailing Prime Minister Juppé's attempts to reform the social security system and ultimately weakened his authority. Recent examples of the effectiveness of mass action, and of the power of labor unions despite their numerical weakness, were the teachers' strikes in 2004 that forced the government to abandon its educational reform proposals; the maritime workers' strike in 2005 that resulted in modification of the proposals to privatize passenger and shipping connections between the mainland and Corsica; and the repeated strikes of railroad workers in 2004 and 2005 that prompted President Chirac to promise that the national railway system would never be privatized. Examples of mass action sponsored by trade unions and student organizations were the countrywide demonstrations and strikes early in 2006 to force Prime Minister Villepin to withdraw a bill that would make it easier for employers to lay off young entrants into the labor force. These successes must be attributed in part to the support of many other sectors of the general public, which, although inconvenienced, expressed solidarity with the strikers because they feared that their own welfare, state entitlements, might be endangered.

Most interest groups have been complaining about loss of power—a loss they attribute to globalization and the growth of transnational controls over economic processes, especially those of the European Union. This is especially true of the trade unions, whose memberships account for less than 10 percent of the labor force and whose influence over political parties has weakened. Nevertheless, interest groups, and in particular labor unions and employers' associations, have continued to play important roles in social administration and the adjudication of labor disputes. Such disputes are addressed in the *conseils de prud'hommes*, the labor tribunals, in which they are formally represented. In 2010 alone, the 209 councils took up more than 200,000 cases and made 11,522 final decisions.<sup>54</sup> The tribunals have not been as effective as expected, and there are discussions within the government about abolishing them.<sup>55</sup>

One of the most important arenas for a formal presence of interest groups is the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council (Conseil Économique, Social, et Environnemental [CESE]),<sup>56</sup> which must be consulted on all pending socioeconomic legislation. Under a constitutional law enacted in 2009 and implemented in 2010, its size of 233 members remains the same as before, but the minimum age is reduced from twenty-five to eighteen and their mandate limited to two terms of five years each. The representation of labor, business, agriculture, professional, and other interests is internally distributed around three “poles” or domains—economic and social dialogue (including workers, white-collar, private enterprise, artisans, and free professions, each union or sector being assigned a specific number of places), 140; environment (including associations and foundations), 33; and “social and territorial cohesion” and miscellaneous associational groups (mutual societies, family association, youth and students, and overseas interests), 60. The representation is to include 40 “qualified individuals” distributed among the three poles (among them 15 who are particularly competent in environmental matters).<sup>57</sup> Under the previously mentioned reforms, the CESE may be convoked by the public with a petition of 500,000 signatures.

The role of a host of noneconomic interests or sectors, such as women, ethnic minorities, and environmentalists must not be neglected. France has several national women's

associations. These groups may not be as large or as well organized as their US counterparts, but since the mid- to late 1960s they have successfully pressured the authorities to abolish legal disabilities based on gender (such as inheritance, adoption, and property ownership), to legalize birth control and abortion, and to make the initiation of divorce easier for women. A major and more recent political victory for women has been legislation providing for gender parity: the requirement that 50 percent of the candidates in legislative elections be women.<sup>58</sup> Environmental groups have grown rapidly during the same period. In all parliamentary elections since 1978, and in the presidential elections of 1981, 1988, 2002, 2007, and 2012 ecologists running under various labels have fielded their own candidates. Indeed, today the Green Party (EELV) has several deputies in the National Assembly; its former leader was an important member of Jospin's leftist coalition government, and two of its members serve in the Ayrault government. Antiracist groups such as SOS-Racisme have developed rapidly since the early 1980s to fight for the rights of ethnic and racial minorities, particularly immigrants. At the same time, the government has made it legal for (and sometimes encouraged) immigrants to form their own associations. These associations have become increasingly important lobbies, as have ethnoreligious organizations such as those of Muslims and Jews.<sup>59</sup> Strikes by nurses, teachers, physicians, investigating magistrates, air controllers, and municipal bus and tram drivers, some of them spontaneous in nature rather than organized by their respective associations, have taken place largely to promote economic as well as noneconomic demands—for example, for more staff or better protection against violence. One development of increasing importance, and a cause of increasing violence, has been the anomic street action of poorly organized categories, such as undocumented immigrants, the homeless, and the unemployed.<sup>60</sup>

## NOTES

1. Pierre Poujade was a bookseller and stationer whose party began as the Union for the Protection of Shopkeepers and Craftsmen (Union pour la Défense des Commerçants et Artisans) in 1953. Three years later, Poujade ran successfully for election to the National Assembly under the label French Union and Fraternity (Union et Fraternité Française).
2. Proportional representation is to be used in departments electing four (instead of three) or more senators, and the single-member constituency (majority) system is to be used in departments electing three (instead of two) or fewer senators.
3. For an analysis of the laws passed since 1966 postponing the dates of elections, see Jean-Marie Pontier, "Le report des élections locales et sénatoriales," *Revue Administrative* (January 2006): 70–78. See also Pierre Martin, "Les modes de scrutin aux élections en France et leurs conséquences politiques," *Regards sur l'Actualité* 329 (March 2007): 17–26.
4. As of 2005, the membership of the various parties was estimated as follows: Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, or UMP), 190,000; Socialist Party, 130,000; Communist Party, 120,000; NF, 100,000+; UDF, 40,000. These figures are approximate and based on a number of often conflicting sources. Typical annual membership dues are about \$30. In the past few years, all political parties have lost dues-paying members. The sharpest decline was experienced by the Socialist Party, whose membership fell from about 700,000 in 1979 to 275,000 in 1996 and to less than 140,000 by 2005.
5. On these cleavages, see Pascal Perrineau, "Les cadres du Parti Socialiste," in SOFRES, *L'Etat de l'opinion 1991*, ed. Olivier Duhamel and Jérôme Jaffré (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

6. Jean-Pierre Soisson, "Les grands mots," *Le Point*, July 13, 1991, 16.
7. Specifically, the electorate voted for Chirac because they had confidence that he would address seriously the following issues, in descending order: unemployment, the construction of Europe, immigration, and the fight against social exclusion. Thomas Ferenczi, "Les Français attendent de M. Chirac qu'il mette en oeuvre le changement," *Le Monde*, May 11, 1995, 9.
8. See Pascal Perrineau and Colette Ysmal, eds., *Le vote surprise: Les élections législatives des 25 Mai et 1er Juin 1997* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 1997); and Michael S. Lewis-Beck, ed., *How France Votes* (New York: Chatham House, 2000).
9. Pasqua often acted like a loose cannon. In the municipal elections of March 2001, he supported the reelection of Jean Tibéri, the mayor of Paris. Tibéri, after being disavowed by the Gaullist leadership because of corruption and prevented from leading the right-of-center ticket for the Paris mayoralty, ran as an independent candidate.
10. One of the signs of the incoherence of the UDF was the rapprochement, especially within the parliament, of its moderate component, the Radical-Socialist Party, with the left-wing Radicals, which continued its alliance with the Socialists.
11. For example, differences remained between traditional leftists, such as Minister of Labor Martine Aubry and former Assembly Speaker Henri Emmanuelli, both of whom favored reducing the workweek to thirty-five hours, and pragmatists, such as Minister of Economics Dominique Strauss-Kahn and his successor Laurent Fabius, both of whom were more reserved about such a policy.
12. William Safran, "The Socialists, Jospin, and the Mitterrand Legacy," in *How France Votes*, ed. Michael S. Lewis-Beck (New York: Chatham House, 2000), 14–41.
13. Preelection polls are taken frequently, but their results cannot be made public later than 48 hours before voting.
14. See Frédérique Matonti, ed., *La démobilisation politique* (Paris: La Dispute, 2005).
15. Bruno Cautrès and Nonna Mayer, "Les métamorphoses du 'vote de classe,'" in *Le nouveau désordre électoral: Les leçons du 21 avril 2002*, ed. Cautrès and Mayer (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 2004), 145.
16. David Revault d'Allonnes, "Ségolène Royal incarne une forme de virginité partisane," *Libération*, September 16, 2006.
17. See "Les cent propositions du 'pacte présidentiel' de Ségolène Royal," *Le Monde*, February 12, 2007. The program was published on "Désirs d'avenir," Royal's Internet site.
18. See "Je revendique la rupture," interview of Sarkozy by Sylvie Pierre-Brossolette and Michel Schifres, *Figaro-Magazine*, September 2, 2006, 40–45.
19. This is contrasted to her father's "authoritarian-capitalist" rhetoric. Vincent Tiberj "Values and the votes from Mitterrand to Hollande: The Rise of Two-Axis Politics," *Parliamentary Affairs* 66 (2013), 69–86.
20. See Alain Mergier and Jérôme Fourquet, "Le point du rupture: Enquête sur les ressorts du vote FN en milieux populaires," *Fondation Jean-Jaurès*, September 2011. See also TNS Sofres, *Baromètre d'image du Front national 2013*. Info Le Monde, January 2013.
21. These included the parti souveraineté, indépendance et liberté and other pro-sovereignty and anti-EU groups, united under the label of Rassemblement Bleu Marine, an electoral alliance formed just before the parliamentary elections.
22. For example, the UDF and the Gaullists have made selective deals with the NF in regional elections, despite opposition from the national leadership of these mainstream parties.
23. Figures are from the Ministry of Interior, <http://elections.interieur.gouv.fr> (CN2011).
24. Pascal Lamy, "La mort du PS? C'est possible," *Le Monde*, August 26, 2009.
25. François Fressoz, "L'effet boomerang de l'antisarkozysme," *Le Monde*, June 8, 2009.

26. In 2002 Arnaud Montebourg, a “young Turk,” formed the Nouveau Parti Socialiste (NPS) to promote his own presidential ambitions, but it got nowhere.
27. The NPA was formed in February 2009 from the Trotskyist Communist Revolutionary League (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire [LCR]) and other extreme-left groups and claimed nine thousand members.
28. In preparation for the regional elections of 2010, the PCF formed its own alliance, the Unified Left (Gauche Unitaire) together with other leftist groups, including leftist Socialists who had separated earlier from the PS. This alliance seemed to surpass that of Besancenot in popularity.
29. The other defeats were in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2007 and the municipal elections of 2008.
30. As a result of the Hunters’ pressure, in August 2005 the Gaullist minister of the environment suspended EU rules for hunting birds and lengthened the duck hunting season, but he was overruled by the Council of State.
31. See Gérard Grunberg, “La rupture de notre système politique,” *Télos*, September 24, 2012.
32. SOFRES poll, May 2013.
33. These include Génération identitaire and Jeunesses nationalistes révolutionnaires.
34. Known since 2005 as Citizen and Republic Movement (Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen, or MCR).
35. Jacques Julliard, “De quoi la gauche est-elle le nom?” *Le Point*, September 20, 2012, 44–45.
36. Pierre Martin, “Comment analyser les changements dans les systèmes partisans d’Europe occidentale depuis 1945?” *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* 14 (2008): 1–21.
37. Samuel Laurent, “Villepin lance son mouvement, ‘libre et indépendant’ de l’UMP,” *Le Monde*, March 25, 2010.
38. Rémi Barroux and Claire Guélaud, “L’UMP cherche une synthèse dans le social-libéralisme,” *Le Monde*, June 15, 2008.
39. Jean-Pierre Sueur, “Le postmatérialisme selon Martine Aubry,” *Le Monde*, August 18, 2009.
40. Saïd Mahrane, “Sarkozy est-il de gauche?” *Le Point*, August 20, 2009, 16–19.
41. For municipal elections of March 2008, the UMP supported several hundred candidates of the left and the center—in part, in order to prevent the FN and the PS to win seats. In these elections, more candidates than ever before were women and people representing “diversity”—in other words, racial and ethnic minorities. On Sarkozy’s “catch-all” behavior in 2007, see Georges-Marc Benhamou, “Un Mitterrandisme de droite,” *Le Point*, May 10, 2007.
42. Gilles Finchelstein, “Dix-huit leçons sur l’élection présidentielle,” *Revue politique et parlementaire*, 114: 1063–1064 (April/September 2012), 225.
43. The years of contributions to the pension funds would be raised from 41 to 44 years and the retirement age from 60 to 63 over a number of years.
44. See Florence Autret and Bernard Wallon, “Le lobbying dans tous ses états,” *Après-Demain* (January–March 2004): 5–6.
45. On interest-groups’ access to deputies, see Hélène Constanty and Vincent Nouzille, *Députés sous influences* (Paris: Fayard 2006). Lobbying with individual deputies or senators is difficult, due to party discipline and the limited role of individual deputies and senators in initiating bills.
46. Patrick Roger, “Les 719 ‘comités’ plus ou moins utiles de la République,” *Le Monde*, November 6, 2009.

47. See Cornelia Woll, "The Demise of Statism? Associations and the Transformation of Interest Intermediation in France," in *The French Republic at Fifty*, ed. Sylvain Brouard, Andrew M. Appleton, and Amy G. Mazur (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 226–244.
48. Michel Chauvière, "Les associations d'action sociale: quelle légitimité dans un contexte en mutation?" *Regards sur l'Actualité* 333 (August–September 2007): 25–40.
49. Hervé Nathan and Pascal Virot, "La CGT lache le PCF en rase campagne," *Libération*, October 8, 1999.
50. Among the most important of them are the Federation of National Education (Fédération d'Education Nationale [FEN]), oriented toward socialism and secularism (*laïcité*), and the Unitary Union Federation of Teaching, Education, Research and Culture (Fédération Syndicale Unitaire de l'Enseignement, de l'Education, de la Recherche et de la Culture [FSU]), with a more eclectic membership. Each of the two unions has about 180,000 members.
51. See Christophe Soulard, *Syndicats* (Paris: Gnos, 2006), 153–170.
52. *Mouvements sociaux* refers both to strikes and to (often spontaneous) mass action on the street and must not be confused with the "social movements" that, to Anglo-American political scientists, denote more or less organized groups similar to interest groups.
53. In 2004 the Council of State was asked to rule on the "representativeness" of a rival trade union, the National Union of Autonomous Syndicates (Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes), established in 1993. Rémi Barroux, "Le Conseil d'Etat peut modifier le paysage syndical français," *Le Monde*, October 22, 2004.
54. *Annuaire statistique de la Justice*, Edition 2011–2012, p. 41.
55. The participation in elections of these councils by workers and white-collar employees, which take place every five years, has steadily declined. Abstention rates were 41.3 percent in 1982 and 74.5 percent in December 2008, the most recent elections.
56. Until 2008 known as Economic and Social Council.
57. "La réforme du CESE ménage les susceptibilités," *Les Echos*, August 26, 2009.
58. See Béatrice Manjoni d'Intignano, *Égalité entre femmes et hommes: Aspects économiques* (Paris: Documentation Française, 1999).
59. See William Safran, "Ethnoreligious Politics in France: Jews and Muslims," *West European Politics* 27 (May 2004): 423–451.
60. See Johanna Siméant, *La cause des sans-papiers* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 1998). For a comprehensive listing of marginal, extremist, and "postmaterialist" organizations, see Xavier Crettiez and Isabelle Sommier, *La France rebelle: Tous les foyers, mouvements et acteurs de la contestation* (Paris: Editions Michelon, 2002).