

Polity IV Country Report 2007: France

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>38</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	9	9	0	Democ:	9	9	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:		38		Tentative:		No		<p style="text-align: center;">Authority Trends, 1946-2007: France</p>
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SCODE	FRN	CCODE	220	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	6	5	5																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date			27 April 1969	Begin Date																					
				28 April 1969																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1958																								
Executive(s)	President Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP); directly elected 22 April and 6 May 2007, 31.2% and 53.1%																								
Legislature	Bicameral: National Assembly (577 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 10 and 17 June 2007) Union for a Popular Movement (UMP): 313 Socialist Party (PS): 186 Other parties: 78 Senate (343 seats; indirectly elected by an electoral college; most recent elections, 21 September 2008) UMP: 151 PS: 116 Centrist Union-UDF (UC-UDF): 29 Communist, Republican and Citizen (CRC): 23 Democratic and European Social Rally (RDSE): 17 Non-partisans: 7																								
Judiciary	Council of State																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

France's political system combines a strong president with a parliamentary system that includes a powerful prime minister. Both chief executives are recruited through competitive multiparty elections. However, while the president is directly elected, the prime minister (or premier) is selected by the president from the dominant party (or coalition) in the National Assembly. This hybrid system can result in the president and prime minister being from different parties. Beginning with the 2002 presidential election, the president's term in office has been reduced from seven to five years. Incumbent President Jacques Chirac of the conservative Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) registered an overwhelming victory in the second round of 2002 presidential elections, defeating Jean-Marie Le Pen of the far-right National Front (FN), who had unexpectedly taken second place in the first round of elections which had included a record number of candidates (16). The presidential and legislative elections of May-June 2007 also provided UMP candidates with electoral majorities. Nicolas Sarkozy, the UMP candidate for president, won a decisive victory over his Socialist opponent, Segolene Royal. Moreover, while the UMP lost some ground in the National Assembly, nonetheless, it retained a workable majority thus ensuring that both the offices of the president and the prime minister were occupied by members of the same party.

Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)

The current system of government, the Fifth Republic, dates from 1958. As designed by Charles DeGaulle, the presidency is the dominant institution in this mixed presidential-parliamentary system. In addition to his power to dissolve the National Assembly with advice (but not necessarily the concurrence) of the premier, the president may hold national referenda on some issues (Article 11) and is granted full legislative and executive powers in time of emergency (Article 16). Moreover, as detailed in Article 5 of the constitution, the president is guardian and arbiter of the basic law.

The legislative capacity of the once all-powerful National Assembly has been greatly circumscribed under the Fifth Republic. No longer permitted to set its own agenda, the Assembly must give priority to bills presented by the executive branch, which can open debate on a bill and propose amendments. The National Assembly can pass specific legislation in such fixed areas as civil rights and liberties, taxation, the penal code, amnesty, declaration of war, electoral procedure, and the nationalization of industry. However, it can only determine "general principles" in the areas of national defense, local government, education, property and commercial rights, labor, trade unions, social security, finance, and social and economic programs. Unspecified areas remain within the jurisdiction of the executive.

The broad scope of presidential authority has curtailed the powers of the premier (who is named by the president from the dominant party in the National Assembly). The subservience of the premier (and, hence, the National Assembly) to the president in the post-DeGaulle era, however, has been increasingly challenged. One of the most important factors contributing to the political dominance of the chief of state during the first three decades of the Fifth Republic was the fact the president's party had also formed a majority in the National Assembly. Under these conditions the presidents were able to assert dominance over the broad outlines of public policy with their respective premiers being assigned a lowlier role of "parliamentary manager." This tradition came to an end in 1986 when a Socialist president (Mitterand) was forced to deal with a right-wing government (under the leadership of Premier Chirac). This period of "cohabitation" lasted until 1988. Subsequent periods of "cohabitation" have existed from 1993-95 and from 1997 to 2002. As a result of June 2002 general elections, President Chirac of the Rally for the Republic (RPR) enjoys strong parliamentary majority support established through the Union for the Presidential Majority (UPM), a coalition of the RPR and the Liberal Democracy (DL); the RPR was subsequently dissolved in September 2002 in favor of the UPM. The leader of the coalition partner, Jean-Pierre Raffarin (DL), was named Prime Minister in June 2002 but he resigned in May 2005 following the decisive rejection of the proposed EU Constitution in a national referendum; the EU Constitution had been strongly supported by Chirac. Dominique de Villepin was named to replace Raffarin as prime minister on 2 June 2005. In the wake of the presidential and legislative victories for the UMP in May-June 2007, President

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Sarkozy nominated Francois Fillion, a moderate in the UMP, as prime minister. The judiciary is highly accomplished and independent.

Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)

France is a competitive multiparty democracy. Freedom of speech and assembly are constitutionally protected and the civil rights of citizens are generally respected. Recent controversies have led to a split in the “cohabitation” of conservative and socialist parties that has characterized French politics since the presidential victory of the Socialist Party (PS) in 1986. In April 2001 a call was made by some members of the PS for Chirac’s impeachment in connection with a scandal concerning secret payments allegedly made to Chirac while he served as Mayor of Paris in the early 1990s. While refusing to support impeachment, the PS-led government pushed legislation to curtail the president’s right to immunity from prosecution while in office. In response, Chirac revealed that the French government had a longstanding tradition of allocating very large sums in the form of secret discretionary funds to the president and other high government officials (including the Prime Minister) as a form of “supplemental income”; in doing so, Chirac argued that, while completely legal, these secret funds were a “bad tradition” that should be changed. While the “secret funds” scandal brought a public outcry against the whole political establishment, public cynicism was effectively diverted against the PS leadership for politicizing the scandal to undermine Chirac. As a result, the PS Prime Minister Lionel Jospin finished third behind far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen in the April 2002 presidential balloting and, in June 2002 legislative elections, the Socialist Party lost 40 percent of its seats in the National Assembly.

In December 2001, a government bill conferring a measure of autonomy on the island of Corsica received final parliamentary endorsement, although in a watered-down version compared with the text approved in May 1999 as part of the Matignon peace process with Corsican separatists. The limited autonomy law did not satisfy the Corsican National Liberation Front (FLNC) which stated that it was abandoning the November 1999 ceasefire in response. In a further setback, in January 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that key provisions in the Corsican autonomy law were unconstitutional. There were large demonstrations in Corsica in 2005 protesting the proposed privatization of the company running ferries to the island. On 28 October 2005, serious rioting broke out in the northeast Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois involving mainly poor Muslim youths; the riots quickly spread to 300 other cities, reaching a peak on 6-8 November 2005. A state-of-emergency was declared on 8 November and the rioting just as quickly dissipated.