



France — Va-PoReg Country Report

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02/08/1871 Start Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): Starting in 987, the Kingdom of France emerges on the map. From 09/21/1792 until 05/18/1804 France was for the first time a republic (French First Republic). From 04/06/1814 until 02/24/1848 France was a constitutional monarchy.¹ In 1848 universal male suffrage was introduced, with the exception of the military who obtained the right to vote in 1945. Louis-Napoléon orchestrated a coup d'état in 1851, overthrowing the republic and declaring himself Emperor Napoleon III, thus establishing the Second French Empire. This Bonapartist regime lasted from 01/14/1852, to 10/27/1870. Following the collapse of the Second French Empire during the Franco-Prussian War, France adopted the democratic regime known as the French Third Republic on 09/04/1870.² The regime is classified from 02/08/1871, the date of the first parliamentary elections in this period, as a patriarchal electoral oligarchy because women, constituting approximately half of all adults, had no right to vote and were systematically excluded from political participation. Married women remained legal minors under the Napoleonic Civil Code, requiring their husbands' permission for property ownership, contractual agreements, and employment. While unmarried women gained legal majority in 1893, all women remained barred from holding legislative, executive, or judicial office, ensuring that Parliament, cabinet, and courts comprised exclusively men. In our alternative classification, this regime is classified as defective democracy with severe suffrage deficits.³ The French Third Republic struggled with governmental instabilities, frequent changes in cabinets and procedural difficulties in the legislature. Governmental power was exercised by broad coalitions, known as party blocs, of which the most prominent are the Bloc National, the Cartel des Gauches, the Union Nationale, and Concentration.⁴ During the 1920s, the governments were challenged by the financial crisis and devaluation of the franc, the French currency at the time. Anecdotally, in 1934 violent riots in Paris over a financial scandal enforced the retirement of Prime Minister Édouard Daladier after only ten days in office.⁵ Fiscal policies are a major factor for governmental instability during this period. In the second half of the 1930s an external threat to government stability emerged, namely the rise of fascism in Spain, Italy and Germany. Pierre Laval and, again, Édouard Daladier had to resign from their positions as prime minister because of their lack in political engagement against the fascist threat.⁶ Germany's Nazi-regime and the start of the Second World War finally heralded the end of the French Third Republic.⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. V-Dem's CEI scores all elections as clean. Their EF&FI scores elections as free until 1918, somewhat free and fair from 1919 onward. Furthermore, political liberties were present except in the period of World War I (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI scores full political liberties but between World War I the outcomes decreased to somewhat present. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. From 1900 to 1913, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. During World War I, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1919 to 1939, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are again both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. For 1940, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as

indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

06/22/1940 End Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal)/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]: On this date, the Second Armistice at Compiègne was signed by officials of Germany and France, establishing a German occupation zone in Northern and Western France, encompassing around 60% of France's European territory. The German troops had reached and occupied Paris on the 06/14/1940. The area that was under military occupation during World War II, referred to as the "occupied zone", encompassed the northern and western regions of France, including the two restricted areas. On the other hand, the southern region of France, excluding the western portion of Aquitaine along the Atlantic coast, was designated as the "free zone" (French: zone libre), where the Vichy regime continued to hold power as a separate state, albeit under significant German influence. Vichy France, also known as the "French State" (État français), took over after the French Third Republic disintegrated due to defeat.⁸ According to our observations and LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, therefore we code this regime as a direct occupation regime. Political liberties were not present according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

For the time between 06/14/1940 and 08/25/1944 see also France, Vichy.

08/25/1944 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]/Start Democratizing Regime: The occupation ended effectively with the liberation of Paris on this date. In the months following the liberation, and until the first elections in 1945, the country was governed by the Provisional Government of the French Republic (Gouvernement provisoire de la République française, GPRF). This government was established in June 1944 and led by General Charles de Gaulle. The GPRF also replaced the Vichy regime and assumed control as the legitimate authority representing Free France. The GPRF was composed of the French Communist Party (PCF), the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO) and the Christian democratic Popular Republican Movement (MRP).⁹ On 04/21/1944 before the first post-war election full universal suffrage, including women as voters, was introduced.¹⁰

10/21/1945 End Democratizing Regime/Start Liberal Democracy: On this date, the first post-war legislative election took place, marking the first time French women exercised their newly granted suffrage rights (established by decree in 1944). The extension of voting rights and eligibility for office to women eliminated the systematic gender-based political exclusion that had defined the regime as a patriarchal electoral oligarchy since 1871, establishing universal popular legitimation characteristic of democracy. The French Communist Party, which had already doubled its performance in the 1936 elections, emerged as the leading party, securing approximately 26% of the vote and 159 seats.¹¹ Since 1946, the Fourth Republic has faced challenges including a lack of political consensus, a weak executive branch, and a recurring pattern of rapidly forming and collapsing governments. Due to the absence of a party or coalition capable of securing a parliamentary majority, prime ministers have been cautious about implementing unpopular reforms to avoid jeopardizing their political standing.¹² The year 1956 was a pivotal one in French history, marked by a series of events that brought the country to the brink of a democratic breakdown, setting the stage for the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958 (Marshall 2018f). These developments also mark the transition of France's parliamentary system to its contemporary presidential system.¹³ The most significant factor was the Algerian War of Independence. Algeria, a French colony since 1830, began its fight for independence in 1954. By 1956, the conflict had intensified, demanding significant attention and resources from France. The political framework of the Fourth Republic, with its fragmented parliamentary system, proved ineffective in dealing with the crisis. The government struggled to maintain a stable majority, leading to frequent changes in leadership and an inability to form a cohesive policy on Algeria. As 1956 drew to a close, the public sentiment was increasingly in favor of a stronger government that could effectively handle the crisis. A new constitution was introduced with a stronger executive branch to stabilize the nation.¹⁴ From 1947 to 1957, based on Polity5's assessment,

during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. In 1958, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. From 1959 to 1964, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive's power was noticeably limited but not substantial, fitting Intermediate Category 2. From 1965 to 1968, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. Until 1985, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive's authority was significantly constrained, nearing parity with other branches, placing it in the third intermediate category. Since 1986, according to Polity5, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. France is a democracy with a dual executive and a bicameral system, consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate. For the year 1945, V-Dem's JCE is classified as comprehensive, indicating comprehensive judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For the following year, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the years 1947-1958, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. From 1959 to 1968, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. Since 1969, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. Nevertheless, events in recent years (terrorist attacks, the pandemic) have led to government cutbacks on civil liberties. As per FH's classification for this regime period, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. Furthermore, according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI political liberties have been constantly present since 1946. Elections in France are deemed free and fair. Political parties operate independently, and the government acts transparently.¹⁵ The right to vote applies to citizens aged 18 and older.¹⁶ On 06/12/2022 and 06/19/2022 legislative elections were held.¹⁷ They were deemed to be free and fair. During the parliamentary elections in June 2022, Ensemble! secured 245 lower-house seats, but it fell short of achieving an absolute majority. The New Ecological and Social People's Union (NUPES), a left-wing coalition consisting of four parties, earned 131 seats. The far-right, Rassemblement National, experienced a significant advancement by winning 89 seats, a notable increase from the 8 seats it secured in 2017.¹⁸ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During independence, LIED has categorized elections in France as competitive in the whole regime period. V-Dem's EF&FI indicates that elections were free and fair and clean in this period while the CEI indicates they were also somewhat clean.

Liberal Democracy as of 01/07/2024 continued.

Additional sources (Elgie 1999, Hanson 2006, Huber 1998, Kempf 2004, Kempf 2009, Knapp/Wright 2005, MacRae 1967, Nohlen 2010, Rioux/Rogers 1989, Skach 2005, Stepan/Suleiman 1995, Suleiman 1994)

Notes

¹ <https://rulers.org/rulfr.html#france>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Third_Republic

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Second_Republic

⁴ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, France_R: 1, France_V: 1.

⁵ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, France_R: 4.

⁶ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, France_V: 4-5.

⁷ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, France_R: 5-6, France_V: 5-6.

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_military_administration_in_occupied_France_during_World_War_II

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_French_legislative_election

- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_French_legislative_election
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Fifth_Republic
- ¹³ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, France_V: 8.
- ¹⁴ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/France_2008?lang=en
- ¹⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/france/freedom-world/2023>
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_France
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_French_presidential_election
- ¹⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/france/freedom-world/2023>

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