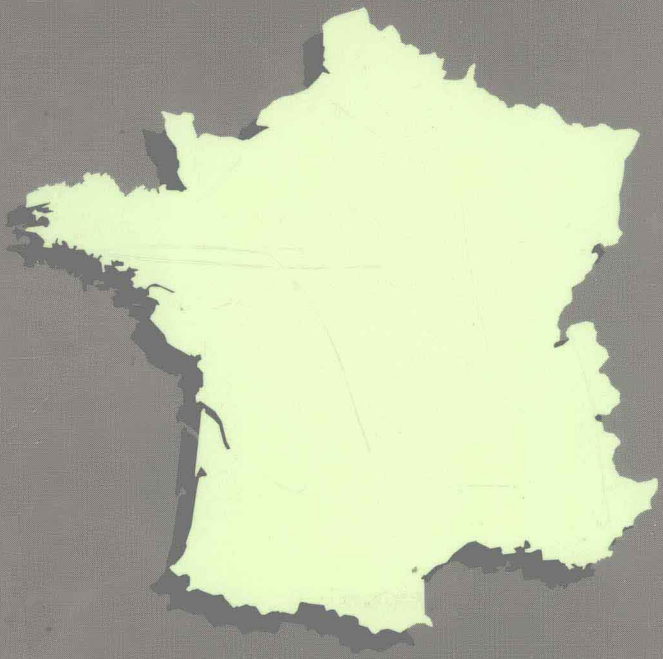
FIFTH EDITION

POLITICS IN FRANCE



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POLITICS IN FRANCE

FIFTH EDITION

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POLITICS IN FRANCE

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Dedicated to the memory of
Georges Lavau

Preface

The first edition of *Politics in France* was published on the "morning after" the student demonstrations and worker strikes that marked a definitive end to the first decade of the Fifth Republic. The preface to this edition is being written ten years into the presidency of the Socialist François Mitterrand. The central purpose of this book remains what it was when it was first published. Then, as now, it is addressed both to students and that construct, the general reader. Each edition has recorded the constant if irregular modernization of an old country and the sometimes surprising development of its political institutions, new and old. But during the decade that has elapsed between the conclusion of the previous edition and the present one there has been a quantum jump in the process of change.

In the winter of 1982, the novelty of a government of the Left, which included the Communists, was still evident. The government was just experimenting with a reversal of its previous Keynesian strategies for economic growth and turning toward policies of financial rigor as the only alternative to a break with the rules of the emerging European Community. Since then, there have been two parliamentary elections that have regularized the alternation in power between Left and Right. The legislative election of 1986 compelled a Socialist president to share executive power with a conservative prime minister, an experience which tested and proved the flexibility of the constitutional dyarchy. As a result of the legislative elections of 1988, a Socialist prime minister was once again named to head the government.

From one election to the next, and in between, the Communist party lost most of its electoral following, and thereby the

place it had occupied in politics since the Second World War. At the same time, a party on the Far Right that had been established in the early 1970s, the National Front, gained significant electoral support for the first time. Both of these events have changed the dynamics of the party system, as reflected in the transformation of the Socialist party into a Center-Left party of government, made of the same cloth as the social democratic parties of Northern Europe. The Socialist president François Mitterrand, whose popularity had hit bottom in the early 1980s, won a second term easily in 1988 after a campaign in which he distanced himself from his party, assuming the role of "republican monarch" consistent with Charles de Gaulle's concept of the presidency.

The almost general acceptance of existing institutions, and of the rules of political interaction, indicates an emerging common understanding in a country known for its secular divisiveness. Partisan divisions remain strong, but Left and Right no longer hold fundamentally opposing views on the socioeconomic and political order. It now appears justifiable to speak, as French and foreign observers often do, of the end of French exceptionalism. Progressive convergence is most evident in the almost general acceptance of the country's key role in the building and strengthening of the European Community, along with the constraints imposed on the sovereignty of member states. On the other hand, the rise of the National Front, growing conflict about immigration, and the pain of persistently high rates of unemployment related to industrial restructuring remind us that a common constitutional understanding is not the same as the end of political conflict and that the bases of political conflict are not disappearing, but changing.

The number of inquiries about France by American, French, and British scholars has increased significantly during the past decade. We have benefited enormously from the work of our friends and colleagues. This research on France has been of unusually high quality, and we have incorporated as much of it into our text as space has permitted. The thoroughly updated and revised footnotes indicate the extent of our efforts.

When we began our collaboration on this new edition, we decided not to proceed by a division of labor, with each of us taking charge of specific subjects or chapters. Every paragraph, indeed every sentence, has been agreed to by both of us. We shared

the joys of an intensive collaboration; now we share common responsibility for the results.

As in all previous editions, the information derived from published sources has been supplemented by numerous interviews and conversations with French colleagues and friends. Over the lifetime of this book their number has grown so large that we refrain from mentioning them by name. Our sincere gratitude for their interest and our admiration for their judgment and competence are here recorded.

We have been especially fortunate that a large number of our colleagues have read and reread different parts of the manuscript. John T. S. Keeler, Frank L. Wilson, Vivien Schmidt, John Ambler, Ronald Tiersky, David S. Wilson, and Nicholas Wahl each read different chapters, and their frank criticism was invaluable in enabling us to correct our mistakes and rethink our analyses. Their friendship—and that of Philip Cerny, Mark Kesselman, George Ross, Yves Mény, Marie-France Toinet, Rémy Leveau, Pascal Petit, Pascal Perrineau, and Georges Lavau—has helped mold our thinking about French politics. We have dedicated this edition to the memory of Georges Lavau, whose untimely death as this book was being completed is a deep loss to all of us who have plowed the field of French politics.

We would like to thank our research assistant, Catherine El Hadad. Ms. El Hadad is a French graduate of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris who is completing her Ph.D. in American politics at New York University. Her research on both sides of the Atlantic has contributed to the richness of this volume. We also owe a real debt to the editors and staff of HarperCollins. In particular, the editors for this edition, Lauren Silverman, Catherine Woods, and Susan Goldfarb, have provided us with a rare combination of professional skill, encouragement, and good humor, and have moved this book through the various stages of production with remarkable speed. In addition, we would like to thank the faculty, students, and staff of the Institute of French Studies at New York University for their help and support. On a daily basis, the Institute has nurtured the study of France in the United States.

Finally, Henry Ehrmann can only repeat what he has said about Claire in the first edition of this book. Martin Schain ex-

presses his deep gratitude, yet again, to Wendy, Jennifer, and Julie for their love and encouragement. In his work on French politics they have always been enthusiastic participants as well as observers.

HENRY W. EHRMANN
MARTIN A. SCHAIN

Preface to the First Edition

The Frenchman Montesquieu once remarked that those nations are happy whose annals of history are boring to read. To the extent that this is true, France is of course an "unhappy" country—for her history has been fascinating and turbulent, not boring. No wonder that the political systems under which she has lived have invited unending and frequently passionate comments by Frenchmen and foreign observers alike.

Such an abiding interest is caused in part by high expectations—expectations which the present leader of the French Republic is not the first to have voiced. Because the country has been the beacon of Western enlightenment, the performance of its political system is measured by exacting standards. There are puzzling inconsistencies in the political and social life of every nation. Those of France have frequently aroused irritation; explanations that have been offered are stubbornly contradictory because they fasten on different aspects of the country's internal contradictions. Does the turbulence of political life hide a pattern of basically undisturbed fundamental values? Or is, in a rapidly changing environment, an all too persistent adherence to basic values responsible for political explosions?

When discussing "Some Characteristics of Historians in Democratic Times,"[1] Alexis de Tocqueville suggests that the lot of historians writing in an aristocratic age was an easy one. They were content simply to detach from the mass of general events "the particular influence of one man or of a few men." Anyone trying to explain the present French regime cannot quite fail to comment upon the "influence of one man." Yet present-day political science

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), Vol. II, pp. 90–93.

fits well, as it must, the characteristics which Tocqueville attributes to the historians of democratic times. We seek, as he puts it, to "assign general causes" to a mass of incidents and are "given to connect incidents together so as to deduce a system from them." Instead of attempting to discern the influence of individuals we prefer "talking about the characteristics of race, the physical conformation of the country, or the genius of civilization"—now conveniently summarized under the heading of "political culture."

Just because France shares with other democracies many political institutions which have worked adequately elsewhere but have failed her, a discussion of the country's political culture as a major variable determining political behavior has always appeared to be particularly relevant. It also provides the main theme of this book. To avoid the stereotypes which a discussion of this kind easily invites, the functional approach suggested in the writings of Gabriel Almond and common to this series in comparative politics has proved particularly, and to this author almost surprisingly, helpful. The categories here employed seem to clarify where choice and where circumstances have shaped the structures of the French political system and how they have determined the functioning of these structures. By sorting out what is unique and what is common to societies of similar development, our classifications should serve the purposes of comparison.

All comparative studies suffer from the limitations imposed by the paucity of strictly comparable data. I do not share the optimism of those who believe that the growing number of comparative statistical studies of national politics are sufficient to test general propositions. Where I have used such data I have regarded them as suggestive illustrations, not as evidence. Until quite recently most French statistics were notoriously unreliable and were, for that reason alone, unlikely to mirror reality better than subjective judgments. I have regarded polling and survey data, also, as suggestive illustrations. French techniques in this field have been refined greatly and their results, too, provide interesting comments. But they "prove" little and, as some French political scientists have shown, to me convincingly, even less than in some other countries.[2]

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[2]See Association Française de Science Politique, *Les Sondages et la Science Politique* (Paris: Mimeographed, 1966).

This study is one of an old country undergoing rapid development. My footnotes should show how much I have profited from the literature on political development—some of which appears in this series. Circumstances have not permitted me to investigate in necessary detail the impact which the international environment has had on French domestic politics. It is obvious that the political development of a country such as France has been drastically affected by her frequent exposure to large-scale wars and more recently to the tensions caused by the cold war.

Yet however heavy the heritage of past events, whether generated within the national borders or outside, present-day France is not just a prisoner of its past. The "silent revolution" described on many pages of this book as taking place in many fields would not be possible if a nation's values were foreordained and unalterable. The limits and constraints conditioning the ongoing development must be clearly understood if France is to hold, as she has so often in the past, pertinent lessons for general and democratic political theory. But again Tocqueville reminds his disciples not to get embroiled too far in "doctrines of necessity" and, instead, to "acknowledge the strength and independence of men united in society." For, as he concludes, "the great object in our time is to raise the faculties of men, not to complete their prostration."

The research for and the writing of this book were substantially aided by Dartmouth College. Its generous leave policy, grants awarded by its Committee on Research, and altogether an atmosphere in which research and teaching are equally recognized made this study possible. But the book also owes much to my earlier musings and wanderings supported by the Social Science Research Council, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

My colleagues and friends to whom this book is dedicated have contributed more than they might wish to acknowledge when they see the results of their counsel. Whether they have read, with great attention to ideas and details, parts of the manuscript, whether they have answered precisely my manifold inquiries or engaged with me, over many years, in lengthy discussions of French politics, their knowledge and understanding were indispensable. In the United States, Gabriel Almond, Lewis Edinger, and Richard Rose have commented helpfully and with

acumen on parts of the manuscript. My colleague and friend at Dartmouth, Professor Howard Bliss, has gone with great care over the entire manuscript. His thoughtful suggestions have resulted in many improvements of content and style. To be edited by as competent a staff as that of Little, Brown and Company is an intellectual joy. The efficiency of the staff of Baker Library at Dartmouth and especially of its Order Department should prove attractive to any scholar.

One of my students, Mr. Roger Witten of the Dartmouth Class of 1968, proved his mettle as an untiring research assistant. Mrs. Louise Spiess can only be described as a paragon among secretaries. The reader is bound to profit from Mrs. Joan Erdman's skill as a judicious indexer.

My wife, Claire, made no suggestions whatsoever, nor did she proofread. She did not even read. Ever since we met more than thirty years ago in Paris—to be sure in the midst of acute political crisis—we have talked, lived, and breathed French politics, with a frown or a smile, in France and from afar. This book will teach her nothing. But all through the writing process she fulfilled her usual and indispensable function. She never ceased insisting that there are broader horizons and more urgent problems in the world at large than a work-centered author will admit. For this my undivided thanks go to her.

March 1968 H.W.E.

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