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1

France the Unexceptional

Andrew M. Appleton

‘Once upon a time, there was an old country, encased in tradition and caution... We must transform our old country of France into a new country, and it must marry its epoch’ – Charles de Gaulle
(quoted in Jackson 2003, p. 141).

1.1 Introduction

From the beginning, the Fifth Republic seemed to most observers to be a political system unlike others. The story is familiar and has been told many times; crafted in a moment of great crisis (the Algerian war), designed to redress the institutional failures of the preceding regime, tailored to fit the political (and moral) worldview of one man, and with the backdrop of a political culture in which the legacy of the French Revolution still loomed large, the new republican institutions appeared to be rather unique. A semi-presidential executive, a prime minister responsible to both the president and the legislature, a national Assembly devoid of legislative initiative, a judiciary lacking in independence, the party weakening device of the popular referendum, and a defense policy placed by constitutional fiat in the presidential domain – all of these elements added up to what became firmly entrenched in political science as ‘the French exceptionalism’.

This accorded exceptionalism had two important analytical consequences. First, it seemed to overtly cast as irrelevant the models and theories of political institutions and action that were propelling the field of comparative politics at the time. Exceptionalism seemed to suggest that France was not just an outlier, but purely different. Generations of scholars were weaned upon superb ‘thick descriptive’ works, such as Wylie’s (1957) *Village in the Vaucluse*. Textbook after textbook on French politics appeared, with almost no reference to the systematic process of comparison. The standard refrain became: ‘to understand France, we must first understand French history and culture, which is just profoundly different from anywhere else dating back at least to the French Revolution’. The second consequence was that

the study of French politics was rarely incorporated into systematic cross-national research. While the lack of inclusion of France in such an early ground-breaking study as *The Civic Culture* (1963) has less to do with exceptionalism than the events themselves of 1958–59, it set a precedent that was barely troubled over subsequent decades. At an institutional level, it may have contributed to the lack of contact between French political science and the broader international community of scholars outside of the circle of French specialists. At an analytical level, it meant that the exclusion of France from cross-national comparison could not permit the French case to inform the models and theories themselves. Arguably, both our understanding of French politics and comparative politics itself suffered as a result.

As we look back at 50 years of constitutional experience under the Fifth Republic, it seems that the model of exceptionalism no longer accurately describes French politics. What was once considered a pedestal may well have become an intellectual ghetto. No matter how unique the institutions of the Fifth Republic may have appeared in 1958 when they were tailored, no matter how much policy practices seemed to be determined by the legacy of French political culture, five decades later they are the source for fruitful comparison with other advanced industrial societies. For example, as Elgie points out in the next chapter, the fact of semi-presidentialism – something that once seemed so, well, *French* – is one that characterizes dozens of political regimes around the world today. Merely by developing and including the analytical category into analyses of democratic institutions, institutional performance, and executive studies, our understanding of the universe of political regimes has improved. And on the other side of the coin, we may now apply the language of comparative politics to the study of the French executive and untangle the myth of the ‘personal presidency’.

As we seek to evaluate the Fifth Republic at its mid-century point in this book, it will become apparent that a clear trend emerges from close scrutiny of each chapter. It is not just that the book documents the evolution of institutions, practices, and policies under the Fifth Republic (although it clearly does do this). It is that each author uses models and theories familiar to all political scientists – whether specialists of French politics or not – that inform and enrich the cases. And, conversely, we find that the situating of the French case within broader comparative models can inform and enrich those models. So this book is not just about continuity and change in French politics, nor simply an update on what has occurred since the last edited volume was produced. The ambition is broader; we argue, collectively, that the application of commonly-held theories from the arsenal of comparative politics makes sense at this developmental stage of the French polity – and we think that the results cannot be ignored by a universe of scholars whose proclivity in the past has been to relegate the study of France to its ‘exceptional’ place.

This chapter gives an overview of some of the major transformations that have taken place at both the institutional and policy levels in France, with a view to placing each subsequent chapter in the book in a broader context. The argument that will unfold, piece by piece, is that the sum total of the experience of the Fifth Republic is the consolidation of an unexceptional, if incomplete, European democracy. The personal presidency has given way to an effective executive authority, the National Assembly (all the while subordinated to the aforementioned executive) has developed a regulatory vocation, the Constitutional Council has emerged as a veto player, the military-industrial establishment has shed some of its Gaullist particularities, and France has become a 'Europeanized' country. Democratization, too, characterizes the transformation of civil society, and the successful decentralization of the *colbertiste* state.¹ Economic policy-making has moved away from the state-interventionist model that once seemed so peculiarly Gallic, and market liberalization and labor market flexibility are the order of the day. If we look at the experience of historically marginalized and under-represented groups, we can see the incompleteness of the democratic experience; yet here too, one might argue, there is little exceptional from a comparative vantage point. The triumph of the Fifth Republic is to have become a European regime comparable to any other – a far cry from *the coup d'état permanent*² that was derided by many at its genesis.

1.2 Decision-making institutions

Designing durable political institutions has been the Achilles' heel of politics in France dating back at least to the revolution. It may be easy to observe that the tradition of statism and centralized power is an old one, but the repartition of powers among institutions and actors has been more complicated. In the absence of effective and stable political institutions, the centrality of the bureaucratic administration was established and the myth of the neutral state was born. In tandem, another feature of French political life took root, the so-called *système notabillaire*; the solution to the ineffectiveness of political institutions and the hyper-centralization of the state was the emergence of a sophisticated set of clientalist networks based on personal power and authority.

The constitution of the Fifth Republic, to a certain extent imposed by de Gaulle as the price of his return to power, was designed to address these ills and to create a stable and effective form of executive authority. Elgie (2005) notes that the adoption of semi-presidentialism (or dual executive) was based on two old traditions of *personal leadership* and *parliamentarianism*. But in largely subjugating the power of the prime minister to that of the president, and particularly in diminishing the powers of the National Assembly, it is clear that for de Gaulle the former took precedence over the latter. And if

his tenure in office was any guide, de Gaulle established the expectation that there should be a presidential style of politics.

As Elgie points out in Chapter 2 of this volume, the empiricist approach to the study of the French presidency has focused to a large extent upon the twin questions of leadership and style. Yet perhaps because of the unique character of the first of the Fifth Republic presidents, or perhaps because of the struggle to define the presidency (as an office) independent from Gaullism as an approach to wielding presidential power, the answers provided by political analysts over the years have tended towards explanations *sui generis*. The French presidency is unique because the constitution of the Fifth Republic is unique, and that is unique because France is unique – an infinitely recursive set of responses that ultimately yield little except the worn mantle of exceptionalism. But clearly things have changed; it is virtually unthinkable that a president today could make the (paraphrased) bold-faced claim, as did de Gaulle announcing his candidacy on 4 November 1965 that it was either ‘me or chaos’.³

It is important to note that the constitution of the Fifth Republic actively tempers direct presidential leadership and despite warnings in the popular press about the presidentialization of French political life, the tendency has actually been in the other direction, at least until 2000 (Elgie 2005; Knapp 2005). Despite successive presidents attempting to emulate de Gaulle’s style of politics, they have found themselves under increasing political constraints stemming for the most part from the lack of large, stable, and effective majorities in parliament. While the experience of cohabitation – a president and prime minister from opposing parties or coalitions – did not bring down the system, it was sufficiently traumatic to impel a constitutional change designed to reinforce the presidency (the reduction of the presidential term from seven to five years, making it concomitant with the life of parliament).

This reform (while not totally eliminating the possibility of cohabitation) makes it less likely that France will undergo the experience of a president and prime minister who have different policy agendas. In doing so, it makes it more likely that the dual executive will be able to function more in accordance with de Gaulle’s expressed dictum that the president should be responsible for setting the broad lines of national policy – especially in the area of foreign and defense policy – while the prime minister would be responsible for the day-to-day running of the economy. This scenario seems to best describe the executive under the previous president since 2002, and many have assumed that it will become a more stable norm. Grossman demonstrates in Chapter 3 that this dynamic has particular consequences for executive-legislative; use of the (in)famous article 44.3 has subsided, and given way to article 38 of the constitution, which makes much more sense in an era of relatively stable partisan, presidential majorities.

Thus, it would be incorrect to suggest that there has been a fundamental change in the executive institutions of the Fifth Republic; with the exception

of the length of the presidential mandate, the institutions remain on paper much as they were in 1958. But there has been a clear shift in the practice of power within those institutions; it may not be accurate to discuss the presidentialization of the French political system, but it may be more apposite to think in terms of (a) the institutionalization of the *presidency*, and (b) the consolidation of executive authority, even in the face of a more active national assembly. As we shall discuss below, these developments can only have taken place if they are inextricably linked to the emergence of presidential/executive majorities, which in turn rests upon a more robust party system that reflects the institutional dominance of the presidency.

Just as the Fifth Republic established an effective executive power, so too was the power of the National Assembly sharply reduced. The 'house without windows' of the Fourth Republic was replaced by the 'semi-sovereign' parliament (Williams 1969). The executive was given a formidable set of tools to intervene in the internal life of parliament, to control debate, and to shield legislation from over-scrutiny and modification (Huber 1996). While French parliamentarians may be among the highest paid in Europe, their political independence was among the lowest and their control over the legislative process the weakest.

However, there are some signs that this has changed in recent years. There has been a resurgence of both the oversight and the debating functions of the National Assembly, in part as a consequence of institutional reforms and in part due to emerging norms (Kerrouche 2006; Knapp 2005). Among the former is the ability to refer legislation to the Constitutional Council (the constitutional reform of 1974) and the ability to control at least some of the parliamentary agenda (1995). Among the latter is a new form of constituency work, informal relationships developed by members of the National Assembly and the government, and the crucial bridging role of political party organizations (Costa and Kerrouche 2007). The French parliament is constitutionally subordinated to the executive, and yet as Kerrouche shows in Chapter 4 there are indications that a new form of parliamentary action is emerging that enhances its role in the policy-making process.

The evidence that is presented in this volume tends to support the view that it is probably incorrect to analyse the National Assembly in terms of 'decline', 'strengthening', or any other unilinear dimensionality. The legislature in France has been transformed by the fact of presidential majorities within the body, and the reorganization of much of its work internally. Individual MPs still lack the ability to craft and introduce legislation, and the opposition lacks the institutional tools to challenge the government's agenda. However, the deliberative function of the legislature has been reinforced, and it is capable of independently scrutinizing both legislative proposals and government action. The mere fact that there are proposals to amend the constitution to enumerate the legislative powers of the National Assembly demonstrates the degree to which it has evolved. Parliament may not have accrued any

additional powers, but the executive has become much more closely attuned to parliamentary majorities; perhaps we have witnessed the subtle transformation of the executive-legislative relationship from one of dominance to responsibility (in a 'lite' version).

The preceding discussion kept returning to the question of more stable, more readily identifiable governmental majorities. This brings us to the question of political parties and their ability to help throw up those majorities. It is fair to say that the French party system has always seemed atypical to those studying it from afar. In general, two words have consistently been applied as descriptors of party life in France: *instability* and *weakness*. Perhaps fitting for a country where the very concept of left and right was born, partisan identification has never been the psychological or sociological link between the individual and the organization. Indeed, Knapp (2004) refers to France as a 'disconnected democracy'. French analysts themselves developed the concept of *ideological families* to denote the stability in the electorate and electoral choices in the absence of stable and enduring party organizations. Finally, the historical ambivalence towards political parties that also dates back to the French Revolution (at least), and which is embedded in the political philosophy of Rousseau, was foremost in the minds of the creators of the constitution of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

Some analysts have portrayed the party system in the Fifth Republic as being inherently unstable (Machin 1990). A counter-perspective is that this period has been one of *consolidation*, propelled in the main by a (relatively) stable set of electoral institutions (Schlesinger and Schlesinger 1990). The two-ballot system (with single-member districts for the National Assembly) has produced an electoral dynamic whereby the first round equates to a primary on either left or right, and the second introduces competition between left and right. This model of the party system has been labeled the *quadrille bipolaire* (the bipolar quartet), and it has been fashionable to trace its roots in the recomposition of parties and party elites during the 1980s, the 1970s, the 1960s, or even beyond (e.g. Schlesinger and Schlesinger 1990).

Yet the consolidation argument faces some serious challenges, particularly when allied to the conceptual framework of the bipolar quartet. The 1980s saw the rise of the *Front National* (FN) as a major electoral competitor. Who could dismiss its showing in the presidential elections of 2002? By the same token, a host of new issue parties emerged in the 1990s, most notably the Greens. Haegel (2005) portrays the emergence of the FN and the new-issue based parties as spelling the demise of the bipolar quartet and ushering a period of intense party system fragmentation. The model of the bipolar quartet becomes even more difficult to sustain with the virtual extinction of the communist party (PCF) on the left and the fusion of the moderate right into the UMP.

These changes have some observers arguing that there has now been a recomposition of the party space in France into a bipolar system, minus

the quartet (Haegel 2007; Grunberg 2006). The emergence of this system has been less determined by ideological factors than by institutional ones (election rules and public financing) and organizational ones (intra-party competition). In this adapted model, the first round no longer functions as a 'primary' between moderate and far competitors on each side of the ideological spectrum, but as a 'coalitional moment' where viable governing coalitions are formed and presented to electors in the second round.

The elections of 2007 seemed to both confirm and challenge this interpretation. On the one hand, the presidential election was reduced in the second round to a clear choice between a candidate of the left (Royal) and one of the right (Sarkozy). The subsequent legislative elections threw up a clear governing majority of the same political stripe as the new president. On the other, the brief but spectacular showing of the centrist candidate François Bayrou seems to suggest that there is a large portion of the electorate that remains firmly moderate and centrist in its orientation.

How much Bayrou's popularity was a product of political ideology and how much can be ascribed to antipathy towards either Sarkozy or Royal is still being analysed. However, it does seem clear that his ultimate failure to persuade voters to make the choice to vote for him is reminiscent of the fate of third-party candidates such as Perot and Anderson in the United States. Popularity in opinion surveys is hard to sustain at the polls when the institutional logic of the system points to a bipolar outcome. Perhaps it is apt to suggest that the institutional logic of the Fifth Republic has finally tamed the indiscipline and factionalism of French political parties.

We must not confuse these developments with party strengthening per se. Sauger's analysis below (Chapter 5) makes it clear that this is not the case; however, the institutional logic of the constitution, allied to the transformation of executive-legislative relationship discussed in the preceding section, has furnished the platform for a certain rigor and constraint to party competition. It would be incorrect to suggest that parties in France have become much stronger over the course of the Fifth Republic; it might be more accurate to suggest that the atypically weak French party system (as compared to, say, Britain, Germany, or Sweden in the early 1960s) has given way to one that is capable of providing stable governmental majorities – and in the interim, the party systems in those aforementioned countries have perhaps loosened somewhat. France's party system no longer looks so atypical.

To this must be added one more element. If the two-ballot system pushes towards a bipolar outcome, how is it that smaller parties and movements continue to emerge, survive, and even thrive? One tendency is to seek the answer to this question in terms of political culture and the historical experience of smaller parties in an often hyper-fragmented party system. But a more compelling explanation lies in the transformation of the political/electoral space in France since the 1970s, most notably with regional and European elections. Both sets of elections are fought using proportional representation,

and both the regional assemblies and the European parliament are arenas where parties and movements can garner resources and participate in coalitions. The Greens and the FN have both proved adept at utilizing this new political space, and to a large extent their ability to maintain an electoral presence in national elections (especially legislative ones) is dependent on it. These elections allow them to contest for the popular vote in a comparatively unconstrained fashion and to demarcate themselves from other political movements without penalty.

At the inception of the Fifth Republic, the institution of the constitutional council was roundly criticized, especially on the left, as being weak, lacking in the power of judicial review, and overly tied to the prevailing executive power. Brouard's chapter on the Council in this volume (Chapter 6) shows to what extent exceptionalism in this arena too has given way to a set of practices comparable to other democratic societies. Indeed, his comparative analysis concludes that the only remaining vestiges of exceptionalism are to be found in the continued politicization of the Council; and here, as he writes, 'It is the pattern in which Council members are politicized which is specific, not the mere fact of the existence or indeed the level of politicization.' But if the Council is to be acknowledged as the veto-player in the political process that it has become, the careful analysis of its decision-making patterns adds value and power to our understanding of the way in which the regime functions in France today.

Switching directions a bit, if we are to examine the institutions of the Fifth Republic as articulated in its early years, nowhere do we find more self-consciously French ones than in the arena of foreign affairs and defense policy. De Gaulle's preoccupation with French grandeur and independence resulted in the arrogation of powers in these areas directly to the presidency. The historical legacies of the French revolution, its role as a colonial power (and post-decolonization relationships with the francophone world), its position as a permanent member of the United Nations security council, its status as a nuclear power, and its founding membership of the European Union combined to make foreign policy a self-reflexive practice in this France. While it might be an exaggeration to state that every act of foreign policy is a willful assertion of French national identity (as opposed to interest), there is no doubt that national identity enters into the foreign policy discourse more than in a country like Great Britain. The tension between interest and identity has produced a series of dualisms; independence versus cooperation in international institutions and regimes, sovereignty versus co-decision making through multilateral institutions, leadership versus domestic conflicts over policy orientations, etc.

The analysis of defense policy by Irondele (Chapter 7) provides a neat framework within which to understand both these dualisms and the evolution of the approach to defense policy under the Fifth Republic. His analysis is categorical in stating that there was indeed a specific, Gaullist approach

to this domain, and that it has left lasting traces in path-dependent fashion. That said, the chapter traces the conversion of this policy area from being in the 'reserved domain' of the presidency, to one that is firmly in control of the executive branch. This transformation is subtle, all the while allowing for a shift of power within the executive towards the presidency (see above). The importance of the argument is that it makes a compelling case to study defense establishment in France as an institution; and one that is firmly comparable to the defense apparatus in other European countries such as Britain and Germany. Irondelle charts a research agenda that is yielding fruitful information beyond the case-specific limitations of approaching it as merely the legacy of Gaullism. If we pose the question as, 'How much Gaullism is left in French defense policy?', we retain answers that have limited interest beyond the case. If we reframe it instead as, 'To what extent did Gaullism create path dependencies in French defense policy?', we have admitted both that the policy arena has substantially evolved since the departure of the General, and (even more importantly), that we can only fully address the question in a comparative framework.

It has been recently argued that the best way to view the evolution of foreign policy in Fifth Republic France is in three discrete stages (Balme 2007). The first period, from 1958–69, coincides with the presidency of Charles de Gaulle. Over the course of his tenure in office, there were several challenges that faced a modernizing France. First, what was to be the outcome of the demands of French colonies for independence? Second, in what guise could France maintain a nuclear deterrent under the conditions of the Cold War? And third, what role would France play in the new architecture of Europe? The outcome of these three processes is well-known and need not be recounted here; suffice to say that de Gaulle pinned the foreign policy identity of France on a course of mitigated independence: an independent (and expensive) nuclear deterrent, a qualified membership in NATO but with no military participation and coordination, and a leadership role – *primus inter pares* – in the European Union.

Grand though these ambitions were, all were inherently unsustainable in the long run. They have even been qualified as 'irrational' (Safran 2006). Over the course of the two decades following de Gaulle's departure from office, French foreign policy evolved to a more pragmatic engagement in Europe, a greater sympathy to the United States and the Atlantic alliance, and a more realistic view of Soviet ambition in Europe elsewhere. The commitment to *la francophonie* – predominantly France's former colonies – endured but some of de Gaulle's more grandiose ideas were quietly laid aside.

The third period of French foreign policy in the Fifth Republic emerged after the end of the Cold War. Three events converged to produce this shift; first, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the reunification of Germany; second, the first war with Iraq; and third, the culmination of the single-market process in Europe in 1993. The juxtaposition of these events served to end any notions

that France could continue to act as a big power on the world stage. Its role would be, at best, a 'small big power'. In particular, the war in Iraq served to expose many of the weaknesses of the French military; a lack of coordination with other NATO forces as a consequence of the long absence from NATO military institutions, poor equipment (since most of the defense budget had been consumed by the increasingly expensive *force de frappe*), and the personnel effects of a conscript force.

Given the abandonment of many of the cherished aims of de Gaulle during the periods following his presidency, what are the guiding rails of French foreign policy today? While there is disagreement on the degree to which traces of Gaullism are still to be found in it (see, for example, Keiger 2005 for a view counter to that expressed here), there is more agreement that a consistent replacement for Gaullism has yet to be found. With regards to Europe, France can no longer claim to be *primus inter pares*; both the evolution of the institutions of the EU (including joint foreign and defense policy mechanisms) and the expansion of its membership have inevitably diluted France's influence. Indeed, many have argued that a certain Euroskepticism has now crept into French foreign policy (Balme 2007). On the global stage, President Chirac attempted to sketch out a role for France as the leader of an alternative view of globalization, one that counters neoliberalism and economic globalization with an ideal of social responsibility, cultural respect, and human rights for all. There is little doubt that this idealized view runs counter to certain domestic economic policy practices (see above), and is far from reflected in actual policy outcomes. Perhaps the most apt summation of what French foreign policy is today is that it is defined mostly by what it is not (Keiger 2005).

1.3 Institutions and state–society relations

The French economic model is always prefaced by reference to *les trentes glorieuses*, the 30 years of sustained economic growth after World War II that transformed France from a semi-agricultural economy to a modern, industrialized country with large capitalist firms. During this period, the so-called *dirigisme* (direction) of the state was incontestable. Policy levers included the expansion of the nationalized sectors, constant intervention in the private sector, and an aggressive promotion of export markets. All of this was underpinned by the planning process, where the central planning agency (the CGP) served as a bridge between political and economic interests.

However, a fundamental turning point was reached in the early 1980s. Just as other European economies, that of France had been pressured by the 'oil shock' and the global economic downturn of the 1970s. In 1981 a Socialist government was elected, promising to reinforce and reinvigorate the *dirigiste* model (directly counter to what was taking place across the English Channel and across the Atlantic). Two years later, that same government was forced to

make a choice: maintain its ideological commitment to state dominance in economic policy-making and abandon its European commitments, or tighten its monetary policy and defend the franc at the price of retreating from an expensive industrial policy.

In opting for the latter the austerity governments of 1983–84 and 1984–86 ended up enacting a series of reforms that set off a wholesale transformation of the French political economy. Levy (2005) points out that this was neither a case of the withering away of the state in the realm of economic policy-making nor a subtle form of business as usual. Rather, it was a radical overhaul of the primary objectives of the government in this domain (essentially substituting a strong fiscal and money policy for industrial policy), coupled with a reassessment of the main mechanisms of government intervention in the marketplace. Central planning was suspended and then abandoned entirely; nationalized firms were mandated to pursue profitability over job protection; and the state abandoned its long-cherished ‘big projects’ model (which had given the world such technological marvels – but market failures – as the Concorde).

Through the 1990s successive governments undertook large-scale privatizations of some of the most cherished firms. This process had already been foreshadowed in the mid-1980s when the right-wing government began to sell significant chunks of public firms to private investors, a practice that was continued by the left during its period in power from 1988–93 (Schmidt 1996). But from 1993 to 97 the pace and depth of privatization was accelerated, especially since the sales raised cash to pay for continued public expenditures on social programs. Perhaps the most telling sign that French economic and industrial policy had been changed was the fact that the Jospin government (socialist) which came to power in 1997 continued apace with privatizations, with barely a whimper from the left. Clift’s contribution to this book (Chapter 9) summarizes these developments neatly, showing how the turn towards market liberalization proceeded apace through the last ten years or so. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to say that *dirigisme* is dead; it lingers on both as a rhetorical device that frames calls to government action, and also as an enabling mechanism for limited intervention in specific cases. Whatever the actual extent of *dirigisme* today, political economic constraints have consigned its use to a marginal place in the panoply of macro-economic instruments at the disposal of the government.

The corollary to this scaled move away from the *dirigiste* model was an unemployment rate that climbed to 12 percent by 1986 as firms turned towards profitability by shedding jobs, and a rapid increase in social spending. The move away from state intervention in economic and industrial policy was accompanied by panoply of new labor market policies designed to ease the pain of liberalization on French workers and to provide short- and long-term retraining and reinsertion. Levy (2005) aptly labels this the ‘social anesthesia state’; in essence, the individual-level effects of market

liberalization and privatization of national champions were mollified by a generous – and expensive – set of programs that have cushioned the vicissitudes of the market. However, the macro effect of these policies is debatable; those in large industrial companies who have lost their jobs through restructuring may have received a comparatively generous range of benefits, but ultimately it has kept unemployment high and placed a fiscal burden upon the state.

All of this was accompanied by the so-called *réfondation sociale* (social refoundation) which was launched by the peak employers' association, the MEDEF, in 2000. Upset by what employers considered to be overly interventionist tactics by the socialist government of the day, most notably in imposing the very popular – on the left, at least – 35-hour working week, the social refoundation was aimed at getting employers and moderate trade unions to renegotiate some of the core aspects of the comprehensive system of social protection for workers. The *réfondation* was not uniformly successful, but it did produce some important agreements (Levy 2005). The return of a solid right-wing majority in 2002 then ushered in a government pledged to addressing some of the lingering ills of the 'social anesthesia' state. The Raffarin government was avowedly committed to introducing labor market flexibility, particularly for the young, reducing the burden of individual taxation, redressing the balance of France's costly pension schemes, and diminishing the cost to the state of health-care coverage.

Despite all of this recent reform activity, the most pressing issue for the French government remains a high level of public spending. In recent years France has failed to meet the targets set by the so-called stability pact that governs membership in the Euro and the European Monetary System, risking censure by its European partners. After the Commission launched an action against the Raffarin government in 2003, the government announced that it would sell off more state-held assets; in 2005 it succeeded in reducing the deficit to 2.5 percent, a rate which it maintained in 2006 (the Commission withdrew the action after these results were announced). Public debt has been held to 64.9 percent in 2007, in an election year when it was forecast that it would rise to 66.6 percent.

The analysis of public budgeting presented by Baumgartner, François, and Foucault in this book (Chapter 10) demonstrates the degree to which the central state has lost its budgetary autonomy. Again, one of the principal themes of the book finds its echo; this transformation has taken place not as a result of constitutional change or the redesign of state institutions, but as a result of a combination of factors. Importantly, each of the factors that they identify is common to other European countries – the rise of multi-level governance (which is discussed by Le Galès and Pinson in Chapter 12), Europeanization, and the maturation of the welfare state. Together, these represent a form of entropy, which they define as 'the idea that power will be spread increasingly among a greater range of relatively autonomous actors'.

The autonomy of the state may have declined, but so too has its capacity to control public spending in a direct fashion.

State-held assets are not infinite, and the stop-gap actions described above have not necessarily attacked the root of the problem, which remains an overly-rigid labor market and an overly-generous set of social policies. But it would be incorrect to perpetuate the stereotype of the French labor market as sclerotic, and those social policies as static and unsustainable. Vail's study of social protection in this book (Chapter 11) concludes that there is actually significant dynamism in labor market and social policy in contemporary France. Both the socialist government of Lionel Jospin from 1997 to 2002 and the right-wing majorities that have succeeded it have aspired to liberalize the labor market and to introduce flexibilities that did not exist before. Concomitantly, successive governments have experimented with a set of social policies aimed at maintaining the safety net for those caught in precarious situations as a consequence of this new approach to the labor market. The stereotypes of French politics often emphasize the resistance to these policies, especially from some of the unions; however, Vail shows that what has often been overlooked is the degree to which these policies have been successful in transforming the conditions of employment in France today.

Perhaps the biggest institutional transformation over the life of the Fifth Republic has been the decentralization of political powers to the regions and other territorial entities. Since 1986 regional governments are directly elected by proportional representations, have a combination of executive and legislative powers, and are endowed with the authority to directly tax. However, decentralization in France was not simply one event or one set of reforms; rather, it is best understood as an ongoing process, in which new administrative procedures and policy initiatives are introduced every few years. Collectively, these reforms add up to a massive transformation of the French state, both in style of governance and substantively in terms of the pattern of government expenditures (Le Galès 2005).

Elgie (2003) points out that the normative foundations of the centralized French state – national unity and equality of citizenship – have been translated into a centralization that was often more myth than reality. Many observers have pointed over the years to the functional networks, honeycombs of influence, which literally made things work at the local level in the face of these unyielding norms. So possibly one of the greatest impacts of the decentralization process has been to change views about the role of the state in the daily lives of ordinary French people. The republic described as 'one and indivisible' in the first constitution written after the revolution is now subject to an addendum: 'the organization of the republic is decentralized'.

The decentralization reforms have also altered the political space, as noted above. New political actors have emerged; for example, mayors of large cities have become, in many cases, powerful local executives with a range of policy instruments at hand to effectuate meaningful and visible change. Regional

councils have undertaken initiatives in areas where it was not necessarily anticipated – transport policy, for example – and have been very successful. Often these kinds of initiatives have been undertaken in partnership with the European Union, allowing this new breed of local actor access to resources not forthcoming from the central state administration. All this has been accompanied by a transfer in public spending from the central state to local territorial entities, as Baumgartner, François, and Foucault persuasively document. Le Galès (2005) sums up the impact of decentralization in France by floating the notion that the country has moved from a centralized style of governance to a more regulatory one, where the state coordinates and regulates rather than imposes.

Pushing this further still, Le Galès and Pinson use their chapter in this book to show that the swollen expenditures of local government have caused a rethinking of the ‘virtuous’ role that was accorded to them in the golden era of decentralization. They suggest that this fact alone may be enough to precipitate a further transformation of center–periphery relations; it is possible that the regulatory relationship between central government and local authorities may be primarily conducted by means of macro-economic controls from the center. Such a solution would see a potential increase in the legal and normative powers of local authorities, but within a tighter set of fiscal and monetary constraints imposed from Paris. Neither federal nor centralized, the territorial organization of the French state is profoundly different today from 50 years ago. The political culture of territoriality persists, to be sure; but the dysfunctions and ad hoc remedies (the *système notabiliaire* principle among them) have given way to a complex mosaic of regulatory controls and local action that would be familiar to students of local government in any modern democratic polity.

The Siamese twin of localism in France has been that associational life that is at the core of civil society. As the country that produced Alexis de Tocqueville, and one of the first to formally recognize the freedom of association, it may be considered paradoxical that France has historically witnessed somewhat low levels of participation in civic associations. Perhaps this is in part due to the tendency of the French to resort to contention and conflict (Tilly 1986), and in part reflective of low levels of social trust. Perhaps also it is a symptom of the lack of clear demarcation between state and civil society, where the state has had the upper hand in determining and regulating relations between it and voluntary associations (Levy 1999). There is little doubt that traditional economic associations have experienced a recent crisis of representation and have struggled to act as interlocutors with the state (Berger 2006).

That said, the emergence of new social movements (NSMs) has challenged this stereotype. In comparative terms, new social movement activity in France has been rather vigorous and sustained. Equally so, French NSMs have been much more oriented towards sub-group or individual interests

than civic associations of the past, challenging the French republican ideal of equality (Appleton 2005; Duyvendak 1995). Much of the new issue agenda in France is colored by the experience of May 1968 and the generation that came of political age at that time. However, there is also much that has been shaped by the experience of other post-industrial societies in Europe and elsewhere.

The evolution of new social movements in Europe in the 1970s and early 1980s was largely driven by feminism, regionalism, ecology, and anti-nuclearism. For many reasons these issue agendas achieved less purchase in France than in countries like Britain, the Netherlands, and Germany. Furthermore, a primary limiting factor on NSM activity at this time was recomposition of the political left (Appleton 2000). This is not to suggest that these movements did not exist at all, but merely to point out that their influence on the political discourse and the policy agenda were rather limited (Tarrow 1994).

A critical turning point came with the emergence of the xenophobic FN in the mid-1980s. As it broke into the national spotlight following the municipal elections of 1983, a host of anti-racist groups emerged such as *SOS-Racisme*. In the late 1980s the focus on anti-racism gave way to a broader agenda that addressed the concerns of immigrants in all walks of society, and then further extended to address questions of poverty, unemployment and social precariousness. By the late 1990s this movement became known as the solidarity movement, encompassing a host of groups and organizations both engaging in advocacy and providing aid and assistance.

Concomitantly, there was a revitalization of the women's rights and environmental movements, both spurred by the decentralization reforms of the 1980s (see above) and the emergence of new political actors and spaces at the local levels. The women's rights movement broadened its agenda to call for a redefinition of democracy and citizenship (Baudino 2003), while the environmental movement achieved very public successes in halting large-scale projects through grassroots activism. Questions of food safety, such as the 'mad cow' scare in the United Kingdom or genetically modified foods, have provided causes around which local groups and activists can rally at the national level.

In this atmosphere ATTAC, one of the more influential new social movements in recent years, was born. This group, which brought together public intellectuals such as Alain Touraine and activists such as José Bové (most well known in the United States for leading the destruction of a McDonalds restaurant in southwest France),⁴ has been at the core of the anti-globalization movement that burst into the public consciousness in the WTO riots in Seattle in 1999. While not large in terms of membership (it currently claims about 30 000 members), the group has had a disproportionate effect on the political agenda; successive governments of both the left and right sent official delegations to the World Social Forum, and the European Social Forum in Paris in 2003 was addressed by then-Prime Minister Raffarin.

The fate of the anti-globalization movement in France is of keen interest. At the United Nations in his millennium address of 2000, then-President Chirac suggested that French universalism, as it has been interpreted and refined since the revolution, should stand for a skepticism towards neoliberal variants of globalization. Indeed, he suggested that France's role in the world should be to give aid and protection to poorer countries exposed to the adverse effects of global market competition. Yet the new president, Nicholas Sarkozy, has seemingly abandoned this official embrace of some of the softer anti-market rhetoric of the anti-globalization movement.

So Woll's contribution to this volume (Chapter 13) concludes that the evidence shows overwhelmingly that there is a resurgence of associational life in France. Under these conditions, it is clear that whatever neo-corporatism existed in the early years of the Fifth Republic, it is under extraordinary pressure today. State–society relations have evolved. The state is keen to underwrite and support this growth in associational activity, but from the perspective of fostering and bolstering social capital. Once more, it seems, political practice in the mature years of the Fifth Republic has come to parallel that in other European countries – maybe with a 'French flair', maybe with a typically Gallic nod to the republican tradition, but certainly far from the stifling model described by Michel Crozier almost 40 years ago. It is not unrestrained pluralism, but it is a new dynamic that transcends the old academic debate opposing pluralism with neo-corporatism, and which seems to have much more to do with building and consolidating social capital.

1.4 The republican model

It is customary to conclude that the French state still largely controls and regulates access from civil society. Woll's analysis even indicates that the state may have gained a measure of autonomy that it did not previously possess. However, the obverse is apparent in the chapter by Lépinard and Mazur (Chapter 14) on the search for gender equality. Their rich analysis may be read, in part, as a case study of the power and limits of new social movements in modern France. Neither the republican tradition nor the institutions of the Fifth Republic could be said to be favorable, by vocation, to a comprehensive set of policies aimed at promoting gender equality. Yet the force of the women's movement was to gain an institutional foothold within the French state itself, through the creation of a succession of institutions devoted to just that. The case shows that the state itself may be reformed through the concerted action of associational organizations.

That said, their chapter also shows the limits to the process. There is little doubt that the vestiges of the republican model continue to circumscribe the pursuit for gender equity. Furthermore, they also highlight the fact that much of the impetus comes not from within the state itself, but from the European level. By the same token, we can also observe another truth about the Fifth

Republic at its half-century; much of the policy agenda – not just in the area of gender policies – is determined through complex external constraints. And if the commitment to implementing comprehensive gender equality policies falters at the European level, that might imperil the incremental advances that have been made in this domain. Objectively, the cause of gender equality still faces many obstacles; yet the activism of the women's movement and the concerted action of 'femocrats' both within the French state and at the European level have confronted many of the sacred tenets of the French republican tradition.

The other sustained challenge to the French republican model in recent years has come through immigration. The ideological core of French republicanism, dating back to the first days of the revolution, has been a commitment to equality of citizenship at all costs. As Duchesne (2005, p. 230) put it, 'The Republican political community is basically conceived as a neutral sphere, where all citizens are considered equal, regardless of any difference such as gender, religious affiliation, ethnic and/or geographic origins, cultural preferences'. In the abstract, this is a universal conception of citizenship which inextricably binds the citizen and the state through the nation. In practice, national identity and the precise meaning of the model have been the source of deep, bitter, and enduring conflicts in French history.⁵

If we leave aside the past and look at the way in which the French state is attempting to negotiate cultural policy today, we see enormous challenges that have been posed in recent years. The changing role of women in society, the transformed character of immigration, the increasing presence of non Judeo-Christian cultures, European integration, and the larger process of globalization have all taxed the ability to maintain even an idealized fiction of republican equality. It is not possible to give an exhaustive treatment of the heated debates over immigration and citizenship laws; however, it is important to note that these have been thrust to the forefront of the political agenda both by the social fact of immigration itself and by the political fact of a xenophobic, extreme right-wing party committed to reversing immigration, that had become an entrenched force by the late 1980s.

Across all these areas there is an uneasy tension between policies that have been enacted which seem to affirm the traditional model and others that seem to reflect an alternative vision of a positive anti-discrimination approach. The anti-veil law of September 2004 reflects the former approach. Following attempts by girls to wear Islamic veils in schools, the government passed a law (with little organized opposition) banning overt religious symbols in public schools. The latter approach is concretized in the so-called parity reforms of 2000, which instigated quotas for women seeking public office through political parties and elections. While the laws did not go as far as the government had hoped, the most significant outcome was a change to the constitution which repudiated the famous article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789.

Thus it seems inevitable that policies aimed at maintaining a fictional version of French national identity are changing, whether through voluntarism or necessity. As much as anything else, one of the undeniable facts of the modern French state (as anywhere else in the advanced industrial world) is the nexus between immigration, marginalization, and poverty. It is perhaps as much a consequence of this reality, rather than because of any more lofty principles, that the French state is being forced to acknowledge what in the United States would be called the 'politics of difference'. There has been an increasing public discourse about one of the taboo subjects of immigration – racial discrimination – and there have been a number of policy proposals to address it. A ground-breaking survey in 2006 showed that over 50 percent of blacks in France said that they had been victims of harassment and discrimination.⁶ In this context, it is almost inevitable that the adherence to a strict version of republicanism will be increasingly impossible.

Chebel d'Appolonia concludes, in the final chapter of this book, that the republican model is in an untenable position. Confidence in the model has waned, as it has manifestly failed to produce policies that will increase social cohesion and reduce marginalization based on race and ethnicity. Yet at the same time public officials use the language of race and ethnicity to describe policy approaches, the state does not even possess the data necessary to map the scale of the problem, let alone design adaptive solutions. French society suffers racism, racial tension, targeted poverty, and institutional barriers to people of color. It is, then, rather like most European, North American, and antipodal societies. In this, instead, the dogged adherence to the republican model retards the development of different policy solutions. How effective those solutions would prove to be anyway is cast into doubt by the observation above, namely that the problems surrounding race and immigration at a societal level seem to transcend political cultural barriers. It is hard to find successful examples of integration in Europe as a whole, and in this France may not be alone.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has staked out a clear line of argument. We do not intend to mitigate the conclusions that may be drawn from the original research presented in this volume, nor do we believe that there is much ambiguity about the demise of exceptionalism over the life-span of the Fifth Republic. Each of our team, either explicitly or implicitly, presents compelling evidence that the 'unexceptionalism' of France today places the analyst at a comparative advantage. Whether we use the language of path dependency, of 'new' or 'historical' institutionalism, of international political economy, of comparative public policy analysis, or any other of the approaches that are used in this book, it is clear that France is a case not unlike any other. As we argued above, we believe that the experience of the Fifth Republic is much better

understood in terms of democratic consolidation; read in that vein, each of the chapters build the portrait of a regime and a society that may just be wedded to the epoch in which we all live.

Notes

1. For those readers who may not know what the term refers to, this serves as a perfect illustration of the tendency to analyse French politics and traditions *sui generis*! Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–83) is considered to be one of the three great architects of the centralized French state, and had a particular interest in the role of the state in fostering commerce and economic growth.
2. Again, for non-specialists of French politics, the reference is to a pamphlet authored by François Mitterrand in 1964, in which he denounced the Constitution of the Fifth Republic.
3. De Gaulle actually said, 'If there were to be a massive and direct demand from the citizens to get me to stay in power, then the future of the new Republic would surely be assured. If not, no-one can doubt that it will crumble straight away, and France will undergo an even more disastrous confusion within the state – this time, with no possible recourse' (translated from Giesbert 1977, p.217).
4. In the United States, the episode in question was portrayed as the sacking and destruction of the restaurant. French people are quick to point out that the restaurant was not destroyed but dismantled and the materials recycled as part of the political statement. Whatever the interpretation, the French continue to be among the highest consumers of hamburgers in Europe.
5. No wonder that in a poll taken in 1987 the top three elements of French national identity identified by respondents were its cuisine (63 percent), commitment to human rights (62 percent), and ideal of 'the French woman' (42 percent) (cited in Safran, 2003).
6. One of the problems in France is that official statistics and surveys of sub-populations are hard to come by. Inspired by the republican principles discussed above, survey takers are prohibited from asking any questions that would identify the race or ethnicity of the respondent. The official census (and all statistics gathered by the Institut National de la Statistique et Etudes Economiques (INSEE)) conform to this stricture.

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What is the decision making process of the EC? The European Council decides by consensus. Council of Ministers. It settles disputes between EU governments and EU institutions. Individuals, companies or organizations can also bring cases before the Court if they feel their rights have been infringed by an EU institution. Co-decision procedure. 1993/Maastricht. Covers most policy areas in the EU: 1. EU commission drafts a proposal 2. Sent to European Parliament (MV) + Council of Ministers (QMV) 3. Amendments-> Back to Commission -> New Version 4. Acceptance or conciliation committee (EP/CM) 5. If no agreement between EP/CM= The directive does not pass.

Decision-making permeates all management and covers every part of an enterprise. In fact, whatever a manager does, he does through decision-making only; the end products of a manager's work are decisions and actions. Decision-making is the substance of a manager's job. Strategic decision-making is a top management responsibility. These are key, important and most vital decisions affecting many parts of an organisation. They require sizeable allocation of resources. They are future-oriented with long-term ramifications. The third part discusses theoretical approaches dealing with decision making in international organisations. The nature of the fourth section is empirical again, as it summarises what we actually know about decision making in international conferences and organisations, based on articles in the journal International Organization between 1970 and 2000. Section one: empirical trends in international conferences and organisations. International organisations have been dynamic institutions, which means that they evolve to meet changing needs and circumstances, and, as time goes by, becoming further and further removed from its treaty base (Bowett 1982, 338).