

# SGI

Sustainable  
Governance  
Indicators

## 2015 France Report

Yves Mény, Henrik Uterwedde,  
Reimut Zohlhöfer (Coordinator)



## Executive Summary

Although France enjoys solid institutions of governance that represent the most stable, consensual and efficient period over 200 years of dubious constitutional experiments, the country struggles to effectively address the challenges associated with Europeanization and globalization. The country's institutions provide a balance between stability and adaptation capacity, leadership and pluralism, and power centralization and delegation. Incremental changes have helped to improve weaker points, such as the role of the Constitutional Council (Conseil Constitutionnel), the overall protection of rights and liberties and issues associated with the centralization of power. The system of the Fifth Republic instituted by Charles De Gaulle in 1958 was designed to consolidate strong leadership. It still works well in this regard, but is showing signs of wear and tear. The strength of the executive is to some extent artificial and relies on institutional tools providing it considerable control of parliament. Also, the strong majorities generated by the electoral system hide the fact that the electorate, and society, are often deeply divided. Majority rule and the climate of confrontation (be it ideological or interest-based), which prevail both in politics and in social relations, do not foster a climate conducive to negotiations and the elaboration of compromises. Both negotiations and compromises are needed if France is to develop sound solutions to present and future challenges and if the government is to legitimate difficult measures and reforms. Furthermore, the Hollande presidency is marked by a strong contrast between the strength of the institution of the office of president and the political weakness exhibited by this president. Contrary to what happens in parliamentary regimes, there is no foreseen solution to such a contradiction. All these factors are significant in explaining why France has not been able to meet current challenges. There are serious doubts about the country's capacity for systemic reforms.

It was within this context that President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2012) came into office, promising “an intensive cure of modernization.” Yet his government's reform agenda, despite introducing some real change (including a reduction in public service employment, a reform of universities and pensions, and measures to stimulate innovation and small and medium-sized businesses) proved disappointing in the end, as it was tainted with protective measures to coddle the status quo. President Hollande, in power since May 2012, initially attempted to reverse Sarkozy's reforms, but further economic

collapse soon commanded a (yet unavoidable) U-turn, with supply-side reforms and more budgetary discipline. Some measures, including labor market reforms and business tax cuts, have been passed but in such a messy and confusing way that the small potential benefits have been lost in an ocean of skepticism. Other changes such as social security and pension reforms, revised family allowances and local government modernization reforms, which involve spending cuts and the removal of redundancies in administrative structures are still to be adopted or put in practice. This new policy, despite its half-measures and unachieved projects, is going in the right direction. However, like his predecessors, President Hollande has not openly embraced the necessary reforms, preferring to maintain the illusion of a state capable of controlling the markets and steering the economy. Indeed, in the last decade there has been a persistent gap between real (if limited) change and immobile concepts, between liberal reforms and traditional “Statist,” interventionist discourse. European integration and globalization often were used as scapegoat concepts to explain changes in French society. The result is that these developments are regularly accused of destroying the basis of society and the hallowed “French way of life.” This makes it difficult for the government to gather political support for its measures. As a result, Hollande has faced strong opposition, in particular from the unions, vested interests and part of his political coalition. This opposition has considerably hindered, and often blocked, government action. However, the main obstacle to any reform has been the indecision, confusion and lack of clarity demonstrated by the president and his office. Another mistake was the decision to raise taxes in 2012 and 2013 instead of introducing savings and structural reforms.

France’s recurrent difficulties also derive from its political and economic culture. Culturally, there is a fundamental distrust in markets and a widely held belief that state action is an efficient means to guide the economy and solve problems. Furthermore, the economy itself is not seen as a driving force but as an ancillary tool, a variable that has to submit itself to the will of political power. This overarching set of values and beliefs explains many aspects of economic and social policymaking in France. The sense that political will (endowed with democratic legitimacy) primes all other considerations, or in other words, that the budget is a servant of politics – is difficult to accommodate with the rules of the European stability and growth pact. As for globalization, the French attitude is distinguished by a particularly high distrust, if not open opposition to this development.

These attitudes are fostered by government itself, as government officials often concede to protest groups they had previously refused in parliament. It also implies that citizens expect, more or less, everything from the state; and ruling elites from both the right and the left of the political spectrum have

continuously fed these expectations by putting in place policies beyond the budget's capacity to fund them (1974 was the last year France had a balanced budget). The illusion that a "different economic policy" can escape the constraints of markets and competitiveness is still very much alive and is fed both by parts of the left and by the extreme right (Front National). The present situation is extremely unstable and tense: public opinion is strained, and the government has neither much political support nor room to manoeuvre. Economically and politically, the country faces a fragile and risky state of affairs.

## Key Challenges

France for the past 30 years has been under constant pressure to adapt. This pressure is a consequence of the new rules and constraints that European integration as well as globalization entail and of the need to improve market competitiveness. Successive governments have often responded reluctantly and defensively to these developments, but progress has been made in terms of decentralization, decreasing state interventionism, the privatization of state-owned companies and opening the country to foreign markets. European integration rules and measures (often initiated by French governments) and government policies have been the main catalysts of this transformation.

These often controversial changes have not been fully realized, however. A strong opposition to change has damaged the capacity to further an offensive, effective adaptation of the French economic model. Over the past 10 years the situation has deteriorated, burdening France with fundamental problems that require reform. France is not competitive; it lacks social cohesion; the state is becoming increasingly antiquated and social dialogue increasingly deaf; the economy is deteriorating; and public deficits and public debt are high. Moreover, citizens' trust in the political class has plummeted dramatically, a result both of President Sarkozy's hasty, top-down and zigzag method of reform and of President Hollande's early illusions about the state of the nation, followed by messy and badly understood measures which have disillusioned many voters. Whatever opinion one can have about actual policy choices, it is striking how little pedagogy has been used. Attempting to reform "by stealth" is not only a EU practice.

Yet, what should France do?

First, the (limited) reform efforts begun under Sarkozy and Hollande should be systematically and consequently continued. France needs policies that

strengthen competitiveness and enhance its potential for further growth; as a consequence, it should change its growth model which until very recently has depended on domestic demand fed mostly by public deficit spending.

Second, clear priority should be given to structural reforms over an immediate return to budget stability. If both are important, the current economic depression is a poor environment for immediate budget stabilization which would be pro-cyclical and trigger even more economic stagnation. As for structural reforms, they would enhance competitiveness and growth potential which, in turn, would have positive effects on the structural budgetary situation by decreasing public expenditures. This could be in line with new delays accorded by the European Union to France for reducing public deficits. But given that former delays granted have not been used to foster reforms, a credible commitment of the French government and a realistic reform program will be necessary.

Third, reform choices should be made more explicit. The realization of reforms requires a mix of political determination, good communication as to why changes need to be made, and effective social consultation with interest groups. While overcoming the lack of real social dialogue and the weakness of intermediate actors (associations, social partners and organized interest groups), several changes introduced in 2007 should continue to be pursued. The method chosen by President Hollande to reform the labor market (a commitment to reform; a social negotiation timeline; agreement with most labor and business organizations; transformation of pact into law) has been a first promising step in this direction but has yet to produce the expected results.

France needs more courageous policies that include clear (if unpopular) choices, a language of truth to explain the challenges, more social dialogue and a less messy and uncoordinated style of government. This will be all but easy for the Holland administration, which has lost the trust placed in it by economic actors, and which faces widespread unpopularity in the electorate and the growth of radical, anti-European movements. What was perceived as challenging in 2013 becomes a titanic task as political and economic resources are unavailable or decreasing. Unfortunately in that context, anything, including the worst, becomes possible.

A major concern beyond these reform challenges is integration. The traditional French model, based on an open policy toward immigrants acquiring French nationality and on the principle of equality of all citizens, regardless of ethnic origins or religion, has lost its integrative power in the last 30 years. The former key instruments of the integration process (education, work, Church,

parties or trade unions) no longer work. The problem is complex: the high concentration of immigrants in the suburban zones leaves young people without much in the way of future prospects; the cultural awareness of young French citizens with a north African background, feeling rejected by society and faced with racism and discrimination, have created explosive situations in these areas. Conflicts have proliferated, such as suburban petty criminality and riots, so-called headscarf conflicts or violence between different (e.g., Muslim and Jewish) communities.

This challenge needs answers involving multiple policies, in fields such as urban development, education, job training and employment. It should emphasize so-called soft policies such as education, social integration, “sociabilité,” all of which require time and human resources beyond the financial involvement of public authorities. What is at stake is a political and social cohesion that derives from common national values and rules.

# Policy Performance

## I. Economic Policies

### Economy

Economic Policy  
Score: 4

France faces a bleak economic outlook. Structural problems, such as a rigid labor market, high unemployment, growing public debt, insufficient funding of social security systems, an unfriendly entrepreneurial environment and a lack of competitiveness, are ingrained and acute. These are factors that limit the growth potential considerably. The French growth model has been based on domestic demand, fuelled by state subsidies, budget deficits and public debt. All these problems however are well-known and have been assessed in multiple reports over the years. The call is unanimous for supply-side reforms to increase the growth potential of the French economy.

The Sarkozy government (2007 – 2012), despite reforms and the president's activism, did not really meet the challenge. The Hollande government (since May 2012) initially did not correctly assess the seriousness of the situation and was thus ill-prepared to address the problems both in terms of strategy and sectoral measures. Faced with a rapidly deteriorating situation, President Hollande has announced measures which, in sum, represent a reform agenda, but which have not been presented as such. Moreover, no major reform has yet been adopted except for savings in the budget and reductions of taxes and levies on companies in order to restore their competitiveness somewhat. None of the announced targets has been met: growth is flat, the budget deficit is still well above the requested 3% of GDP, public debt is growing and is more than 2000 billion euros (97% of GDP), while unemployment is above 10%.

Hopes of economic growth that would, in turn, allow the Hollande government to make changes more acceptable to a reluctant public did not materialize. Instead, the government must grapple with poor growth, which makes the adoption of reforms and budget consolidation politically more difficult. At the same time, the lack of reforms further limits France's growth potential. Thus,

the Hollande government, like its predecessors, has turned to “stealth reforms” in an attempt to appease its electoral and party base. But the reforms adopted thus far are not commensurate with the enormous problems the country is facing.

### Labor Markets

Labor Market  
Policy  
Score: 4

Despite high overall spending and a large number of reform measures, labor market policy has shown poor results during the review period. Particular problems are centered in notoriously high youth unemployment figures; similarly, the employment rate of workers over 55 years is one of the lowest in the OECD (45.6% in 2013 compared to OECD levels of 54.9% and an EU target of 50%); and (especially young) French citizens with immigrant backgrounds face tremendous difficulties integrating into the labor market.

The reasons for such failure are numerous and complex. The high level of youth unemployment is linked to the French job-training system, which relies heavily on public schools; yet diplomas from such training are not really accepted in the industry at large, which hinders a potential worker’s transition from school to a job. As for senior workers, a retirement age of 60 and various early retirement schemes have led to the present situation. Heavy labor market regulation is another issue, as well as the high cost of labor. There is a dual labor market: on the one side, a highly regulated and protected sector (part of which are the five million public employment positions, one of the highest figures in Europe), on the other, a sector characterized by precarity, limited job protection and insecurity. The rigidity of the former sector has triggered the development of the latter, hindering access to regular jobs for newcomers and compelling workers to jump one from contract to the next, each of which are of limited duration or represent interim employment.

The Sarkozy government tried to pursue a more “active” policy toward recipients of unemployment benefits, by creating a unified labor service agency and by launching a special social benefit which offers complementary benefits to the unemployed who return to (often badly paid) work. The Hollande administration has been successful in realizing some controversial labor market reforms, based on an agreement between social partners that was concluded in January 2013 and transformed in a binding law applicable to all. It is supposed to introduce more flexibility in the job market in exchange for better health services and training for workers made redundant. The effects of this agreement still have to materialize, and the number of stable contracts (contrats à durée indéterminée) has dramatically declined.

## Taxes

Tax Policy  
Score: 4

Taxes and social contributions amount to 48% of GDP, one of the highest levels in the OECD. This is the consequence of extraordinarily generous political and budgetary commitments, which have led to continuously rising taxes. Nonetheless, tax revenues do not cover costs, as public spending is high (57% of GDP in 2012).

A narrow income-tax base and a wide range of fiscal exemptions have resulted in an opaque, confusing and inequitable tax system. The constant search for additional revenue has further complicated an already cumbersome system. A small number of people actually pay income tax (13 million) and 90% of the total tax is paid by 10% of the taxpayers. To alleviate the burden on this taxpaying minority, many “outs” have been created with the additional purpose of directing exemptions toward targeted sectors (housing, small companies, overseas territories). But this of course has just further complicated an already complicated tax system.

Corporate tax and other levies are too high in international comparison, a clear handicap for the competitiveness of French companies.

The entire tax system requires an overhaul, but the political cost would be such that most governments have preferred instead a policy of constant and somewhat incoherent minor adjustments, rather than thoughtful, long-ranging reform. This has been true for the Sarkozy administration (2007–2012) as well as for the Hollande administration. The Socialist government increased value-added tax, eliminated loopholes, increased income taxes, introduced additional levies on companies’ profits and adopted a “super tax” on the wealthiest individuals (75% marginal tax rate on over €1 million). Although the Constitutional Council stopped the plans for this latter project, the tax increases triggered a tax-flight among the wealthiest, a diffuse tax revolt among companies and the middle class and fostered disillusionment among those with lower incomes who, for the first time, had to pay income tax. Paradoxically but not unsurprisingly, state revenues in 2013 were much lower than expected (€14.6 billion less than budgeted) as a result of the economic crisis, lack of growth, tax evasion and a growing black market.

The rather dramatic situation faced by French companies forced the government to adopt a plan for rescuing them by lowering taxes and levies. The rather cumbersome and complex system put in place might create some breathing space for companies but does not guarantee increases in investment, innovation or competitiveness. It is paradoxical, for instance, that the company which has benefited most from this is the post-office public company, not the

best example of companies confronted with international competition. The 2015 budget plans to exempt from income tax nearly 1.8 million taxpayers after having added 1.3 million taxpayers to the taxroll in 2014.

In sum, the Socialist-led government's policies reflect the pursuit of short-term political, or clientelistic, aims.

### Budgets

Budgetary Policy  
Score: 3

France's budgetary situation is unsustainable. The Hollande government's major mistake when coming to power in 2012 was to increase taxes on all fronts rather than to cut spending, which was, in fact, increased. The outcome has been rather catastrophic: Revenues were much lower than expected due to the economic crisis, lack of growth, tax evasion and increasing black market, while at the same time the collective morale of the French individuals and companies plummeted. Overall, the government adopted very few cutbacks. The 2015 budget foresees expenditure cuts but fails to respect the 3% deficit limit set up by European rules. And while the structural deficit was reduced in 2012, 2013 and 2014, the government has abandoned the objective to balance the structural budget postponing this target to 2017. There is very little chance in that context that the objectives set up by the European treaties will be met at the end of Hollande's term in 2017, as his government's rather chaotic stop-and-go fiscal policies have undermined his legitimacy as well as that of the government, making any major reform an impossibility. A recent example of such a failure has been the government's announcement (8 October 2014) that it was renouncing plans to implement the so-called eco-tax when faced with the protest of truckdriver companies.

### Research and Innovation

R&I Policy  
Score: 7

In research and development policy France performs well. According to the EU Innovation Policy Report, France is ranked eleventh (of 27 EU countries) with respect to innovation capacity; in the report's global innovation index, France performs above the EU average but is ranked in the group of "innovation followers," behind the group of "innovation leaders." Overall spending on research and development represents 2.3% of GDP, below the OECD average and far from the EU target of 3%. Whereas public spending on research efforts in France is comparable to the best-performing countries, private spending is low but growing thanks to the fiscal incentives put in place by the Sarkozy government and maintained by the Hollande administration. France's main weaknesses are its relatively low private resource mobilization for research and development efforts, a less than innovative corporate environment, especially with small- and medium-sized businesses, and weak

cooperation between the private and public sectors.

The government has recently taken several measures to facilitate and promote innovation. Fiscal rebates for companies and citizens have been introduced; a public bank (Banque Publique d'Investissement) has been created to finance innovative small and medium firms; major projects have been financed; private funds have been mobilized through the creation of foundations; a €30 billion public loan was offered to support “innovative” ventures; the creation of start-up companies has been facilitated through various legal and tax incentives and capital risk channeled toward these innovative sectors; regional clusters have been supported by local and state authorities and cooperation between universities and companies has been encouraged. Infrastructure investment has also been made.

However, there are still no tangible results from all these efforts. Some barriers to innovation still exist. Cooperation between academic institutions and businesses is still restricted by cultural traditions, such as a lack of investment by small- and medium-sized companies and the reluctance of researchers to invest in policy-relevant or applied research. Productivity and the status of public research in international rankings could also be improved. Other issues include the growth of start-up companies that are unable to raise proper funds and are then forced to sell assets to bigger companies. In general, the mediocre profitability of French companies is an obstacle toward more research and development spending. Existing fiscal and regulatory rules with “threshold effects” (sharply rising charges when the number of employees reaches the threshold) create barriers to the growth of small firms. Uncertainty over legal and fiscal rules is also a major problem, as shown by the company revolt in the wake of the proposal of the Socialist-led government under President Hollande to raise taxes on profits resulting from the sale of young companies.

### Global Financial System

The Hollande government, like its predecessor, has been active internationally and at the EU level in supporting better international banking regulations. Both administrations have been strongly supportive of all initiatives contributing to the re-capitalization of banks, to the better control of speculative funds and to the fight against fiscal evasion and tax havens. They also have been active, together with 10 other EU member governments, in proposing to impose a levy on financial transactions (the so-called Tobin tax). Both have also pushed for the creation of a banking supervision mechanism at the EU level.

## II. Social Policies

### Education

Education Policy  
Score: 6

The French education system can in many aspects be characterized as successful. France is rated rather well in the Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa) study, even though the country was downgraded, dropping from tenth of 27 in 2000 to seventeenth of 33 in 2009. Nonetheless, French results remained close to the OECD average throughout the period. Overall education spending totaled €132.1 billion in 2009, or 6.9% of GDP. Spending at the pre-school level is exemplary, with nearly all children three years old and older attending pre-school (écoles maternelles) and France is still above the OECD average at the primary schooling level. Secondary education is usually rather good but too costly and, in recent years, has fallen behind other OECD countries. Higher education is dual, with a broad range of excellent elite institutions (prestigious lycées and grandes écoles) and a large mass university system, which is poorly funded and poorly managed, and does not prepare its students well for a successful entry to the labor market. Spending on universities lies below the OECD average. More importantly, drop-out rates are dramatic: only 40% of registered students obtain a university degree.

One major problem concerns professional training. The education to professional training transition has been deficient. Organized by state schools, the system has lacked alternate training in cooperation with businesses, and diplomas are often not accepted by companies. This is one of the reasons for high youth unemployment in France. However, recently new joint training programs in cooperation with businesses have been established and have proven successful. As for universities, they are in principle accessible to all as fees are practically non-existent. However, the high rate of failure and the massification of teaching have contributed to the decline of the traditional university system. Nearly 40% of students choose, after high school, to register in alternative public or private institutions (grandes écoles, technical institutes, business schools). Social inequality in access to education and qualifications is another sensitive problem. There are persisting inequalities that effectively penalize students of working-class families at the university level, and flagrantly in accessing the elite schools (grandes écoles). Social, ethnic and territorial inequalities are often linked (as a result of a massive concentration of poor immigrant families in suburban zones).

University reform has been a permanent topic on the political agenda; some changes have been introduced (managerial autonomy and more financial resources for universities) but France is only at the beginnings of a profound modernization push of its tertiary education system. Unfortunately, the fears of student protests have impeded any overhaul of a system that is in great need of change and adaptation.

### Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion  
Policy  
Score: 7

By international and European standards, the French welfare state is generous and covers all possible dimensions affecting collective and individual welfare, not only of citizens but also of foreign residents, and keeps poverty at a comparatively low level. Therefore, social inclusion in terms related to minimum income, health protection, support to the poor and families is satisfactory and has permitted that, up to now, the impact of the economic crisis has been less felt in France than in many comparable countries. The challenge for France at a time of economic decline and unemployment is, first, to provide sufficient funding for the costly system without undermining competitiveness with too-high levels of social contributions (which demands an overhaul of the tax and contribution system as a whole); second, to recalibrate the balance of solidarity and individual responsibility by introducing more incentives for the jobless to search for employment.

If social inclusion (the feeling of being fully part of the community) and equal opportunities form part of the welfare state, its performance is less convincing: Some groups or territorial units are discriminated and marginalized. The so-called second-generation immigrants, especially those living in the suburbs, as well as less vocal groups in declining rural regions have the feeling of being abandoned to their fate as their situation combines poor education and training, unemployment and poverty. Gender equality and in particular the right to equal pay is still an issue despite progress in recent years.

### Health

Health Policy  
Score: 7

France has a high-quality health system, which is generous and largely inclusive. Since its inception, it has remained a public system based on a compulsory, uniform insurance for all French citizens, with employers' and employees' contributions calculated according to wage levels. Together with widespread complementary insurances, they cover most individual costs. About 10% of GDP is spent on health care, one of the highest ratios in Europe. The health system includes all residents, and actually offers services for illegal immigrants and foreigners.

The problem is cost efficiency and the containment of deficits, which have been constant in recent years. Since 1996, parliament has voted on an annual expenditure target for the whole system but, in practice, this target has been regularly exceeded (it faced a deficit of €12 billion in 2014). The government has found it difficult to impose targets for the evolution of expenditures, pharmaceutical prices, medical treatment, physician remuneration and wages (for hospital employees). Savings have improved recently, but the high level of medication consumption is an issue still to be tackled with more decisive measures.

### Families

Family Policy  
Score: 10

There is a long and consensual tradition of support for families, going back to the 1930s. The policy mix which has developed since then has been successful in providing child care, financial support, parental leave and generous fiscal policies (income is not taxed individually but in each family unit, dividing up the total income by the number of people in a family). In addition, families using the child care support at home benefit from rebates on the social costs involved. These policies have been effective. Not only is the birth rate in France one of the highest in Europe, but also the percentage of women integrated in the labor market compares favorably to the European leaders (Scandinavian countries) in this domain. However, faced with the need to reduce the budget deficit, the Hollande government has lowered some financial benefits granted to families because these benefits were perceived as advantageous to “wealthy” families (these include the deductibility of charges related to the care of children or the capping of tax benefits which were obviously reserved to families paying income tax). The government has retired plans to break with the “principle of universality” of the French welfare state (i.e., social benefits for all, related to the number of children per family, but without any distinction of wealth or revenues) because this has been identified as a hot-button issue in the present political context.

### Pensions

Pension Policy  
Score: 5

The French pension system is relatively generous, and largely prevents poverty of the elderly. But it is also complex, which is a problem for equity: First, the so-called general regime applies to all private employees and is complemented by additional voluntary systems, in particular in large companies. Second, some professions are affiliated to “special regimes” which are characterized by shorter periods of contribution and higher generosity in pension payments. These systems usually cover employees working in public companies or groups highly subsidized by the public budget (coal mines, public transport, sailors and fishermen, for example). Finally, public servants

usually benefit from higher payments as their pension payments are based on a final salary, and not on an average. Early retirement is a common practice, and despite of the raising of the retirement age to 62 years, the average age of entry into pension is 58.

In order to meet the (mainly) demographic challenges and to assure the sustainability of the pension system, French governments have tried to introduce reforms on several fronts over the last 10 years, usually against fierce opposition: an increase in pension contributions; an increase in the number of years of contribution, to 43 years; and in 2008, a reduction of peculiarities or privileges granted to “special regimes.” These reforms are bound to create social problems for the younger generations, who are penalized by their late entry in the labor market, their unstable job careers and the necessity to contribute for a longer period of time. At the same time, deficits in the system continue. The Socialist Party (PS), which had opposed limited reforms under the Sarkozy administration, are now forced to face drastic changes to improve the sustainability of the pension system. It is important to note that France’s pension system is entirely publically run, and there are practically no pension funds except for a few limited exceptions. Furthermore, the Socialists who had fought fiercely against the rise of the pension age had to find an excuse for swallowing it when coming to power. They have introduced the concept of “penibility”, a very complex and bureaucratic mechanism allowing workers to go to pension at 60 if they fill the criteria and measures set up for every industrial or service sector. The consequence of this new mechanism is twofold in addition to its costs: it introduces further uncertainty about the actual pension age and puts in place a highly complex and cumbersome system of measurement of penibility.

### Integration

Integration Policy  
Score: 6

Traditionally, France has an open policy toward immigrants who seek to become French citizens. Every person born in France is considered French, or eligible to obtain French citizenship. Integration policies, in terms of long-term residence permits, access to citizenship and family reunification are open and generous. Presently, the largest share of new legal immigrants is related to the reunification of families. It explains partially the difficulty of integrating new immigrants who often have no skills, no education and do not speak French. Processes of integration have to start from scratch. The characteristics of immigrants moving to France are another problem: most are unskilled and as such, subject to vagaries of the economic crisis, for instance in the construction sector.

The integration of the so-called second (in fact, often the third) generation of

immigrants, especially coming from Maghreb countries, is difficult for many reasons: education system failures; community concentration in urban/suburban ghettos; high unemployment; cultural identity issues, and so on. Add to this the challenges of illegal immigrants, many of whom moved to France more than 10 or 15 years ago yet have no regular job and thus do not contribute to the pension system. Although they have access to health care and their children can attend schools, the situation is often dramatic and inextricable as for many, it is impossible to fulfil the requirements for a residence permit. Immigrants must demonstrate that they have the required documents, such as tax records, employment contracts and housing contracts, while at the same time they are essentially forced into the labor and housing black market. Potential employers and landlords will not document that they employ or house illegal aliens, as this is a crime. Under such conditions, integration is difficult, if not impossible. Immigration from Eastern Europe and the southern Balkans, the “migration of the poor,” is also a sensitive subject.

### Safe Living

Safe Living  
Conditions  
Score: 6

Although the police maintains a reputation of being efficient (sometimes too efficient, as the institution is granted significant powers and discretion vis-à-vis the citizenry), concerns over internal security are high. Attention has focused on repeated outbreaks of urban violence in the suburbs or other areas. Following a rising level of petty crime and several terrorist attacks on French territory and abroad, citizens have been more and more vocal about the need to be better protected by enforcing “law and order” measures. There is a growing feeling of insecurity related to the rise of robbery both in cities and - this is a new phenomenon - in the countryside. Drug trafficking and violence are such in some neighborhoods of large cities that they are seen as off-limits. There is obviously a relationship between the economic and social crisis and this increase in feelings of insecurity. This situation has also had a decisive impact on protest votes in favor of the extreme-right party, the National Front.

Nonetheless, domestic security policy is able on the whole to protect citizens; some problems (related to urban violence for instance) are often linked to social problems and have to be managed by actions beyond security policy.

### Global Inequalities

Global Social  
Policy  
Score: 7

France has a long tradition of offering support to poor countries both in terms of financial support and promotion of policies in their favor. However, this should be qualified. First, France is reluctant to consider that free trade is one of the most effective instruments of support. As a consequence, France is often

an obstacle to the lowering of tariffs and trade barriers, for instance in agriculture. Second, French aid is concentrated on African countries, where its economic interests have been traditionally strong. The temptation to link aid to imports from the donor country is quite common.

Within the framework of international organizations, France is active but for the above mentioned reasons, its policy preferences are deeply influenced by path dependency, such as colonization and the global network of French-speaking countries.

### III. Environmental Policies

#### Environment

Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 6

France has a poor performance record with respect to environmental targets. Its good performance on carbon emissions is due to the importance of nuclear power in France, whereas other areas related to energy efficiency, such as insulation technology, have been neglected. Environmental policies have continued to be subordinated to sectoral policies which are considered more important. When economic interests and environment protections clash, economic interests tend to prevail. Environmental interest groups and government ministries (although established comparatively early) do not play a decisive role in policymaking. Former President Sarkozy, who launched an ambitious environmental plan, later considerably downgraded his ambitions. Even at the time of writing, when the government coalition is comprised of Socialists and Greens, the influence of the latter is minimal. Lobbyists and pressure groups in favor of the status quo or of the interests of business are much more influential. Environmental requirements are perceived as a source of additional costs and rarely as an incentive for innovation and competitiveness. The latest example has been the withdrawal of the so-called eco-tax on the road transportation of goods in October 2014, which was driven by fears of a truckdrivers' protest. The bill on the "energetic transition" which was adopted in October 2014 doesn't do much to curtail the dominance of nuclear energy as its contribution to the overall needs is capped at 50% of the total.

The French policy in favor of environmental concerns has to be seen within this tension. For instance, the focus on nuclear energy puts the country in a favorable position as far as carbon production is concerned, but the choice of diesel oil rather than gas implies a considerable excess in particle emissions. In many large cities, France does not reach relevant targets established by the European Union.

The same contrast is observable in the field of renewable water resources. In principle, France supports a water policy and has set up water agencies to monitor the use and protection of its water resources. However, the French authorities have been unable to resist the agriculture lobby, which is the largest consumer of water. This plays out in the southwest of France, where the intensive production of corn jeopardizes regional resources, and even more in Brittany, where surface water (the main resource in that region) is highly polluted by intensive pork and poultry production. Despite condemnations by the courts and the EU commission, the government has been reluctant and unable to tackle the problem properly. Rivers and the sea are affected by the excessive proliferation of toxic seaweed. The situation is much better with forests (their surface is growing) and biodiversity. In this latter case, it must be noted that the protection of biodiversity has met resistance in metropolitan France by many diverging interests (agriculture, construction and transportation). Thanks to France's vast and essentially wild territories overseas in Guyana and in the Pacific zone, the results regarding ecological indicators are slightly better than they would be if only the European space was considered. While forests are growing, a result of the drastic reduction of farming and of cultivated land, the maintenance of these new wild areas is insufficient despite a long tradition of care by specialized engineers whose profession was established by French monarchs.

### Global Environmental Protection

Global  
Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 6

All French governments in recent decades have been committed to advancing environmental policies at the global level. Former President Chirac (1995 – 2007) made a strong plea in favor of an international agreement in a speech in South Africa. Under former President Sarkozy, France was among the leading group of countries trying to secure an agreement on climate change mitigation at the 2009 U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

However, this openness to internationally approved, more drastic and protective policies reaches a limit when French interests are at stake. For instance, any policy which would reduce the capacity of the nuclear energy industry to grow is frowned on by France, despite the unresolved issue of nuclear waste dumps. More generally, there is a frequent contradiction between the support given to wide, abstract and long-term agreements negotiated at the international level and the reluctance to actually implement them.

# Quality of Democracy

## Electoral Processes

Candidacy  
Procedures  
Score: 10

The electoral process is fair at all levels, and controls by ad hoc commissions or the judiciary ensure the smooth running of elections. There are some restrictions to assure that only serious candidates stand in presidential contests. These include a requirement that each potential candidate has to obtain 500 signatures of support from elected persons, such as mayors or senators, from a third of French départements, or counties, to prove his or her political relevance. In addition, candidates must pay a deposit of €15,000. But these restrictions do not limit the number or variety of political backgrounds of candidates. In most elections, local as well as national, many candidates decide to run as they often can benefit from advantages that help facilitate the variety of candidates, such as the free provision of electoral materials or a partial reimbursement of expenses for candidates who win more than 5% of the vote. Fraud is exceptional, and has been limited to a few regions such as Corsica or overseas territories. Some limitations are imposed on anti-constitutional parties that espouse terrorist or violent means to power. These restrictions are exceptional and are confirmed by administrative tribunals yet can easily be bypassed.

Media Access  
Score: 9

According to French laws regulating electoral campaigns, all candidates must receive equal treatment in terms of access to public radio and television. Media time allocation is supervised by an ad hoc commission during the official campaign. Granted incumbents may be tempted to use their position to maximize their media visibility before the official start. Private media is not obliged to follow these rules, but except for media outlets that expressly supporting certain party positions, newspapers and private media tend to fairly allocate media time to candidates, with the exception of marginal candidates who often run with the purpose of getting free media time. The paradox of this rule for equal time is that the presidential candidates who are likely to make it to the second round receive the same amount of media time as candidates who represent extremely marginal ideas or interests. The result is that the “official” campaign on public channels is often seen as boring and viewers pay little attention. More and more viewers are apparently switching to private channels to skip the repetition of short, standardized complacent interviews on public channels.

Voting and  
Registrations  
Rights  
Score: 9

The right to participate in elections as a candidate or as a voter is fully guaranteed not only by law but also in practice. There is no evidence of restrictions or obstruction in the application of the law. Every citizen enjoys rights that are provided by the constitution. In recent years, no progress has been made to extend the right to vote to foreign residents, except in the case of residents who are also EU citizens (yet only for local and European elections). Both former President François Mitterrand and President Hollande committed themselves to granting resident foreigners the right to vote in local elections (after five years of full residence). However, the fierce opposition of the right and the rise of the National Front (FN) have postponed these proposals indefinitely.

Voter registration is easy and, in particular in small local communities, it is quasi-automatic as the local bureaucracy often proceeds with the registration process even without a specific request from the individual. Elsewhere, potential voters have to register. It is usually estimated that some 10% of the electorate is not registered. Some groups are excluded from voting: people suffering from serious mental health issues and who are under the care of a guardian; people excluded after a serious act that would strip their voting rights, such as electoral fraud; and criminals who have been stripped of their civic rights, and thus voting rights.

Party Financing  
Score: 7

Lacking a sufficient legal framework, party financing has been a source of recurrent scandals related to illegal funding practices. Nearly all parties, notably the parties in government, used to finance activities by charging private companies that were working for local public entities or by taxing commercial companies requesting building permits. Only since 1990 a decent regulatory framework has been established. Since then, much progress has been made in discouraging fraud or other illegal activities. However, not all party financing problems have been solved. Current legislation outlines state public funding for both political parties and electoral campaigns, and establishes a spending ceiling for each candidate or party. The spending limits cover all election campaigns; however, only parliamentary and presidential elections enjoy public funding. Individual or company donations to political campaigns are also regulated and capped, and all donations must be made by check, except for minor donations that are collected, for instance, during political meetings. Donations are tax-deductible, with certain limitations. Additionally, regulations (in particular the law of 15 January 1990) established new checks and controls that are applicable for all elections in constituencies with more than 9,000 residents. Within two months after an election, a candidate has to forward the campaign's accounts, certified by an auditor, to the provincial prefecture, which does an initial check and then passes the information on to a special national supervisory body (the Commission Nationale des Comptes de Campagne et des Financements Politiques). In

presidential elections, this review is made by the Constitutional Council (Conseil Constitutionnel).

These controls have made election financing more transparent and more equal. Yet loopholes remain. For example, the presidential campaign of Edouard Balladur in 1995 has been placed under criminal investigation, over concerns that several million euros were paid to the campaign out of a contract with Pakistan for the sale of military submarines. The Constitutional Council has reviewed former President Sarkozy's presidential re-election campaign, and decided in July 2013 that he had exceeded his spending limits. His party had to return €1 million in penalties to the state. An ongoing inquiry has found evidence that Sarkozy's Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party flagrantly ignored the rules and forged false invoices in order to appear to have remained within the spending ceilings set by law.

When these rules are violated, three types of sanctions can be exercised: financial (expenditures reimbursed), criminal (fines or jail) or electoral (ineligibility for electoral contests for one year, except in the case of presidential elections).

Popular Decision-  
Making  
Score: 4

The Fifth Republic (1958 – ongoing) reintroduced the referendum, not only for the ratification of the constitution but as an instrument of government. The president elected at the beginnings of the Fifth Republic, Charles de Gaulle, used referenda to seek support for decolonization and to revise the constitution, and in doing so, bypassed parliamentary opposition. In 1969, de Gaulle became essentially a victim of the referendum, as he had declared that he would resign should a referendum on regionalization fail. Since then, the referendum has been used less frequently. The use of referenda at the request and for the benefit of the executive is a risky enterprise. All referenda since 1962 have been characterized either by indifference and high levels of abstentions or by outright rejection. Only in one case (the vote over the Maastricht Treaty in 1992) was the executive able to secure a small, albeit fragile, majority.

As only the president may call a referendum, the practice is perceived as an instrument of the executive and not as a real democratic tool, since popular initiatives are not possible under the referendum system.

Local referenda can be organized in the case of a merger of communes or for local issues at a mayor's initiative. Very few have taken place, however, and the outcomes have been disappointing, as abstention is usually high and the results are often contrary to expectations (e.g., a proposal to merge two Corsican departments or in April 2013, two failed Alsatian referenda). The experience of referenda in France is perceived by the public as not really

democratic and an instrument of manipulation by those in charge. The temptation thus is to vote “no,” regardless of the question.

### Access to Information

Media Freedom  
Score: 7

In principle, media independence is guaranteed by a complete set of constitutional, legislative and administrative rules. There is not much more that can be done to improve the legal status of the press. This said, media independence is multifaceted. One must distinguish between public and private media, and separate legal independence from financial dependence or influence. Public authorities have in principle no direct capacity to intervene in public media decision-making as the power of control and supervision is delegated to an independent media authority. However, the situation is not clear-cut for many reasons. First, public media are mostly dependent upon a special tax paid by every TV owner, while access to the advertising market was strongly curtailed by the former Sarkozy government. Most funding is now under government control. Secondly, former President Sarkozy triggered an outcry by shifting the authority to appoint the president of public radio from the independent authority to the president himself. A new bill introduced by the Hollande administration has revoked this measure.

In the private sector, public influence can be felt through the generous subsidies paid to all daily and weekly newspapers. However, it is paid as a kind of entitlement based on general rules and principles, and as such does not provide any real political leverage to the government. Much more serious is the porosity between the world of media and the world of politics, as well as the fact that most newspapers are owned by large business interests. However, the situation is paradoxical: ownership provides a limited capacity of influence (to which the distrust of most media vis-à-vis capitalism testifies, despite being funded and supported by wealthy companies or individuals). While in the past political power heavily influenced the press, today the main issue is the interlocking of media and politics. This confluence is counterweighted by two factors: the existence of a few truly independent media outlets (such as Mediapart or Le Canard Enchaîné) which actively cover government scandals and malfeasance, and the fact that newspapers which support opposition platforms tend to be more independent vis-à-vis the government in power.

Media Pluralism  
Score: 5

Media pluralism is reasonably guaranteed in France. Yet nearly all newspapers, daily or weekly, local or national, are under the control of either rich business people or companies or banks. One of the few exceptions is a regional newspaper in the western part of France. Whereas on the national level there is a wide range of newspapers expressing political pluralism, local media is normally characterized by a monopoly or quasi-monopoly position of one paper in a given geographical area. The print run of daily newspapers is

low by Western standards, and has been negatively affected by online publications. The print market is largely in decline and suffers financially. The situation is further aggravated by an obsolete, inefficient, corporatist and costly system of distribution that is controlled by the unions. Many newspapers are put in jeopardy due to the costs and general malfunctioning of the distribution system. Faced with online competition, rising costs and a shrinking readership, print media have had to rely more and more on the benevolence of wealthy entrepreneurs or on the state. Given the multiple ties between political and business elites in France, this is not a particularly favorable situation for the maintenance of a vibrant culture of media pluralism.

Access to  
Government  
Information  
Score: 7

The right of access to information was strengthened in 1978 through the establishment of an independent agency, CADA (Commission d'Accès aux Documents Administratifs). This body guarantees that any private or public entity is entitled to be delivered any document requested from a public administration or service, regardless of the legal status of the organization (private or public) if the institution maintains a public service. However, some restrictions have been established, mainly in relation with issues regarding the private sphere or the protection of intellectual property or business information in order to safeguard competition between companies. The main and more controversial issue is the refusal to issue documents by citing security or defense concerns, a concept which can be applied broadly and with a limited capacity for challenging in court. The administration in question must deliver the requested document within a month. After that deadline, inaction is considered as a rejection which can be challenged in court.

The development of new technology systems, such as e-government and e-administration, has increased the possibility for citizens and specialized media to obtain important public information. The diffusion of public statistical surveys, public reports and other documents from different public bodies has been largely facilitated by Internet sites, allowing the downloading of these documents without cost or restriction.

### Civil Rights and Political Liberties

Civil Rights  
Score: 8

In France, even though there is an established tradition of the rule of law and the recognition and protection of civil and fundamental rights, there is too a long history of infringements of those rights. The two main reasons for this are related to the distrust, and often contempt, of government toward the judiciary. This behavior dates back to the French Revolution, and has been further exacerbated by the country's fraught political history; violations have continued to occur up until the 1980s.

The situation has improved in recent history for several reasons. First, governments have had to concede some improvements or make concessions to the judiciary, for example by limiting government intervention in the appointment of magistrates, by limiting government interference in the judicial process, and by strengthening formal guarantees. Second, the public at large, in particular activists and NGOs, has been instrumental in limiting the undue reach of governmental power, and the media have supported such social movements. Third, France's judicial system now acts in the shadow of international courts which sanction national violations of the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union play an incremental but decisive role in this progress.

A more general problem is related to the partial or poor implementation of the rule of law, either because public officials adopt an attitude of benign neglect or because of the difficulty for the poor or immigrants to access the courts. Civil rights areas such as the effective protection of the handicapped, women or foreigners have still to improve.

Political Liberties  
Score: 9

Political liberties are well-protected in France. This situation can be explained by several factors. The fact that these liberties are considered as the heritage of the French Revolution sets them in a quasi-sacred position; protections were granted and solidified by the highest administrative court during the Third and Fourth Republics; recently, the increasing and active role of the Constitutional Council in striking down laws which could jeopardize said liberties has been crucial. The expansion of the court's powers stemmed from its 1971 decision to protect the right of association from governmental intervention.

A controversial and still not fully resolved issue is related to the interpretation of the separation of religious and public life (*laïcité*). The ban of religious signs and symbols from public places is, in theory, applicable to all religious affiliations but concerns mainly the Islamic community. Currently, an ongoing debate has focused on the possibility of expressing religious beliefs or to practice religion in the workplace. President Hollande has indicated that legislation on these issues might be considered soon, following contradictory decisions by the highest private courts which authorized (for some) and banned (for others) a kindergarten assistant to wear the Islamic headscarf in school. However, due to the present political and social climate, it is doubtful that the President will be able to stick to his commitment.

Non-discrimination  
Score: 6

In principle, any discrimination such as those based on gender, race, ethnic origin or religion is banned by the constitution and by fundamental law. Beyond the recognition of the right of non-discrimination, however, institutional monitoring, judicial support and policy measures to ensure such rights are less than adequate.

France's legal basis for non-discrimination is solid. The controversial recognition of "marriage for all," or recognizing the right of gays and lesbians to legally marry, is a point in case. Courts tend not only to apply but also to extend these rights. Many policy measures, particularly financial incentives or subsidies, attempt to compensate for different instances of discrimination, in particular gender, age or migration background. However, the situation is often contradictory in many cases. For instance, while immigrants face challenges in getting residence permits, illegal immigrants have free access to health care and their children can be legally registered at school. A key contention concerns the integration of so-called second-generation immigrants. Despite many policy measures, a large number of these young French (they are all citizens) feel like foreigners in their country. The failure to provide quality schooling and, later, a proper job is one of the most dramatic dimensions of what is called invisible discrimination. One serious handicap in dealing with this situation is enshrined in the French republican tradition, which emphasizes strict equality and excludes in principle any sort of discrimination, even positive discrimination.

Institutionally, a recent development is the creation of a new body named the Defender of Rights, which replaces several specialized agencies. In addition to national organizations, many regional or sectoral ad hoc institutions that address discrimination cases have been established.

### Rule of Law

Legal Certainty  
Score: 6

Generally French authorities act according to legal rules and obligations set forth from national and supranational legislation. The legal system however suffers still from a number of problems. Attitudes toward implementing rules and laws are rather lax. Following centuries of centralization and heavy top-down regulation, this attitude was described by political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville as "The rule is rigid, the practice is weak" (*La règle est rigide, la pratique est molle*). There are many examples of this attitude, common both at the central as well as at the local levels of government. Frequent is the delay or even the unlimited postponement of implementation measures, which may be used as a convenient political instrument for inaction: sometimes because pressure groups successfully impede the adoption of implementation measures, sometimes because the government has changed, and sometimes because the social, financial or administrative costs of the reform have been underestimated.

Another factor is the discretion left to the bureaucracy in interpreting existing regulations. In some cases, the administrative official circular, which is supposed to facilitate implementation of a law, actually restricts the impact or

the meaning of existing legislation. A striking example is the most-debated law on housing adopted in 2013 under the initiative of a Green minister, Cecile Duflot. The implementation decrees have not been published and most of the law will never be applied given the strong criticisms it has received from all sides. In other cases, the correct interpretation of an applicable law results from a written or verbal reply by a minister in parliament. This is particularly true in the field of fiscal law, which is subject to detailed and changing interpretations by politicians as well as by the bureaucracy.

Finally, the most criticized issue of legal uncertainty derives from the multiple and frequent changes in legislation, in particular fiscal legislation. The business community has repeatedly voiced its concerns over the instability of rules, impeding any rational long-term perspective or planning. These changes usually are legally impeccable, but economically debatable.

Judicial Review  
Score: 9

Executive decisions are reviewed by courts that are charged with checking its norms and decisions. If a decision is to be challenged, the process is not difficult. Courts are organized on three levels (administrative tribunals, courts of appeal and the Council of State (Conseil d'Etat). The courts' independence is fully recognized, despite that, for instance, the Council of State also serves as legal advisor to the government for most administrative decrees and all government bills.

This independence has been strengthened by the Constitutional Council, as far such independence has been considered a general constitutional principle, despite a lack of language as part of the constitution on the matter. In addition, administrative courts can provide financial compensation and make public bodies financially accountable for errors or mistakes. By transferring to public authorities the duty to compensate even when an error is made by a private individual (for instance, a doctor working for a public hospital) it ensures that financial compensation is delivered quickly and securely to the plaintiff. After this, it is up to the public authority to claim remuneration from the responsible party. Gradually, the Constitutional Council has become a fully functional court, the role of which was dramatically increased through the constitutional reform of March 2008. Since then, any citizen can raise an issue of unconstitutionality before any lower court. The request is examined by the Supreme Court of Appeals or the Council of State, and might be passed to the Constitutional Council. The council's case load has increased from around 25 cases to more than 100 cases a year.

Appointment of  
Justices  
Score: 5

Appointments to the Constitutional Council, France's supreme court, have been highly politicized and controversial. The council's nine members, elected for nine years, are nominated by the French president (who also chooses the council's president), and the presidents of the Senate and the National Assembly. Former presidents (at the time of writing, Valéry Giscard

d'Estaing, Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy) are de jure members of the council but do not usually attend meetings. Up until the Sarkozy administration, there were no checks over council appointments made by these three highest political authorities. Now respective committees of the two parliamentary chambers organize hearings to check the qualifications and capacity of proposed council appointments. From this point of view, the French procedure is now closer to the process in which Supreme Court justices are appointed in the United States, rather than typical European practices. During the review period, President Hollande announced a constitutional reform that cancels the right of former French presidents to become ex-officio members of the council.

Other supreme courts (penal, civil and administrative courts) are comprised of professional judges and the government has a limited role over their composition as the government can appoint only a presiding judge (Président), selecting this individual from the senior members of the judiciary.

Corruption  
Prevention  
Score: 5

Up to the 1990s, corruption plagued French administration. Much of the problem was linked to secret party financing, as political parties often sought out alternative methods of funding when member fees and/or public subsidies lacked. Methods included on the national level weapons sales to brokering lucrative contracts with multinational companies, or on the local level, public purchasing to the awarding of long-term concessions for local public services. Judicial investigations revealed extraordinary scandals, which resulted in the conviction and imprisonment of industrial and political leaders. The cases themselves were a key factor for the growing awareness of the prevalence of corruption in France. This led to substantive action to establish stricter rules, both over party financing and transparency in public purchases and concessions. The opportunities to cheat, bypass or evade these rules however are still too many, and too many loopholes still exist. A scandal in March 2013 involving a minister of finance who is accused of alleged tax fraud and money laundering has put the issues of corruption, fiscal evasion and conflict of interest on the public agenda. In reaction, government ministers have been obliged to make public their personal finances; parliamentarians may be obliged to do so as well in the future. However, these hastily adopted measures are still incomplete and do not tackle critical problems related to corruption, such as the huge and largely unchecked powers of mayors (who are responsible for land planning and public tenders), the rather superficial and lax controls of regional courts of accounts, the intertwining of public and private elites, the holding by one person of many different political offices or political mandates simultaneously (cumul des mandats). All these factors granted do not constitute by themselves acts of corruption, but can lead to it – particularly as the legal definition of corruption is narrow and thus reduces the possibility to effectively sanction any malpractice. Cases of corruption related to the

funding of political campaigns by foreign African states or through unchecked defence contracts are currently (at the time of this writing) before the courts. Moreover, the accounts of the Sarkozy campaign in 2012 were rejected by the Constitutional Council and the public funding granted to candidates refused as a consequence. Since then, the finances of his party are under investigation and some instances of malpractice have been identified. As long as legal codes to regulate conflicts of interest (beyond the case of ministers or parliamentarians) have not been adopted and seriously enforced, corruption will continue, unimpeded by sanctions.

# Governance

## I. Executive Capacity

### Strategic Capacity

Strategic  
Planning  
Score: 5

French governments commonly refer to ad hoc committees tasked with providing information on crucial issues. In some cases, a report is requested from a single individual. Committee members are mainly high-level civil servants, former or active politicians and academics, and often are chosen on the basis of their sympathy to the government in office at the time. This situation raises the concern that opportunism may prevail over real strategic planning. One example during the review period is the Gallois report on French business competitiveness, which was commissioned by President Hollande and published in October 2012, and which has been used to legitimize financial support granted to businesses, as well as some structural reforms, against the reluctance of leftist members of the government coalition.

Most of the time committee reports are either partially paid attention to or shelved altogether. There are no committee meetings with government authorities, except the formal handing over of the requested report. A new permanent committee, set up by President Hollande to assess budgetary issues (before the budget is submitted to Brussels), might be more influential as it has been placed under the chairmanship of the president of the Court of Accounts.

The only bodies that take a long-term view in terms of strategic planning are bureaucratic departments such as those that are part of the finance or foreign affairs ministries. The committee of economic advisors attached to the prime minister's office produces reports on its own initiative or at the office's request. Its impact on actual policymaking is limited, however. President Hollande has redefined the tasks of the former council of strategic analysis, renamed France Stratégie, to strengthen its role in prospective political planning.

In spite of these various instruments, there is nothing similar in terms of comparable influence to Germany's economic institutes, for example. In addition, it is striking how the political actors over the past years have been unable to publicly propose a "vision" or at least a credible analysis of what policies could or should be introduced.

Scholarly Advice  
Score: 4

In contrast to some other European countries, the French government does not rely much on academic advice, even though the President's Office and the Prime Minister's Office frequently consult economists, and though outstanding nongovernmental academics may be chosen to sit in national reflection councils covering various policy fields (integration, education, etc.). But the influence of academics is not comparable to what can be found in many other political settings. High-level civil servants tend to consider themselves self-sufficient. Once the government has chosen a policy strategy, it tends to stick to it without significant discussion over the appropriateness or effectiveness of choices made. There is nothing comparable in France to the economic institutes in Germany, for example, the opinions of which serve to guide the government and offer a platform for public debates.

#### Interministerial Coordination

GO Expertise  
Score: 7

There are three main loci of policy evaluation once a policy proposal has been forwarded to the prime minister. The first is the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the second is the President's Office, and the third, in cases of legislation or regulation, the Council of State. This hierarchical organization gives the prime minister the option of modifying ministers' draft bills. In important cases, this steering function is located in the President's Office. Both the president and the prime minister appoint advisors from all ministries as policy advisors in a given sector. All ministerial domains are covered. Several hundred people are involved in government steering, checking, controlling and advising functions.

However, considering these various checks a method of evaluation is probably overstated. The PMO mainly coordinates and arbitrates between ministries, takes into consideration opinions and criticisms from involved interests and from the majority coalition, and balances political benefits and risks. The President's Office does more or less the same in coordination with the PMO. More than offering a thorough policy evaluation, these two institutions serve as a place where the ultimate arbitrations between bureaucrats, party activists and vested interests are made. The power of the last word belongs to the President's Office, and this informal hierarchy gives considerable influence to the president's cabinet, and in practice, to the person in charge of a given policy area. The Council of State is supposed to offer legal advice only. However, the council takes advantage of this mandatory consultation step to

trim a proposed bill or decree, pointing out weaknesses or contradictions. This advice however goes much beyond legal issues, and it has to be underlined that the government has a choice between accepting the council's advice or dropping the questioned elements of policy, given international, European or constitutional requirements. The policy road, under these circumstances, might be narrow.

During the Hollande presidency (since May 2012), the lack of political/administrative coordination has been striking in its sheer absence. The period under review has been marked by multiple contradictions between and tensions over policy choices and issues. Divergences and fights between ministers reflected tensions within the left coalition and within the Socialist Party itself. A major battle was fought when the minister of the economy himself expressed disagreement with the government's economic policy. The prime minister had to step in and request the dissenting ministers' resignation. Political leadership under Hollande has demonstrated unprecedented weakness in the history of the Fifth Republic. This lack of policy guidance obviously has political and party consequences but is also rather disastrous in terms of policy coherence, consistency and credibility.

GO Gatekeeping  
Score: 10

The Prime Minister's Office has strong powers vis-à-vis line ministers. Since the beginning of the Fifth Republic, the authority of the prime minister has been indisputable. The only exceptions to this iron rule derive from the presence of heavyweights in the Cabinet, or when a minister has privileged access to the President (for instance, Jack Lang, the minister of culture during Mitterrand's presidency). President Hollande's reluctance to impose a strong line weakened the prime minister vis-à-vis the ministers during the term of the first prime minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault. His successor, Prime Minister Manuel Valls has imposed a return to strict discipline and forced dissenting ministers to resign. This turmoil has shown that beyond the formal rules, it is political leadership that enables the full application of the prime minister's powers.

Line Ministries  
Score: 7

Line ministers have to inform the prime minister of all their projects. Strong discipline, even at the public communication level, is imposed, and this rule is reinforced by the attitude of the media, which tend to cover any slight policy difference as the expression of political tension or party divergence. Not only the Prime Minister's Office oversees the policy process but also his cabinet assistants, in each area, supervise, liaise and coordinate with their counterparts in line ministries about the content, timing and political sequences of a project. The secretary general of the Prime Minister's Office (and his alter ego at the Elysée) operates in the shadow, but he is one of the most powerful people within that machinery. He can step in case the coordination or control process at that level has failed to stem the expression of differences within the government. As in other fields, the well-established tradition of the Fifth Republic has been shaken up by the hesitations and vagaries of the Hollande presidency.

Cabinet  
Committees  
Score: 7

Coordination is strong within the French government, and is in the hands of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the President's Office, which constantly liaise and decide on issues. Coordination takes place at several levels. First at the level of specialized civil servants who work as political appointees in the PMO (members of the Cabinet, that is political appointees belonging to the staff of the prime minister), then in meetings chaired by the secretary general and finally by the prime minister himself, in case of permanent conflicts between ministers or over important issues. In many instances, conflicts pit the powerful ministers of budget or finance against other ministries. Appeals to the prime minister require either a powerful convincing argument or that the appealing party is a key member of the government coalition, as it is understood that the prime minister should not be bothered by anything but the highest level issues. While this framework remains in place, it has been affected over the past two years by the president's hesitations and U-turns.

Ministerial  
Bureaucracy  
Score: 8

If a ministry wishes to get its proposals accepted or passed, there are no other options than to liaise and coordinate with other ministries or agencies involved. In case this consultation has not taken place, objections expressed by other ministers or by the Council of State might deliver a fatal blow to a proposal. All ministries are equal, but some are more equal than others: for example, the finance minister is a crucial and omnipresent partner. Usually the coordination and consultation process is placed under the responsibility of a "rapporteur," usually a lawyer from the ministry bureaucracy. The dossier is always followed as well by a member of the minister's staff who communicates with his/her counterparts and tries to smooth the process as much as possible. In the most difficult cases (when ministers back up strongly the positions of their respective civil servants), the prime minister has to step in and settle the matter.

Informal  
Coordination  
Score: 8

A crucial factor and essentially an invisible coordination mechanism is the "old-boy network" of former students from the grandes écoles (École nationale d'administration (ENA), École Polytechnique, Mines ParisTech and so on) or membership in the same "grands corps" (prestigious bureaucracies such as Inspection générale des Finances, Diplomatie, Conseil d'Etat and so on). Most ministers (except perhaps the least powerful or those considered as marginal) include one or several persons from this high civil servant super-elite who know each other or are bound by an informal solidarity. This same sort of civil servant works as well in the prime minister's office or the president's office, strengthening again this informal connection. The system is both efficient and not transparent, from a procedural point of view. It is striking, for instance, how much Hollande has relied on people trained together with him at ENA and to whom he has offered key positions in the political administration.

### Evidence-based Instruments

RIA Application  
Score: 4

The practice of compiling regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) has been followed since 1995, notably under the supervision of the PMO. However, there is still no systematic RIA process with comparable rules and methodologies; this is just one reason why there is an excess of legislation with an insufficient analysis of regulatory impact. There are partial substitutes, however. The finance and budget ministries try to systematically evaluate the fiscal impact of any new measure. This evaluation might be biased, however, as considerations may be exclusively motivated by financial and budgetary concerns. In some ministries (such as industry, agriculture and social affairs) there is also a tradition of analyzing the impact of planned policies. In other sectors, the law might impose these assessments (such as with the environmental and industry ministries, for instance). A legal assessment is systematically practiced by the Conseil d'Etat before the adoption of a regulation or governmental bill. Parliamentary committees also often do an excellent job of regulatory assessment. However, what is lacking is a systematic cross-examination involving all the main stakeholders. Former President Sarkozy, with the goal of trimming bureaucratic costs, instituted the so-called RGPP (Revue Générale des Politiques Publiques). It has permitted the cutting of around 100,000 positions, but the process has been highly criticized by the opposition and by the unions. President Hollande has decided to move to another type of review (Modernisation de l'Action Publique) but little, aside from a reduction of regions from 22 to 13, has changed so far. There is, however, a notable lack of evaluation of new bills under discussion. As a consequence, many bills are withdrawn at the last minute, frozen or postponed. The fact that few reforms have actually been adopted only serves to fuel anti-reform sentiments among sectoral groups and the public at large. As any reform is contested and rejected by more or less large segments of the population, the government, by fear of popular revolt, is often obliged to cancel or water down its measures.

Quality of RIA  
Process  
Score: 3

Studies analyzing the impact of regulatory impact assessments (RIA) have stated that, although the initial skepticism of administrative bodies toward RIA has been overcome, the content of assessments has been too general and often tended to justify the need for action rather than attempt a critical, well-grounded, assessment. In addition, there are few international comparisons when examining possible alternatives. The assessments are conducted by stakeholders with a perspective of fighting for or against a policy measure. Thus, in general, such assessments have little to recommend them.

Sustainability  
Check  
Score: 3

There is no real systematic sustainability strategy except in the ministries, where EU regulations require such an examination. In most instances, political jockeying tends to prevail over policy analysis.

Negotiating  
Public Support  
Score: 5

### Societal Consultation

The traditional distrust regarding “lobbyists,” not seen as legitimate political actors, and the difficult social relations in France that hinder effective social dialogue, have limited the capacity of governments to seamlessly or successfully find avenues of negotiation and cooperation. There are thousands of official or semi-official commissions that are supposed to give opinions on a given issue or area; however, governments tend to prefer negotiations with selected partners, excluding some considered as not being “representative.” Consultations are often rather formal, and interested parties very often have no willingness to find a compromise.

The temptation to govern top-down has always been strong. But in many cases severe, repeated conflicts and protest movements have raised and have often successfully vetoed governmental action. This is a clear hint that government has not succeeded in assessing the political power, the consideration and cooperation of civil society and its actors.

This being said, things are beginning to change. In recent years, governments have sought the consultation of interest groups more systematically, and these practices have partly been adopted as legal obligations. Moreover, the rules of social negotiations have been modernized to encourage social contracts between employers and trade unions. The reform bill on the labor market in 2013 followed an agreement between most trade unions and business organizations, a pact which was then made into law by the government and parliament. Nonetheless, given the persistent distrust on the part of the unions, progress is slow and, in some cases, minimal. As there is no overall consensus among some unions and business groups regarding economic and social policy aims, it is very difficult to make substantial and swift progress. Two years and half after coming to power, the leftist government has still to introduce most of the needed reforms. Having lost political credibility and backing, the Hollande government will find it very difficult to obtain the political support it needs to carry out any reforms.

### Policy Communication

Coherent  
Communication  
Score: 3

Government policy communication is usually subject to centralized control by the executive branch. One of the preoccupations of the executive branch as part of the Fifth Republic is to avoid disagreement or contradiction within the ministerial team, even when coalition governments are in power. There have been situations in which ministers expressing divergent views in the media have been forced to resign. Under the Hollande administration, the executive

branch gave initially more leeway in this regard, as Hollande appears to prefer addressing differing views internally rather than have these differences of opinion be subject to external criticism. However in September 2014, the newly appointed prime minister made clear that he would not accept such public displays of dissent anymore, forcing the president to push out his dissenters.

The key problems with policy communication in France have come about as a result of the president and his administration's lack of strategic and decision-making clarity. For example, many of the choices made by President Hollande have not been in line with his campaign pledges (and thus with his party as well as voters' expectations). A poor communication of his budget-tightening measures has led to much public criticism. A succession of badly managed issues has had tremendous negative effects on policy credibility. In spite of repeated changes in the president's communication team, little progress has been made. There has never been such an unpopular president who has done so little in terms of introducing structural reforms. This rather paradoxical situation can be explained, at least partially, by the awkward style and confusion found in the executive branch's policy communication.

### Implementation

Government  
Efficiency  
Score: 3

The government is efficient in implementing its programs, as it can rely on a relatively disciplined cabinet and an obedient majority, while other veto actors are basically absent. The question whether government policies are effective is another matter. One of the major issues facing the government during the review period is a lack of credibility concerning the commitments it has taken in relation to growth, unemployment and the reduction of deficits. Optimistic forecasts have been disappointed by poor results on all fronts. Most international organizations (the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Union), think tanks or even national organizations (the French central bank, the statistical institute, the Court of Auditors) have pointed out the impossibility of reaching set targets based on over-optimistic data or forecasts. This situation has not changed over the period of observation. It will take some time (and some tangible results) before the government can restore its credibility.

Ministerial  
Compliance  
Score: 8

Compliance by ministers, if assessed comparatively, is good, as a minister can be dismissed at any time and without explanation. In the French majority system and in the absence of real coalition governments, the ministers, who are nominated by the president, are largely assigned to him. Together with the effective hierarchical steering of governmental action, ministers have strong incentives to implement the government's program, following guidelines produced by the president and the prime minister. This statement remains true

but is highly dependent on the leadership capacities of the president and prime minister. Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who came into office in March 2014, has improved the situation but remains squeezed between a reluctant party and a feeble president. In addition, the actual policy being different from the announced program on many fronts, the main feeling among observers and public at large is one of confusion and chaos.

Monitoring  
Ministries  
Score: 7

Line ministry activities are generally well monitored, but several factors influence the impact of oversight, including: the strength of the prime minister; the relationship of the minister with the president; the political position of the minister within the majority or as a local notable; media attention; and political pressure. This traditional pattern under the Fifth Republic failed to work during the first 30 months of the Hollande presidency due to the president's weakness and reluctance to arbitrate between ministers and divergent preferences. Since the September 2014 crisis and the resignation of the dissident ministers, Prime Minister Manuel Valls has proven able to exercise improved oversight of the ministries.

Monitoring  
Agencies,  
Bureaucracies  
Score: 7

In a centralized system like France's, the central machinery is unable to monitor fully and constantly the implementation of government policies. There exist huge sectoral and geographical variations. In some areas, decisions are not implemented or instead are badly implemented or flexibly interpreted. For instance, education is one of the most centralized policy fields in France, but implementation varies so starkly that parents have adopted strategies (such as the crucial choice of where to live) to register their children in the "best" schools. Implementing centrally designed policies requires local or regional adaptation or rigid rules that are applicable to all. Even the prefects, supposedly the arm of central government, refer to this practice, as may be witnessed for instance in the absent, or insufficient, implementation of water directives in some regions.

Task Funding  
Score: 6

Over the past 30–40 years, the powers of communes, provinces (départements) and regions, delegated by central authorities or taken over de facto by local entities, have increased considerably. Normally a delegation of powers was accompanied by corresponding funding. However, as sectors devolved, sub-units were notably badly managed or insufficiently funded, and local units had to face huge expenditure increases that were not fully covered by the central government. Local lobbying groups are so powerful (given the tradition of accumulating elective mandates, most national parliamentarians are also elected local officials; furthermore, the local lobby controls the second chamber, the Senate) that they have managed to secure substantial fiscal transfers not earmarked for special purposes. Thus, more than two-thirds of non-military public monies are spent by local/regional actors, a figure comparable to the situation in federal states. While in theory local governments are agents of the central government, they have, actually, secured ample discretion.

On the other hand, the piecemeal and ad hoc reforms of local taxation, such as the elimination of the local business tax (*taxe professionnelle*) and its compensation by national state allocations in 2009, or President Hollande's cut of state subsidies to local government as a move toward budget consolidation, have not improved the situation. A clear balance of national and local powers, financial resources and responsibilities is still lacking.

Constitutional  
Discretion  
Score: 6

Some instances of recentralization have occurred through fiscal or administrative means, but despite the usual stereotypes about French hypercentralization, it is fair to say that subnational government enjoys much freedom of maneuver. Legally, subnational government is subordinate. Politically, the influence of local elites in parliament and in particular in the Senate is decisive. The most efficient but contested instruments of control derive from the legal, technical or economic standards imposed by the Brussels and Paris bureaucracies. Violating such standards can involve high political, monetary and legal costs for local politicians. Prime Minister Valls has announced some measures designed to rationalize powers and spending, which would be a welcome reform. At this stage, however, it is difficult to know if the government will be able to overcome the varied and strong oppositions to its still rather vaguely formulated projects.

National  
Standards  
Score: 9

Policymakers in France share a common interest in ensuring national cohesion. This is the basis for a large number of national standards and rules that canalize local and regional policies. National standards are determined by national regulations and constitutional and administrative courts serve as arbiters in disputes over whether these standards are met. The application of national standards is facilitated by the fact that most public utilities are provided by large private or semi-public companies with a vested interest in having the same rules and standards across the country. Services such as energy supply, water distribution, garbage collection are run by many different companies, most of which belong to two or three holding companies. Market uniformity is often much stronger (for the sake of efficiency and profit) than bureaucratic uniformity, since individual actors in companies, unlike politicians and bureaucrats, have less leeway in interpreting and adapting the law to local concerns.

### Adaptability

Domestic  
Adaptability  
Score: 8

The French government has a good track record in adapting national institutions to European and international challenges. This can be attributed to the bureaucratic elite's awareness of international issues. This contrasts vividly with the government parties' weakened ability to adapt national policies to the challenges stemming from the globalization of the economy, as there is often fierce resistance from trade unions, most political parties and public opinion at

large. The past three years have been a vivid illustration of resistance to change in many sectors of society and in particular among unions and professional associations. Policymakers bear a heavy burden in this respect as they have been unable to make clear to their electorate the issues at stake and the need for measures to be taken in facing current challenges.

International  
Coordination  
Score: 7

France plays an active role in the international coordination of joint reform initiatives. The country contributes to the provision of global public goods. It has a long tradition of acting on an international level to prevent climate change, provide humanitarian and development aid and promote health or education programs. However, the French government often takes positions that advance French (economic) interests and does not present its initiatives as platforms on which support and consensus could be built. This limits the government's success in steering or influencing decision-making at the European level. Striking examples include the French government's attitude toward free trade discussions, in particular those concerning agricultural products or its inability to translate properly and efficiently at the national level the measures deriving from supranational recommendations. Environmental issues such as air or water pollution are good examples of this collective failing.

### Organizational Reform

Self-monitoring  
Score: 5

There are plenty of reports prepared at the request of governmental authorities in view of reforming rules, procedures and structures. However, only a few of these recommendations are implemented. Resistance by interested ministries or agencies is usually fierce and often supported by opposition parties or even by part of the majority coalition. The issue is complicated by the fact that ministerial structures can be set up and changed by the government in charge. The most ambitious recent attempt has been the general assessment of public policies launched in 2007, which ordered an assessment of all policies and institutions to rationalize their makeup and to find savings. This process was cancelled by President Hollande and replaced by a new procedure named the Modernization of Public Action (Modernisation de l'Action Publique), which at the time of writing had yet to be fully implemented. Among the government bodies most unable to change its structures is local government, a system that is multilayered and complex. All serious attempts at reform have failed. The new Prime Minister Valls has announced ambitious reforms in this area but the next year will be decisive with regard to the failure or success of his proposals (e.g., cutting the number of regions by half, reforming the provinces, forcing the communes to cooperate).

Institutional  
Reform  
Score: 6

French governments are usually reactive to the need to adapt and adjust to new challenges and pressures. These adaptations are not always based on a thorough evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of the foreseen changes,

however. A case in point is the reluctance of most governments to take seriously into consideration the recommendations of international organizations, if they do not fit with the views and short-term interests of the governing coalition. Resistance from vested interests also limits the quality and depth of reforms. Too often the changes, even if initially ambitious, become merely cosmetic adjustments (when not dropped altogether). This results in a public that grows increasingly weary of reforms when, in fact, very little has been done. This is particularly true when the executive is weak, as has been the case in the past three years.

## II. Executive Accountability

### Citizens' Participatory Competence

Policy  
Knowledge  
Score: 6

Citizens' interest in politics and their participation in the political process have been on the decline in recent decades. Obtaining their information primarily from television, most citizens are poorly informed. Television stations devote little time to any political topic and tend to prefer talk shows where people express their views, rather than using prime-time hours for political information which is seen as uninteresting to larger audiences. Information follows mobilization, rather than the other way around. Information is often provided on a certain topic once a group of citizens or political activists have succeeded in attracting media attention.

One of the problems with government information is that politicians tend to hide the truth or to minimize harsh realities. Since the Socialist government's economic policy U-turn in 1983, governments have tried to hide necessary measures or reforms behind a veil of euphemistic language. As an example, President Hollande's tough budget policy has been renamed "budgetary seriousness" to avoid accusations of "austerity"; even the wording "rigueur" (the tight control of public spending), used by the Socialist government in 1983, is banned. This kind of action "by stealth" may initially be successful, but it does not enhance political awareness among citizens, and it fuels populist feelings too. At the same time, opinion polls suggest that French voters are aware of the budgetary situation, as 81% think that the best way to resolve the country's economic problems is to reduce public spending (Pew Institute poll).

Citation:

Pew Institute; <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/05/13/chapter-1-dispirited-over-national-conditions/>

### Legislative Actors' Resources

Parliamentary  
Resources  
Score: 7

French legislators have fewer resources at their disposal than, for instance, their American colleagues, but they are reasonably equipped should they wish to make use of all facilities offered. In addition to two assistants, whom parliamentarians can freely choose, they receive a fixed amount of funds for any expenditure. There is a good library at their disposal, and a large and competent staff available to help individuals and committees. These committees can also request the support of the Court of Accounts or sectoral bureaucracies, which are obliged to provide all information requested. There are still problems, centered on the long tradition of parliamentarians holding several political mandates. Three-quarters of parliamentary members are also elected local officials, and many of them dedicate more time to local affairs than to parliamentary activities. Absenteeism is one of the major problems of the French parliament.

Obtaining  
Documents  
Score: 9

Committees have free access to all requested documents. However, areas such as national security, the secret service or military issues are more sensitive. The government might be reluctant to pass on information but, worse, could be tempted to use information limitations to cover up potential malpractices. For instance, in the past the PMO had at its disposal substantial amounts of cash that could partially be used for electoral activities of the party in power. No information was available about where the money actually went. In the same vein, it is only during the Sarkozy presidency that the president's office budget became transparent and accessible to parliamentary inquiry.

Summoning  
Ministers  
Score: 8

Committees can summon ministers for hearings, and frequently make use of this right. In exceptional cases, ministers can refuse to attend. Given the supremacy and the discipline of the majority party in parliament during the Fifth Republic, such a refusal does not result in serious consequences.

Summoning  
Experts  
Score: 10  
Task Area  
Congruence  
Score: 3

The parliamentary committees can summon as many experts as they wish as often as they need in all matters, and they often make use of this right.

There is no coincidence between the structures of ministries and those of parliamentary committees. The number of parliamentary committees is limited to eight (six until the 2008 constitutional reform) while there are 25 to 30 ministries or state secretaries. This rule was meant as, and resulted in, a limitation of deputies' power to follow and control closely and precisely each ministry's activity. The 2007 – 2008 constitutional reform permitted a slight increase of committees, and allowed the possibility to set up committees dealing with European affairs.

Audit Office  
Score: 8

Parliament does not have its own audit office, except for a special body called the Office Parlementaire d'Évaluation des Choix Scientifiques et Technologiques, which is responsible for analyzing and evaluating the impact

of technology. In practice, its role has been rather limited.

Instead, the Court of Accounts is now at the disposal of any parliamentary request and can act both as auditor and advisor. While much progress could be made to fully exploit this opportunity, it is noticeable that collaboration between the two institutions has improved since the Court's presidency was offered to two prestigious former politicians. Improvements also resulted from the decision by former President Sarkozy to appoint the then chairman of the finance and budget committee of the National Assembly to the post, a position which for the first time had been reserved for the opposition party.

Ombuds Office  
Score: 2

Parliament has no ombuds office, but plays a key role in the functioning of the (former) Ombudsman office. Until 2011, the médiateur (ombudsman) could intervene in malpractices and administrative problems at the request of individuals but only through the mediation of a parliamentarian. The purpose was to try to solve as many problems as possible through the intervention of elected representatives, and to ask the ombudsman to step in only if the issue could not be addressed or solved in a satisfactory way. In 2011, the office was merged with other independent authorities to form a new body (Le Défenseur des Droits). It is still early to assess the impact of this reform. However, it has not affected the role of parliamentarians in the process.

### Media

Media Reporting  
Score: 6

Mass media, notably morning (radio) and evening programs, offer quality information concerning government decisions. As for print media, the crucial issue is the division between local and national media. A few quality daily papers and weekly papers provide in-depth information. However, in many instances, the depth and magnitude of information is dependent upon the level of polarization of the government policy. Instead, in local newspapers, information is often superficial and inadequate. The same division applies to private and public audiovisual channels. Some private channels offer only limited, superficial and polemical information. On the whole, economic information is rather poor.

### Parties and Interest Associations

Intra-party  
Democracy  
Score: 5

Parties are usually both centralized and organized hierarchically. There are few registered political activists. These are all serious limitations to the inclusiveness of citizens in the selection of leaders and of policy options. However, there are some countervailing forces. One traditional point is the practice of accumulating elective mandates. Many politicians are not selected by a party; they are individuals who have made their breakthrough locally and impose themselves on the party apparatus. This means that national politicians

have a concrete and ground-based knowledge of people's aspirations and claims. Another factor is the popular election of the president. Candidates' programs are inclusive; no policy sector is forgotten in their long to-do list. A third factor lies in recent changes in the selection of candidates for presidential elections and communal elections. Primaries have taken place, first within the Socialist party, then in the neo-Gaullist conservative Union for Popular Movement (UMP). In both cases, both registered activists and voters sympathetic to the party are eligible to participate. However, control of the party apparatus is crucial as evidenced by Sarkozy's decision in September 2014 to run for the chairmanship of the UMP.

Association  
Competence  
(Business)  
Score: 4

Business associations, mainly the largest employer's union (Mouvement des Entreprises de France, MEDEF) but also agricultural associations, are able to formulate policy proposals and contribute to agenda setting. They have their own research and study capabilities, and can successfully lobby government and parliamentarians. Weaker organizations such as the association of small and medium companies complain that their specific interests are marginalized by larger international groups and by the government. Trade unions are usually more reactive, mainly because their membership is low, at less than 8% of the workforce, the lowest percentage within the OECD, and split into several rival organizations. Government tries to stimulate social negotiations by extending social partnership agreements to the whole sector. In areas where interest groups are united and strong, as in agriculture and education, they may have substantial influence, amounting to co-decisions together with government. In other areas, the weakness of organized interests results in marginal involvement in decision-making, which may lead to friction at the implementation level.

Association  
Competence  
(Others)  
Score: 6

The number of, and membership in, non-business associations has been increasing. If the phenomenon of dependency on the financial support of public authorities exists, especially at the local level, there are non-economic associations that are combining pluralistic approaches, long-term perspectives and a public perspective. This can be seen in fields such as urban policy (where national programs and local public actors rely on the expertise and commitment of associations dealing with local issues), environmental policy or social policy (aid to people with different social problems or handicaps).

This being said, only a few associations are equipped with the capacity to make relevant and credible proposals. Some groups (such as environmental groups and social workers) have a real proactive strategy; most associations are reactive.

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Contact:

Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh

Dr. Daniel Schraad-Tischler  
[daniel.schraad-tischler@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:daniel.schraad-tischler@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)

Dr. Christian Kroll  
[christian.kroll@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:christian.kroll@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)