

## Wed Sept 23, French Political Institutions and Electoral System

### Farrell: Majoritarian Electoral Systems (skip 3.2 and parts of 3.3 relating to Australia)

- Primary difference between SMP and majoritarian system: electoral formula (EF)
- ‘two-round system’
  - Common in most former French colonies and territorial dependencies
  - *Majority-plurality* version used for legislative elections
    - § Candidates receiving 12.5% of registered voters’ votes proceed to round 2
  - *Majority-run-off* version used for presidential elections
- Difference in ballot structure (BS): voters choose a ballot paper (drafted by the party according to a set of rules) instead of punching a hole, etc..
- Two-round system creates a tendency for voters to gravitate towards the political center
- The majoritarian system has the same vote-seat problem as SMP (see Table 3.3)

### ICP, France, Section 3

- unitary **semi-presidential** system. Why not ‘semi-parliamentary’?
  - dual executive: president appoints PM
- Political challenges of the 5<sup>th</sup> republic
  - Alternation between opposing parties: Mitterand and the PS in 1981
  - **Cohabitation** (esp. 1997-2002)
- Presidential powers
  - Names PM, approves cabinet officials, nominates various officials
  - Conducts foreign affairs (negotiates and ratifies treaties and names ambassadors, etc.)
  - Directs armed forces and orders troops into combat (for up to 4 months w/o parliament)
  - Can dissolve National Assembly and call for new elections
  - Appoints 3 of the 9 members of the Constitutional Council
- The president also formulates the state’s overall policy direction, which the PM then translates into specific programs
- What is the role of the **grand écoles** and **grand corps** in the civil service?

### French Judicial System

- Built on Roman Civil Law and the Napoleonic Code, which is very different from the US/UK common law system
- Judicial precedent is relatively unimportant compared to codification of the law

**Constitutional Council:** has recently gained the power of judicial review

- 9 members, staggered 9-year nonrenewable terms
- 3 appointed by pres, and 3 each by Senate and National Assembly leaders
- “Can only strike down recently enacted legislation in the brief period before the law is actually implemented”

## ICP, France, Section 4

**National Assembly:** 577 single-member districts, with voting generally along party lines

- Can *only* legislate on enumerated matters set out in Article 34 of the French constitution
- More powerful than the upper house, the 343 member **senate**, because only the NA can both pass laws opposed by the other house and pass measures of censure on the president

**Political Party System:** two main parties, once center-right and one center-left, and a range of ‘fringe’ parties

- **Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP)** – formed in 1958 to support de Gaulle, and is consequently ‘ideologically malleable’
- **Parti Socialiste (PS)** – created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘modernized’ by Mitterand in the 1970s, “lost its ideological bearings after the right turn of 1983”
- Smaller parties
  - On the left (the most fragmented): *les Verts* (Greens: much smaller than in Germany), several Trotskyist parties, and the once-dominant *Parti communiste francais* (PCF).
  - In the middle: the **Nouveau Centre (NC) and Mouvement Democratique (MoDem)** – formerly the Union des democrats pour la France (UDF) and led by the popular Francois Bayrou (18.6 percent of the 2007 vote)
  - On the far-right: **Front National (FN)**. Dominated by the xenophobic and anti-Europe Jean-Marie Le Pen, who infamously characterized the Holocaust as a ‘historical detail’

**French National Identity:** the controversies of a universal but assimilationist approach

**The ‘Immigrants Issue’**

- Most immigrants in France come from the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, all former colonies)
  - Of the 15 million Muslims in Western Europe, a third live in France
- Unemployment rate among Muslims is twice that of the overall population
- 2004 law banning “conspicuous signs of religious affiliation” in public schools (supported by 80 percent of French population)
- Muslims face systemic discrimination (example of resume distribution experiment)

**Gender**

- The recent **parity law** “requires political parties to nominate an equal number of male and female candidates in legislative bodies whose members are elected by a list system.”
  - Has been enormously successful in municipal councils and the European Parliamentary elections (which are done by PR), but less so in the NA and the executive