

France

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

France has acquired a reputation as a nation with a strong commitment to equality and social justice from its many struggles throughout its history. During much of the 18th and 19th century, French history was characterized by struggles between the monarchy and the nobility and also between the nobility and the common people. This led to numerous revolutions, most notably from 1789-1794 and then again in 1848. After 1871, France established the Third Republic and became a stable democracy.


The most dramatic events of the 20th century for France were the two world wars. WWI profoundly affected the country, as 50% of Frenchmen between the ages of 20-30 were killed. During WWII, France suffered the worst military defeat in its history. France was occupied by the Germans before being liberated by Allied troops with the help of the French Resistance in 1944.

After WWII, France directed most of its energies toward reconstruction. The US-funded Marshall Plan was a key factor in those efforts. France's success at reconstruction allowed it to build an elaborate social security system and welfare state. Overseas, France went through a violent process of decolonization as many of its former colonies sought independence. France lost control of Vietnam in 1954 after an eight-year war. It lost Algeria, which was supported by the UN, in 1961.

In 1958, France adopted the Constitution of the Fifth Republic and elected as its president Charles de Gaulle, a former army general and leader of the French Resistance during the war. De Gaulle reformed much of the economy and steered France toward the modern era. In 1960, he granted independence to all French African colonies.

The next big issue for France became European unification. The drive towards a more integrated Europe began



<p>Flag</p>  <p><i>The three colors originate from the French Revolution of 1789. Red and blue were the colors of the City of Paris' coat of arms and white was the color of the royal house.</i></p>	<p>France: Facts</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Capital</td> <td>Paris</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Government</td> <td>Const. Republic</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Government Head (President)</td> <td>Nicolas Sarkozy</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Economy</td> <td>Capitalist</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Independence (Unification)</td> <td>1789</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Area (sq. km)</td> <td>547,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Population (millions)</td> <td>64</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Adult Literacy</td> <td>99%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pop. Growth Rate</td> <td>0.57%</td> </tr> </table>	Capital	Paris	Government	Const. Republic	Government Head (President)	Nicolas Sarkozy	Economy	Capitalist	Independence (Unification)	1789	Area (sq. km)	547,000	Population (millions)	64	Adult Literacy	99%	Pop. Growth Rate	0.57%
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Source: CIA World Fact book. Military data for year 2005. All others for year 2008. GDP figures are in Purchasing Power Parity. Tuberculosis data for year 2006 and Health Care % of GDP for year 2005 from WHO.

in 1951 and consolidated in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome in which the European Community (EC) was established. After the oil shocks of the 1970s, France made a second push for European unity in the 1980s and strongly supported the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, which France ratified in September 1992. However, in 2005 French voters rejected further strengthening of the EU by voting against a proposed EU constitution. French citizens were concerned that too much authority and too many jobs would be lost to the newest member states where the standard of living is cheaper.

In May 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy was elected President of France. A right-of-center candidate, President Sarkozy saw his election as a mandate for change. He promised to slash unemployment, cut taxes, review the 35-hour work week, shrink the government bureaucracy, reform pension rules, and make it easier to create new businesses. However, with the global recession continuing, it is unclear how many of these goals can be maintained. Mr. Sarkozy still hopes to trim government employment, tighten welfare rules, and make it easier to start a new

FRANCE TODAY

A developed country, France is located in Western Europe. It is about 25% larger than California in size. A leading country of the world, it has the eighth largest economy (according to the CIA World Factbook). France is known for its gourmet food and wines, which make the country a popular tourist destination. It also prides itself on its global leadership role and tends to have an active voice on international security issues. It is one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and plays a leadership role in other organizations such as NATO.

France was one of the main battlegrounds of both World War I and II. Although victorious in both wars, the devastation to its empire and infrastructure and the toll on its people was immense. In recent years, France's ability to reconcile with Germany and to forge a close working relationship with its enemy of both world wars has contributed to the continent's recovery over the past 60 years. Germany and France led the decision to economically integrate Europe, now known as the European Union (EU).

France is attempting to transition from a well-devel-

oped market-based economy that has featured extensive government ownership and protections to one that is more flexible and receptive to market conditions. For years the country's unemployment rate has hovered around 10-12%. The rate dipped to about 8% during the strong global economy of 2006-08. But with the worldwide recession, it is expected to climb in 2009. Attempts to shed some of the government protections in the recent past have been met with large public street protests and strikes.

Another challenge for the country has been the integration of six million Muslims, most of them from former French colonies. With unemployment rates of about 40%, they exist on the fringes of French Society. For three weeks in 2005, youths of African origins fire-bombed 10,000 vehicles and hundreds of schools, businesses, and government buildings. The government has promised more education and job opportunities for poor youth. But large-scale affirmative action programs such as the ones instituted for minorities in the US in the 1970s are illegal under French law.

Human Rights

As an old democracy, France takes pride as the "inventor" of human rights. The first declaration of human rights was in 1789 during the French Revolution. France has a very high level of human rights protection for its citizens.

Internationally, France has often promoted human rights, which it describes as one of the fundamental principles of its foreign policy. The country is one of the leading donors of foreign aid. It frequently ties foreign aid to the protection of human rights issues in the countries it provides aid to. However, in some cases (Iraq, China, and former colonies in Africa, such as Zaire), France has given commercial or diplomatic concerns a higher priority than human rights promotion. In the case of China, France argued that foreign aid should not be tied to human rights. However, with its former colonies in Africa, France has tied foreign aid to human rights improvements. On the non-government side of this issue, France has very active human rights NGOs. Through the European Union, France supports the EU's funding and administration of human rights NGOs in other countries.

France has virtually no child labor problem. There are

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effectively enforced laws strictly banning the employment of children under 16 and not allowing physically difficult work for children under 18. The government demonstrates a strong commitment to children's rights and welfare through well-funded systems of public education and medical care.

France has well-developed and well-enforced laws for dealing with violence against women, including violence that occurs within marriages. The government also provides shelter, counseling and assistance for women who are victims of abuse.

Although the law prohibits job discrimination based on sex, studies have shown that women continue to receive lower wages than men for equal work. In addition, women's rights groups criticize sexual harassment laws as inadequate to protect women from hostile work environments.

France's most difficult human rights issues relate to its Muslim and Jewish minority religious groups. In the 1960s, during periods of fast economic growth, France suffered labor shortages and invited a large number of migrant workers from its former African colonies. However by the 1980s, with rising French unemployment, this minority population began facing anti-immigrant discrimination. They are increasingly isolated in urban ghettos, and second generation minorities are not well integrated into French society.

In 2004, one of the most hotly debated issues in France was a new law to promote total equality in public schools. The part of the law that has gained so much attention is a ban of "religious signs" in public schools. Under this law, Muslim girls are not allowed to wear head scarves, Jewish boys cannot wear skullcaps (yarmulkes), and Catholics cannot wear large crosses. Even though the law applies to all religions, the main goal is to prevent Muslim girls from covering their hair in class. France considers head scarves to be discriminatory against females, and wants public schools to be non-religious (secular) places that promote sexual equality. Secularism underlies the French concept of government and dates back to 1789 and the French Revolution. French thinking differs from pluralist societies, such as the US, which try to emphasize acceptance and celebration of the cultural differences among their citizens. In contrast, the French ideal envisions a consistent, secularized French identity as the best way to preserve national unity and the separation of church

and state. The law passed the French legislature by an overwhelming margin.

Muslims strongly oppose this law due to the ban on head scarves in school. They argue that forcing girls to remove their head scarves would violate their religious beliefs. Many worry that girls will simply drop out of school instead of complying.

In 2005, after two minority children were electrocuted hiding in a power station while running away from police, three weeks of riots erupted in immigrant neighborhoods across the country. About 10,000 cars were burned, almost 500 public schools or buildings were attacked, and 4,770 people were arrested. The rioting was a popular revolt caused by joblessness, discrimination, and poverty. In response, the government is struggling to promote ethnic minorities without setting racial quotas, which politicians see as intruding on civil liberties. French law prohibits differentiating between people on the basis of color or race. Companies are prevented from keeping records of the number of employees with minority backgrounds.

However, some employers have begun putting diversity policies into practice, raising awareness and broadening recruitment procedures. One government official has suggested a way of monitoring minority employment is to use the birthplace of a parent or grandparent. No one believes that such ethnic monitoring will solve the problem overnight. But without some way to measure the extent of discrimination, it is hard to know the degree of integration's progress.

France not only has Western Europe's highest Muslim population, it also has the area's largest Jewish population. When tensions are high in the Middle East, anti-Semitic violence can occur. After 9/11, some Jewish schools and synagogues were attacked. About 2,300 Jews left for Israel because they felt unsafe. At the time, French leaders accused Muslim immigrants of contributing to the anti-Semitic violence. In January 2009, government leaders warned that the conflict in Gaza between the Palestinians and Israelis should not be used as an excuse for renewed anti-Semitic behavior. Reports were trickling in that there was minor damage done to a few synagogues. A French Muslim leader called for calm. He said that no motive could justify an assault on a place of worship.

Environment

Geographically, France is the largest country in Western Europe and has the lowest population density. France suffers from urban air pollution in many of its cities and water pollution in agricultural regions. It also suffers from acid rain in the north of France. France has a rigorous set of environmental laws and regulations. However, two notable exceptions concern automobile exhaust emissions and ground water pollutants from chemical fertilizers.

France also faces challenges due to its reliance on nuclear energy for 80% of its electrical needs. The country reprocesses used nuclear fuel in a chemical plant to separate plutonium, uranium and fission products. But reprocessing does not get rid of the radioactivity. Instead it creates more pollution.

France's reprocessing plant is located in Normandy near the English Channel. Liquid waste discharges from reprocessing are polluting the English Channel and spreading radioactivity in the seas of Western Europe. The pollution from the reprocessing plant has so angered other European countries that 12 members of the OSPAR convention (a European body whose mission is to protect the marine environment) voted in 2007 for the elimination of the radioactive releases from the plant with a view to shutting down the reprocessing activity. France abstained. Denmark, Norway and Ireland have called on France and Britain, which runs a similar plant, to shut down their reprocessing operations.

In addition, the nuclear power plants are sometimes struggling in the summer months to maintain the water temperatures of river water used to cool their plants. If the river water becomes too hot, a plant needs to be shut down. That may mean energy shortages for a country with few alternative options. With global warming, it is anticipated that river water temperatures will rise for longer periods of time.

Officially, the French government prides itself on the "clean" energy source nuclear energy provides. It is offering to build plants in other countries trying to find alternative solutions to fossil fuels.

France: Health

Birth Rate	13/1,000
Death Rate	8/1,000
Life Expectancy - Male	78
Life Expectancy - Female	84
Infant Mortality	3/1,000
HIV/AIDS Cases	120,000
HIV/AIDS Prevalence Rate	4/1,000
Tuberculosis Rate	14/100,000

Thus, it is somewhat ironic that internationally France has become a leader on global environmental issues. France has promoted environmental awareness within the EU and has supported many international agreements on the environment, including the establishment of a world environment fund in 1990 to assist developing countries. After an oil spill off their coastline in 2000, France has spearheaded the EU drive for stronger controls for oil tankers off the European coast.

France has closely integrated its environmental agencies and research institutions with EU agencies. In international environmental conferences, France has taken a common position with its EU partners, including its ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in May 2002. It is easier for France than most countries to take this position because of French reliance on nuclear power for its energy needs. Thus, it produces the least amount of carbon dioxide emissions of all the industrialized countries. It is on target to meet its Kyoto Protocol reduction of at least 8% below 1990 levels of GHG emissions.

The principal health challenge for France lies in reforming its funding policies to meet increasing costs due to an aging population. France has a national health insurance system that covers over 95% of its population. Most health care services are provided in the private sector. Individuals are free to choose physicians and specialists without permission. Funding is from payroll taxes. There is an emphasis on prevention of disease instead of treatment once a person becomes ill.

Current expenditures for health care equal 10.5% of its GDP. Its health care system covers nearly all health related costs, including long-term care and prescription drugs. This public focus on health care is reflected in its infant mortality rate (3 per 1,000), among the world's lowest. The average life expectancy, 81 years, is one of the highest for developed countries.

France: Economics

GDP (trillion)	\$2.075
GDP/Per Capita	\$32,600
GDP Growth Rate	2.1%
Unemployment	8%
Inflation Rate	1.5%
Exports (billion)	\$546
Imports (billion)	\$601
External Debt (trillion)	\$4.396

France has a moderately high percentage of its adult population suffering from AIDS (1 per 1,000). Its population also suffers a rate of tuberculosis of 14 per 100,000. The tuberculosis rates were increasing during the 1990s, but are now leveling off. France's rates of infection for AIDS and TB are partly due to high rates of immigration and tourism from Africa and other countries with elevated rates of disease.

Economy

France, one of the world's largest economies, has a highly developed and diversified industrial base that affords its citizens one of the world's highest standards of living. The economy combines a free market system with considerable government control over the industrial sector through planning, regulation, and some state ownership of companies.

Despite some recent attempts to move government decision making to the local level, the French government remains highly centralized. Twenty-five per cent of French citizens are employed in the public sector. This creates an overlapping bureaucracy and high tax rates (50% of GDP) to pay for the public sector. Public spending accounts for 54% of the French GDP vs. a global average of 42% of GDP. More people do not necessarily make the government more efficient. For example, the country has twice as many post offices as Germany, yet fewer of its letters arrive the next day.

The government has tried instituting limited reforms to create more private sector jobs and to move a stubbornly high unemployment rate downward. According to a government report, if France had the same employment rate and working hours as the UK, its GDP

would grow by an extra 20% over 10 years. Yet the public greets almost every reform attempted with suspicion. One reform, which would have allowed employers greater freedom to hire and fire young people, was withdrawn when the proposal led to mass student protests in the spring of 2006.

In order to tackle sluggish economic growth, President Sarkozy has vowed to cut taxes and rein in powerful trade unions. Some French government workers can now retire at age 50 with full benefits. The President has proposed to extend the years union members must work before they can retire. He also wants to index their pensions to prices rather than wages.

Presently all universities in France are state-funded. The President has proposed to let universities pursue non-government funding. This proposal resulted in student protesters blocking access to campus buildings in half of the French universities in November 2007. In the same month, there were street protests by striking state employees who would be affected by changes in the pension rules. The government insists it is ready to talk with unions but that, unlike the last government, it will not budge on plans to overhaul the French economy.

Many large French firms are very competitive in the international arena. It is the small French firms that struggle with the high cost of labor. Many employers resort to understaffing or the use of temporary staff. For example, one fast food restaurant owner says his staffing levels at French restaurants are at 66% of what they would be in the UK. Another statistic shows that after seven years of starting a business in France, an entrepreneur has only 7% more employees compared to 126% more in the US after the same amount of time.

At almost 40% of GDP, international trade is very important for France's economy. France is the world's eighth largest trading nation and is a world leader in high technology, defense, agricultural products, and services. Over 75% of French trade happens within the EU. France is a member of the WTO and adopts a free trade policy. However, the country is very protective of the subsidies provided to EU farms by the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). French farmers receive about 25% of CAP funds annually, or about \$12 billion. While farming accounts for only 4% of the workforce, the French place a huge importance on the food they eat and where it comes from. Former President

De Gaulle once said, “a country that cannot feed itself is not a great country.” Many in France still remember the food shortages they experienced after WWII. Thus the French have actively protected their farmers in all trade negotiations including recent trade negotiation rounds for the WTO. For five years the Doha round of trade talks have repeatedly collapsed due to several developed countries insistence, especially France, on protecting their farmers from competition from developing countries lower-cost farmers.

France actively seeks foreign direct investment and offers a variety of financial incentives, including tax breaks and a highly skilled workforce, to attract investment into its economy. In addition, the country has a vast banking system with extensive resources. Due to the global financial crisis, many banks in the US, the UK and Germany have needed emergency loans from their governments. However, French retail banks are weathering the storm quite well. France has set aside \$52 billion in emergency funding to boost capital in French retail banks, but only 25% of the funds have been requested. On the other hand, French investment banks have had some financial problems. They purchased some of the questionable mortgage-backed equity funds that provided the trigger for the global credit crisis in 2008.

The merging of its currency, the franc, with those of other European nations was one of the steps taken to advance European integration. While the new currency has existed for accounting purposes since January of 1999, a major milestone in European integration was passed January 2002, when euro coins and bills were first distributed. Initially, many countries that adopted the euro, including France, were having difficulties adopting the measures of the EU Stability and Growth

Pact. For several years France was out of compliance with the Pact's rule that a country must keep its budget deficit under 3% of GDP. In 2003, the EU opened an excessive deficit procedure against France. In November 2006, the EU voted to drop the procedure when the French deficit improved. The French deficit fell to 2.9% of GDP for 2005, and it stayed about even in 2006 and 2007. However, the global economic meltdown will probably cause France to move back into the red in 2009.

Security

Although the political and military power of France is somewhat more limited than in earlier centuries, modern France still has important diplomatic and political influence in world affairs. A member of the alliance that prevailed in World War II, France is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Thus, France has veto power over Council actions. The country is also one of the world's seven acknowledged nuclear powers. France is one of the few countries in the world with the ability to send military forces around the globe. Only the US has more troops overseas than France.

The French entered the 1900s as one of the world's leading powers, with colonies in Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. A member of the victorious alliance in WWI, France lost over a million lives in the war and suffered great damage to its cities, farms, and transportation systems.

In 1940, the invading German army quickly defeated the French forces and France remained an occupied country during most of World War II. After the war, France attempted to hold onto its colonies. However, it lost military campaigns to maintain colonial control in Vietnam in the 1950s and in Algeria in the 1960s. Its West African colonies also became independent in this period. Still, France has maintained a high degree of influence in these countries. For example, it is the only colonial power to maintain permanent bases in Africa.

Although a member of NATO during the Cold War, France pursued a more independent security policy than other countries in the alliance. In particular, France insisted in maintaining direct control of its own nuclear arms.

France: Security (Armed Forces)	
Military expense as % of GDP (2005)	2.6%
Armed Forces/ Spending (in billions)	\$45
Armed Forces/ Spending per capita	\$714.29

The 1990s posed a number of challenges to France. The end of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany have shifted political and economic power towards Berlin and away from Paris. However, France maintains close economic and political ties with Germany. France generally has worked to strengthen the global economic and political influence of the EU and its role in common European defense. The French just completed the rotating EU presidency on December 30, 2008. President Sarkozy relished his role as the EU President.

As an aftermath of 9/11 and the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, France and other European countries believe that they need to play a more proactive role in security-related matters. These countries historically had low military expenditures, concentrating instead on domestic and social concerns. As a result, no EU country's military comes close to the size and strength of the US forces. The Europeans see a need to change this philosophy. They are building up their ability to participate in global "hot spots" with the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). The goal is to create a force of 60,000 troops that can be sent quickly when peacekeepers are needed. France has a plan to spend about \$100 billion to build up its military strength between the years 2008-2013.

After 9/11, France agreed to allow its troops to participate in NATO military operations outside Europe for the first time since NATO was created after WWII. Currently, French troops and military leaders are involved in several parts of the world. French troops play a leadership role in several conflicts in Africa. France is also participating in NATO efforts in Kosovo and Afghanistan. France is one of the few countries willing to put its troops in dangerous parts of Afghanistan. As of August, 2008, 22 French soldiers have been killed in that unstable country. The French have about 1,700 troops serving in Afghanistan.

France has been supportive of the US war on terrorism. Anti-terrorism coordination between the two countries improved after 9/11. The French and US governments exchange intelligence information on terrorist movements and financing. Beginning in January 2002, US Customs inspectors joined French inspectors at the French port of Le Havre to inspect for WMD in US bound sea cargo containers. In Afghanistan, French special forces work alongside American special forces in the hunt for al Qaeda and Taliban forces.

While France has supported the war on terrorism, it was not in favor of the US invasion of Iraq. In the lead-up to the American invasion, the French insisted that if Iraq was found in non-compliance with the UN-mandated inspections to search for WMD, more discussions should be held before an invasion could be considered. Because the US invaded Iraq without a mandate from the UN Security Council, France refused to send troops to Iraq. Like Germany, the extent of their military involvement was to help train new Iraq police forces but only if they could be trained outside Iraq. However, French businesses have not been shy about seeking business opportunities in the new Iraq. For example, a French company won a contract to feed many of the US troops stationed in Iraq.

Since 2003, France has supported four UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on Iraq, including UNSCR 1546. At the invitation of the Iraqi government, this resolution laid out a timetable for Iraq's political transition and reaffirmed UNSC authorization for a Multinational Force in Iraq to stabilize the country. France contributed to the 230 million euro EU contribution to Iraq reconstruction in 2003. After the Iraqi Interim Government took power, France agreed to forgive substantial outstanding debt incurred by the former government.

France places a high priority on arms control and non-proliferation. After conducting a final series of six nuclear tests, the French signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. France is an active participant in the major supplier regimes designed to restrict transfer of technologies that could lead to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. There are the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Missile Technology Control Regime. It also participates actively in the Proliferation Security Initiative. The country has joined with its fellow UN Security Council members to offer a package of incentives and disincentives to Iran to halt its uranium enrichment activities. The Security Council has passed three rounds of sanctions against Iran. Yet Iran insists it has a sovereign right to continue its nuclear enrichment program.

Since the 1960s, France has experienced several instances of domestic terrorism. In the mid-1990s, a radical Algerian group terrorized Paris with a deadly bombing campaign. France has a large Muslim minority, especially immigrants from its former colony of Algeria. Investigation of radical Algerians led to the discovery

of a vast terrorist web throughout Western Europe and to the criminal conviction of many of these terrorists. Since 9/11, France has arrested dozens of people in several other terrorist investigations. Of those currently detained, there are five Pakistanis who are suspected of aiding Algerian Richard Reid, known as the “shoe bomber.” (In December 2001, Reid attempted to blow up a plane on a flight from Paris to Miami by igniting his explosives-filled shoes.) Since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the French have arrested several Islamic extremists who allegedly were recruiting men to join insurgents in Iraq.

In December 2005, the French parliament adopted a tough new anti-terrorist law inspired by British mea-

asures used to identify the bombers who carried out the July 2005 subway bomb attacks in London. The law increased video surveillance of railways stations, airports and other public areas, permitted official snooping on the internet and mobile telephone records, and lengthened the period of detention for terrorist suspects. It extended existing anti-terrorism legislation in France that was already considered among the toughest in the 27-nation EU. Human rights groups and other critics of the anti-terrorism law worry that such laws threaten basic freedoms for French citizens. The French politicians argue that they are just trying to protect their country from a catastrophe like the London subway bombings.