

The Political Class in Advanced Democracies

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	x
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xii
1 Professional Politicians: Towards a Comparative Perspective <i>Jens Borchert</i>	1
2 Australia: Party Politicians as a Political Class <i>Ian McAllister</i>	26
3 Belgium: Political Professionals and the Crisis of the Party State <i>Lieven De Winter and Marleen Brans</i>	45
4 Canada: Political Careers between Executive Hopes and Constituency Work <i>David C. Docherty</i>	67
5 Denmark: Professionalism in an Egalitarian Political Culture <i>Torben K. Jensen</i>	84
6 Finland: From Political Amateurs to Political Class <i>Ilkka Ruostetsaari</i>	107
7 France: Enduring Notables, Weak Parties, and Powerful Technocrats <i>Marcus Kreuzer and Ina Stephan</i>	124
8 Germany: From “Guilds of Notables” to Political Class <i>Lutz Golsch and Jens Borchert</i>	142
9 Great Britain: From the Prevalence of the Amateur to the Dominance of the Professional Politician <i>Uwe Jun</i>	164
10 Ireland: Party Loyalists with a Personal Base <i>Michael Gallagher</i>	187
11 Israel: Community, State, and Market in the Shaping of the Political Class <i>Uri Ram</i>	203
12 Italy: The Homeland of the Political Class <i>Ettore Recchi and Luca Verzichelli</i>	223

13	Japan: Political Careers between Bureaucracy and Hereditary Constituencies <i>Claudia Derichs and Harold R. Kerbo</i>	245
14	Netherlands: Political Careers between Central Party Dominance and New Pressures <i>Monique Leijenaar and Kees Niemöller</i>	259
15	New Zealand: Parliamentary Careers and Electoral Reform <i>Elizabeth McLeay</i>	278
16	Norway: Professionalization—Party-oriented and Constituency-based <i>Hanne Marthe Narud</i>	298
17	Portugal: The Patrimonial Heritage and the Emergence of a Democratic Political Class <i>José M. Magone</i>	320
18	Spain: A Textbook Case of Partitocracy <i>Peter Matuschek</i>	336
19	Sweden: Between Participation Ideal and Professionalism <i>Magnus Hagevi</i>	352
20	Switzerland: The Militia Myth and Incomplete Professionalization <i>Reto Wiesli</i>	374
21	United States: A Political Class of Entrepreneurs <i>Jens Borchert and Gary Copeland</i>	392

Index

France: Enduring Notables, Weak Parties, and Powerful Technocrats

MARCUS KREUZER AND INA STEPHAN

7.1 POLITICAL PROFESSIONALIZATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

France's republican experiments in 1791–2 and 1848–52 were too short-lived to spur the development of professional politicians. It was only in 1870 with the beginning of the Third Republic that the professionalization of French politics started in earnest. Three elements characterized this professionalization. First, it took place within a large and centralized state bureaucracy the goals of which frequently conflicted with those of politicians. Second, French politicians quickly, and by European standards early, became skilled political entrepreneurs but their careers remained marked by a high degree of uncertainty. Third, disciplined political parties developed very slowly which delayed the professionalization of certain aspects of parliamentary and electoral politics.

In the Third Republic, the professionalization of politicians took place within an already highly institutionalized and large-scale Napoleonic state bureaucracy. Throughout the nineteenth century, this bureaucracy served various monarchical and imperial regimes. During the Second Empire (1852–70), for example, Louis Napoleon used the bureaucracy to select so-called official candidates, organized their election campaigns and obstructed vote-getting efforts of any challenger (Zeldin 1959; Kreuzer 1996). Therefore it is not surprising that this state bureaucracy retained some of its anti-republicanism after 1870. Higher civil servants, the local prefects, and army officers continued to be disproportionately recruited from the aristocracy and *haute bourgeoisie*.

The leaders of the Third Republic never managed to fully republicanize the civil service (Birnbaum 1994: 45–7). They succeeded, however, in introducing two administrative reforms that sought to reduce the bureaucracy's anti-republicanism. First, they created competitive entrance exams for all higher civil service positions in order to wrest the recruitment process from existing reactionary, old-boys' networks. Second, the founders of the Third Republic created the *Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques*. This new and private school was designed to rigorously train prospective

civil servants. Its high tuition costs, however, limited access to children of the aristocracy and *haute bourgeoisie* (Silberman 1993: 148–52). Ultimately, these two reforms isolated the administrative recruitment process from both reactionary influences and pressures of patronage. Yet, they also contributed to an inward-looking civil service with a technocratic and anti-political culture that remained hostile to the wheeling and dealing of the emerging political class.

The anti-political orientation of bureaucrats grew almost in proportion to the professionalization of politicians. In the 1870s, political professionalization was still limited. Conservative notables from the Second Empire continued to benefit from deferential voters, government-sponsored election campaigns, and various forms of electoral malfeasance (manipulation of voter registration, electoral invalidations, etc.; Garrigou 1992: 81). From the 1880s onwards, however, professional politicians began to displace the old notables. One important driving force behind this professionalization was the bitter constitutional conflicts fought between republicans and monarchists. In these conflicts, each side tried to win the upper hand by modernizing its electioneering practices and improving its local organizational infrastructure (Kreuzer 2001: 23–51). As a result, politicians could no longer win votes by relying solely on their social status and personal economic resources. They now also had to improve their rhetorical skills, build political networks, and satisfy the interests of their constituency. They became modern notables who assisted individual voters in their administrative dealings and in providing pork-barrel projects for their constituencies (Birnbaum 1994: 37).

This fairly rapid professionalization of politics, however, did not produce a large and very cohesive political class. Parliamentary pay remained modest as any increases faced stiff public opposition. Payments were first introduced in the Second Republic (1848–52) but the 9,000 francs (FRF) annual salary remained unchanged until 1909 when it finally was increased to FRF15,000—an amount about as high as the salary for a higher civil servant. Furthermore, political careers provided little security, the electoral turnover rate remained high throughout the Third Republic. On average, 41.2 percent of the Deputies were newly elected between 1870 and 1893, between 1894 and 1914 the rate was 35.4 percent and 40 percent between 1918 and 1939 (Dogon 1953: 322). These high turnover rates also kept legislative seniority fairly low at around 10 years throughout the Third Republic. According to Dogon, France developed a two-tiered political class with one tier consisting of regularly re-elected incumbents and another tier with short-lived, political “itinerants” (Dogon 1953: 332).

This high degree of professional uncertainty can partially be attributed to the weakness of France’s nineteenth century parties and their consequent inability to regularize political careers. The professionalization described so far proceeded from one form of notable politics to another—without parties assuming any political prominence. The enduring, albeit altered, strength of notable politics reflects the fact that universal male suffrage was introduced before the onset of the industrial revolution in 1848. Because of this sequencing, electoral professionalization took place in the absence of well-organized interest groups, national communication infrastructure (e.g. railroads, national press), large scale urbanization and distinctly formed

class identities. Such an environment kept the costs of winning votes low and facilitated local, door-to-door canvassing and informal personal networks around which notable politics was organized (Kreuzer 2001: 23–51). Once institutionalized, notable politics had greater latitude to minimize the demands generated by industrialization for more national and disciplined party organization (Huard 1996).

The weakness of parties meant that France's political class, for all its *esprit de corps*, remained atomistic and weakly organized. The atomistic quality became particularly apparent in the legislature. Deputies frequently belonged to multiple parliamentary groups, switched their memberships and rarely adhered to disciplined party voting in the *Assemblée nationale* (AN). The Third Republic's parliamentary procedures purposefully obstructed the professionalization of legislative affairs. These procedures required that committee positions be assigned by lottery and prohibited parliamentary groups from holding their meetings in the chamber of Deputies. These restrictions served to randomize legislative careers and prevent the formation of disciplined parliamentary groups. Such groups were widely considered to be incompatible with a Deputy's free mandate (Albertini 1961: 586–669; Mestre 1994: 14). The lifting of these restrictions in 1910 contributed to a modest increase in parliamentary discipline during the inter-war period. Committees became better organized and had greater continuity in their membership. They, however, still had no administrative support staff (Albertini 1959: 39).

The most notable development between 1900 and 1939 was the growing importance of parties in electoral politics. By 1914, Socialists, Republicans, and Conservatives had all transformed their informal organizational networks into permanent parties. These parties functioned as national umbrella organizations for coordinating fundraising, distributing campaign material, and strengthening voters' party identification. However, these new parties complemented rather than supplanted the personal vote-seeking style of political notables. They were loosely structured electoral organizations that were strictly tailored to the re-election needs of individual political entrepreneurs (Huard 1996: 226–89). They did not give—as it was the case in Germany—rise to party bureaucrats and still required that Deputies launch their political careers as locally elected officials and cumulate offices to support their political ambitions. Any organizational innovations that would have limited the autonomy of Deputies never got past the drawing board. During the inter-war period, only the *Section française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO)—which was then splitting into the Socialists and the Communists—and the Radical Party (*Parti Radical*) formalized their governance mechanisms sufficiently to permit grassroots members to influence personnel and policy matters (Kreuzer 2001: 71–8, 91–7).

The German occupation and the Vichy regime constituted a contradictory break in the development of the political class. On the one hand, the parliamentarians themselves gave away their power by transferring their competencies to Marshal Pétain; furthermore, the prohibition and suspension of parties interrupted the institutionalization process that had begun in the inter-war period. On the other hand, the Vichy regime neither had well organized and trained followers—like for example the German or Italian fascist mass organizations—nor own qualified elites which

could have supported the takeover at the local level and thus sustained the power apparatus. The regime had to fall back upon local elites. After the liberation of France in 1944 a new breed of politicians from the *résistance* was recruited at the national level, while the local level was marked by continuity (Höhne 2000).

During the Fourth Republic (1945–58), the importance of political parties continued to grow and that of notables to decline. The three largest parties, the Socialists, Communists, and Christian Democrats (*Mouvement Républicain Populaire*—MRP), were also the three best organized groups. They had centralized their electoral organizations, recruited sizable memberships, and established formalized governance structures. Their organizations allowed them to carry out national campaigns, control the formulation of policies and, to a lesser extent, direct the recruitment of candidates. Individual candidates consequently had less opportunity to promote themselves and were more frequently denied re-nominations if they were disloyal to their parties (Williams 1958: 348–9).

The parties even managed to organize legislative business more tightly. They set the agenda, assigned committee positions and allocated ministerial portfolios. Therefore, public “interest shifted away from the Palais Bourbon [Parliament] where decisions were formally registered to the party meeting where they were really made” (Williams 1958: 359). Party discipline was by no means as strict as in Britain or Germany but it noticeably increased after 1945. Other aspects of parliamentary work, however, remained unchanged: Deputies still received no public funds for hiring support staff. Parties instead levied a tax on the Deputies’ incomes to employ legislative staffers. The salaries and pension benefits continued to be pegged to those of higher civil servants (Williams 1958: 365, 193). At the cabinet level, civil servants assumed a more prominent advisory role after 1945. Many of these member of the *Haute Administration* (ministerial bureaucracy) came from the new *Ecole Nationale d’Administration* (ENA) which was created in 1945 (Birnbaum 1994: 59–66).

The Fifth Republic constitutes a significant break in France’s political professionalization. After 1958, politics was characterized by the growing influence of technocrats, stricter party discipline in parliament, and the renewed electoral importance of notables (Ruß *et al.* 2000).

7.2 THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Political professionalization in France has been shaped by the enduring tensions that existed between administrative state structures and representative political institutions. Since 1870, entrepreneurial politicians with their need for particularistic benefits co-existed with a large and centralized state bureaucracy which saw itself as self-appointed defender of the national interest. These enduring tensions, however, were significantly modified by the different constitutional configurations of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Republics. The Third Republic’s political institutions exacerbated the tensions between politicians and bureaucrats. Its small, single-member districts personalized electoral contexts and created considerable demand for all

sorts of particularistic benefits (Kreuzer 2001: 53–70). Its weak executive and strong committees, in turn, imposed few disciplinary constraints on Deputies to desist from endless pork-barrel projects and advocate coherent, national policies as favored by state officials (Albertini 1959). In the Fourth Republic, proportional representation and the introduction of women suffrage led parties to pursue more collective policies and the strengthening of the executive restricted the allocation of particularistic benefits.

However, it was not until the Fifth Republic that the tensions between politicians and bureaucrats were significantly reduced. De Gaulle made no secret of his dislike for the parochial politics of the Third Republic and the polarized sectarianism of the Fourth. To prevent a repetition of these experiences, he changed the representative political institutions as well as the administrative state structure. With the aim to improve the coordination of economic development policies and to curtail the power of the cities and *Departements* de Gaulle introduced various administrative reform projects. Local politicians and bureaucrats were successful, however, in obstructing and finally preventing many reforms—except the implementation of the regions (Schmidt 1990: 76–82).

With the introduction of a plurality electoral system with a second ballot Charles de Gaulle and Michel Debré—the two major figures behind the formulation of the Fifth Republic's constitution—drew upon a modified form of the old two-step voting system. Candidates wanting to participate in the second ballot for Parliament have to overcome a legal threshold (5 percent in 1958–66; 10 percent 1966–76; and since 1976 12.5 percent but since then referring to the totality of all persons entitled to vote). This threshold reduced the localizing and personalizing effects of the electoral system of the Third Republic by automatically excluding smaller parties and candidates which had regularly “sold” their withdrawal from the second ballot and/or their support to the highest-bidding remaining candidate. Furthermore, it made it easier for party elites to coordinate the withdrawal of candidates at the national level, thus diminishing the possibilities of candidates to act as free agents and representatives of local interests (Bartolini 1984: 107; Kreuzer 2000). The introduction—in a referendum (1962)—of the direct election of the President amplified these effects, because it nationalized politics and exerted an important coattail effect on parliamentary elections. Furthermore, by admitting only the two candidates with the highest number of votes to the runoff ballot (if no one gained the absolute majority in the first ballot), the election procedure contributed to the formation of two disciplined, bipolar blocs able to gain majorities and to be resistant to claims of particularized preferential treatment (Bartolini 1984: 119–20). Eventually, presidential elections did not only modernize the campaigns, but have also strengthened the political parties in respect to the mobilization of resources and the logistic organization of electoral campaigns (Cole 1993).

The Fifth Republic's electoral system and campaigning regulations reflect the continued effort to minimize the political influence of interest groups. The single member districts localize and personalize representation and make it more difficult for interest groups to co-opt political parties. Ever since 1875, French electoral law determined a wide range of economic incompatibilities between the parliamentary mandate and

positions in private corporations (Liebert 1995: 415). It also restricts the ability of interest groups to use their financial resources in order to influence political parties. Political finance regulations, for example, forbade until 1988 any private contributions to parties and limited the money that could be raised from party members. A new law passed in 1990 has restricted private contributions to 20 percent of campaign expenditures. This law also established formal restrictions on print and media advertising that were intended to moderate the cost of modern election campaigns and limit the financial dependence of parties on interest groups (Kreuzer 2000; Doublet 1992: 43; Drysch 1993: 165; Benoit and Scale 1995: 33–4). However, the new and old regulations only constrained but never prevented the mobilization of private capital resources as parties resorted to various illicit forms of political financing (Mény 1995: 159–72).

A remarkable feature of the Fifth Republic's constitution is the double-headed executive with the President as the head of state and the Prime Minister as the head of government. The President has not only the right to nominate a Prime Minister as well as individual ministers (as proposed by the Prime Minister), but can also dismiss them. Furthermore, he heads the council of ministers. In times when the Prime Minister and the President are from the same political camp, as was always the case up to 1986, the President also sets the overall direction of the government's policy, the Prime Minister and the cabinet merely being instruments of implementation. In times of split affiliations (*cohabitation*) the authority shifts towards the government and thus to the Prime Minister who is constitutionally in charge of determining and guiding national policy (article 20 of the constitution). Despite the incompatibility of governmental office and parliamentary mandate, which was intended to strengthen the autonomy of the executive *vis-à-vis* the legislative, the *cohabitation* leads to an empowerment of the *Assemblée nationale* (and hence the parliamentarians and party groups). The reason is the Prime Minister's increasing dependence upon the parliamentary majority to carry through his policy—at the same time as he lacks the backing of the President. The Prime Minister tightly controls the agenda set in his cabinet. He is responsible for all ministerial decisions and continuously supervises the activities of ministers with the help of a large staff (Thiébault 1994: 139–40). He also dominates the legislative decision-making process.

In the National Assembly, committees play a subordinate role. There are only six permanent committees which all have an extremely large membership (up to 145). This limits their specialization and ability to develop expertise that could offset the informational advantages of the government. Committees also have no right to initiate legislation and only limited possibilities to modify it (Mattson and Strøm 1995). Furthermore, the constitution gives the government extensive decree powers which permit it to by-pass the National Assembly and the Senate and to circumvent the Assembly's delaying power by calling a so called package or blocked vote which is final and only contains the amendments acceptable to the government (Andrews 1978: 490–1).

This legislative disenfranchisement affects the balance between France's representative and state structures in two ways. First, it deprives Deputies and Senators of the

possibility to allocate particularistic benefits. The government, for example, can automatically block any private member bills or amendments that will either increase expenditure or decrease revenues (Andrews 1978: 485, 493). Second, the weakening of the *Assemblée nationale* indirectly enhances the influence of civil servants over the legislative process. Where committees previously discussed and amended bills, now members of the executive supervise the drafting of bills (Suleiman 1973: 749–52).

The Assembly can force the government to resign by way of a motion of no confidence, which must be introduced by at least 10 percent of the Members. On the other hand, the Prime Minister has the possibility to discipline his parliamentary majority by tying a vote of confidence to a bill (article 49.3).

Finally, only the President can dissolve Parliament which gives him the ability to discipline his parliamentary majority or, lacking one, to call an early election in the hope of winning a majority. These rules regulating governmental survival all increase the autonomy of the executive from the legislature in times of political correspondence between the Prime Minister and the President. They have allowed the executive to pay little attention to the career ambitions of Deputies and appoint as ministers or cabinet advisors the allegedly apolitical civil servants that de Gaulle viewed as the most competent guardians of the national interest. However, political practice has changed since the days of de Gaulle: the ministerial bureaucracy has become politicized, the change in government in 1981 as well as the *cohabitations* have led to a different conception of the parties and to a strengthened position for the Assembly. The political system oscillates between a presidentialization on the national level and—since 1982—an increasing importance of the departmental and regional level due to the laws on decentralization (see Section 7.4).

Overall, the semi-presidential system that de Gaulle devised significantly strengthened the executive and weakened Deputies as well as parties. The resulting asymmetry of power between these three political actors ultimately limited the importance of particularistic benefits and facilitated the growing influence of senior civil servants and technocrats.

7.3 THE POLITICAL CLASS

A political class is characterized as a professionalized, homogenous, and closed structure, living off politics. Hence it is necessary, regarding the Fifth French Republic, to enlarge the point of reference from the so called traditional *hommes politiques* to the higher civil servants and the management of the (former) public sector. “Indeed, in critical ways, the elite has become indistinguishable from the political class in France. The barriers between serving the state, serving one’s personal interest, and serving political interests have been blurred to the point of becoming, for all practical purposes, nonexistent” (Suleiman 1995: 161).

Because of their common structures of recruitment and common interests—related to a distinct historical conception of the state and its centralized bureaucratic

structure—one can find the core of the political class exclusively on the national political-administrative level which hardly extends beyond the boundaries of Paris (not to say the boundaries of the seventh *arrondissement*; see Chevallier 1997).

7.3.1 *Size and Composition*

By international comparison, France can surely be seen as a “Republic of office-holders” (Ruß 1993) due to its *c.* 500,000 electoral offices. But only a small part of these can be found on the national level and few allow their holders to be financially independent: most prominently the 577 members of the *Assemblée nationale* and the 321 members of the *Sénat*. Concerning the cumulation of offices (*cumul des mandats*, see below), the more than 3,800 seats of the *conseiller généraux* at the *Départements* level and the roughly 1,700 seats in the regional councils are also important because of their influence and remuneration (Knapp 1991: 18; Frémy and Frémy 1996: 2165). Looking at the governmental and ministerial level one finds a mix of political and administrative posts, the number of which Kimmel estimates to 1,000 (Kimmel 1996: 18). We have also to include the leading posts of the nationalized or formerly nationalized enterprises because they have often been filled by former members of the Assembly or other members of the political class (Birnbaum 1994: 80–1; also cf. Bock 1999).

On the other hand, the French political parties contribute little to the professionalization of their personnel in this regard (except for the *Parti Communiste Français*—PCF, see below). Their small size as well as their weak financial base generally do not allow them to finance full-time politicians; they contribute more to the professionalization of politicians in terms of recruitment, career-planning and organization of election campaigns (Ysmal 1994: 198–202).

7.3.2 *Political Recruitment and Political Careers*

Political careers in the Fifth Republic usually follow one of two paths, both of which are founded on the historical traditions of the French state: on the one hand the importance of an autonomous and centralized administration claiming political independence, and on the other hand the significance of locally established politicians acting as a “hinge” between centralism and localism.

These traditions have been reinforced both by the institutional characteristics of the Fifth Republic (majority vote, incompatibility of executive posts and Assembly seats) and by the development of the *Assemblée nationale* towards a national legislature of local office holders (a function originally meant for the *Sénat* only). At the same time, with the founding of the ENA in 1945, an elite of administrative technocratic experts has been created. This elite can fulfill a multitude of functions and is to be found on the highest levels of the state since the 1950s. The *énarchisation* has been characteristic of certain career patterns: e.g. after graduating from the ENA joining one of the *grands corps* (*Inspection des Finances*, *Conseil d'Etat*, *Cour des*

Comptes), followed by a post in a ministerial cabinet, perhaps culminating in the rise to director of a cabinet or even in a ministerial post.¹ Since access to the *Haute administration* apart from the *grandes écoles* is barely possible, this education leads to a certain uniformity of the administration. A strongly developed *esprit de corps* and a similar socio-economic background, of a bourgeois nature, support the development of a homogenous, autonomous, and self-reproducing elite, which tends to assume a class character and extends its influence beyond political boundaries (Birnbaum 1994; Thoenig 1996).

Although the Left criticized the political hegemony of the conservative and liberal parties in the 1970s as “Etat-UDF” (UDF = *Union pour la démocratie française*) and “Etat-RPR,” no change took place after the Socialist’s ascent to power in 1981. There was neither a significant exchange of administrative elites nor a renunciation of the mechanisms of recruitment. When the ENA-graduate Laurent Fabius became Prime Minister in 1983, the technocrats were also accepted by the Socialist government. After the aristocracy and the *notables* of the Third Republic as well as the civil servants of the Fourth Republic, the membership of the administrative elite became the decisive criterion: “à la République des fonctionnaires semble succéder une République d’experts en affaires économiques” (Birnbaum 1994: 161). Connected to the change of power was a certain politicization of these elites—or rather, politicization became necessary and visible. But France is not yet a party state (*Parteienstaat*) like Germany, where the “correct” party membership sometimes is more important than competence to get a post. Yet, also in France some political scientists complain about the “osmosis” of political and administrative circles (Portelli 1988: 27; Chevalier 1997: 91).

After gaining access to politics via a ministerial cabinet and other governmental posts, members of the administrative elite may continue their careers in different ways: (1) return to the former administrative office, (2) assume a leading position in (formerly) nationalized enterprises, or (3) further develop and stabilize their political career through a national mandate as Deputy or Senator (Birnbaum 1994: 84). To preserve or to enlarge their own chances of re-election, politicians may use the possibilities of *parachutage*. This means a top-to-bottom process of nomination in a (safe) constituency for politicians who are already established on the national level (Chavel 1995). But to protect the political career it is insufficient to win a constituency and a seat in the AN given the majority voting procedure. Because of the high electoral volatility, even the “stars” of the political scene can easily be voted out. Only a local anchorage with intensive effort at the base level and some more local or regional elective mandates can significantly enlarge the chances of re-election and provide an extra income. On the other hand, a strong identification of the candidates

¹ Under this career pattern we can also find the graduates of the *Ecole Polytechnique* (called “X”), who are qualified for the entrance in the *Corps des mines* or the *Corps des Ponts-et-des Chaussées*, leading to the technical administration, of the *Ecole Centrale* and of the business-schools HEC, ESSEC, ESCP. But it is more important to belong to one of the *grands corps* than to have graduated from one of these *grande école*. For a critical view of the *énarchisation*, see Kesler 1997.

with national party politics and/or a concentration on governmental affairs can diminish the chances of re-election.

After the rules concerning the cumulation of offices (the *cumul des mandats*) were tightened in 1985, only a combination of two of the following elective posts is now possible: Deputy in the AN or Senator, Member of the European Parliament, *conseiller régional* (Deputy on the regional level), *conseiller général* (Deputy on the level of a *Département*), city councilor of Paris, mayor in a community with more than 20,000 inhabitants, *adjoint* (vice-mayor) in a community with more than 100,000 inhabitants (Knapp 1991: 35).

A second path of professionalization is a bottom-to-top process which finds its starting point in local politics. At the outset a political party commitment is not necessary. However, this becomes indispensable for national office because of the electoral system and its block-building mechanism. Depending on the importance of the town/the region in the national context, a mayor or president of the regional council may gain importance in party politics. A connection with national politics via a mandate in the Assembly or the Senate was indispensable in the years before the passing of the decentralization acts (1982) to get access to the center of power and decision-making in Paris. Via this route, local politicians could by-pass the omnipotent departmental representative of state power, the *préfet*. Both career components are complementary: "Mayors seek national office either for itself or for the resources that access to Paris can deliver. Deputies seek municipal office either for itself or for the local resources—in terms of goodwill, cash and logistical—that a town hall can deliver. Thus national office reinforces local office, and vice versa" (Knapp 1991: 30).

A local mandate offers personal and material resources in campaigning, which are not immediately at the disposal of *parachutés*. Due to the absence of party- and campaign-finance laws until 1988 as well as to the weak financial situation of political parties in France, access to such resources and the illegitimate practices of party-financing (e.g. by super-elevated bills from consulting companies) have been the decisive factors in campaign-financing (Ruß 1993; Doublet 1997; Mény 1997).

The coincidence between re-election as a proof of confidence in the individual, locally based Deputy and the crisis of representation of the political class as a whole is shown by poll results (Ysmal 1995; *Le Monde*, 27 February 1997): for some years, French people have trusted their mayors (1997: 68 percent), while they mistrusted their MPs and ministers (36 percent and 41 percent, respectively).

Increasing electoral volatility, changes in the party-system, and the majority vote lead to a high percentage of marginal seats. For the period from 1958 to 1991 Ysmal estimates only 99 (21 percent) safe constituencies (Ysmal 1994: 202). In every newly elected assembly, almost one-third of the MPs are freshmen; the average incumbency is about 2.6 legislative terms (cf. Ysmal 1994: 193–4). This high degree of turnover offers a possibility for the political parties to select new candidates in many constituencies. As the elections of 1993 and 1997 showed for the PS (*Parti Socialiste*) and for the RPR (*Rassemblement pour la République*) respectively, electoral landslides are leading to a renewal of the political personnel and to a restructuring within the parties.

The different career patterns (top-to-bottom, bottom-to-top) are also leading to different professional paths of former Deputies (Birnbaum 1994: 80–2; Dogan 1999). While locally anchored politicians, regardless of their political persuasion, often enter leading posts on the local level, where they bring in their national experience and contacts, “top-to-bottom-politicians” stay on the national level in the management of (formerly) nationalized enterprises or return to their original authorities. In any case the contacts to the administrative elite (via education or co-operation) are more decisive for this group than the party affiliation—a fact which reflects the importance of the *grandes écoles* in forming a homogenous elite (Suleiman 1995).

With regard to the social background we find two tendencies for the Deputies as well as for the political-administrative field: “le personnel politique de droite vient principalement de la bourgeoisie économique et de la haute fonction publique, et celui de gauche de la bourgeoisie intellectuelle et de la fonction publique moyenne et supérieure” (Denni 1993: 422). This tendency is confirmed by the composition of the AN with a dominance of self-employed people in the RPR and UDF and a dominance of teachers and professors on the left. To this can be added a clear dominance of males and an average age of 48–52 years in the AN (Ysmal 1995).

Only one change can be observed in the last years: the proportion of women has risen to 11 percent (sixty-three female Deputies) in 1997 and 12 percent in 2002, so that in a European comparison it is no longer France but Greece which occupies the last rank (*Le Monde*, 4 June 1997 and 18 June 2002). In 1997, this development was mainly due to the 30 percent quota in the process of nominating candidates instituted by the PS, as a result of which forty-two of the 246 socialist constituencies were won by women (17 percent). In 2002, in spite of the introduction of a *parité*-clause in the French constitution in 2000, French parties rather accepted a financial penalty than a 50 percent quota of women among nominated candidates.²

7.3.3 *Living off Politics*

The levels of remuneration for French office-holders (Table 7.1) are linked to the income of the higher civil service (Rouban 1994; for the following figures cf. Frémy and Frémy 2002: 1854–5). On the local level (municipalities, departments, regions) the office-holders are not allowed to earn more than FRF50,209 (€7,654) a month.³

On the national level Deputies, Senators, and members of the government get, beside their remuneration, considerable tax advantages, maintenance grants to keep offices, to travel etc. as well as credits at favorable terms (Table 7.2; for details cf. Frémy and Frémy 2002: 1854–5). There is also an incompatibility rule which forbids MPs to continue practicing their original occupations, except for farmers, shopkeepers,

² In 1997, 3 of the 8 Deputies of the *Verts* are women (37.5%), in the PCF 5 of 37 (13.5%), in the RPR 5 of 140 (3.57%), and 7 of 109 of the deputies of the UDF (6.42%). In 2002, only 68 of 3,284 female candidates won a seat in the AN (4 of 21 PCF, 23 of 141 PS, 1 of 3 *Verts*, 2 of 8 PRG, 1 of 22 UDF, 36 of 369 *Union pour la majorité présidentielle* [RPR], 1 of 3 Divers Droits). The total percentage of women in the AN has increased from 10.9% in 1997 to 11.8% in 2002. For the role of women in the political life of France, see Kleszcz-Wagner (1998).

³ Converted according to the fixed EMU rate (FRF1 = €0.15245).

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Table 7.1 Remuneration for political positions on the sub-national level, 2001 (in FRF)

Position	Monthly remuneration (before tax)
<i>Conseiller municipal</i> (city councilor)	
Municipalities < 100,000 inhabitants	No functional allowance, expense allowance possible
Municipalities > 100,000 inh.	1,384
<i>Maire</i> (mayor)	
< 3,500 inh.	3,921–9,918
Small cities (3,500–20,000 inh.)	12,686–14,992
Medium cities (20,000–100,000 inh.)	20,759–25,372
Large cities (> 100,000 inh.)	33,445
> 200,000 (incl. Paris, Lyon, Marseille)	33,445
<i>Conseiller généraux</i> (Departement-councilor)	
< 500,000 inh.	9,226–11,533
> 500,000 inh.	13,839–16,146
<i>Conseiller régionaux</i> (regional councilor)	
< 2 million inh.	9,226–11,533
> 2 million inh.	13,839–16,146

Note: 1FRF = €0.1525 (fixed EMU rate).

Source: Frémy and Frémy (2002: 1854–5).

Table 7.2 Monthly remuneration of AN Members 2002, before tax

Basic salary	€ 5,169
Functional allowance	€ 1,331
Additional privileges: lump sum for phone bills within the constituency; free travel in the first class of the SNCF; 40 roundtrip flights from Paris to the constituency; 6 roundtrip flights within France; attractive credit (c. € 76,225) loan at 2 percent interest (for 10 years) to buy a flat.	

Source: Frémy and Frémy (2002: 1854–5).

craftsmen, businessmen, and professionals, accounting for only 15 percent of all MPs (Ysmal 1994: 200). Beside the access to the parliamentary research office, MPs get administrative subsidies, sufficient to hire three personal assistants to support them in their work in the constituency and in Paris. But as this is left to the MPs' discretion, the personal staff can comprise from one to five persons (*Service de la Communication de l'Assemblée*, 27 May 1997).

According to their party affiliation, national MPs have to transfer different sums to their parties: as in the case of local office-holders the PCF gets the total income and pays the regular party salary to their Deputies. The Socialist Deputies have to transfer between €1,145 and €8,436 depending on their marital status and further local mandates. The UDF collects €383, the RPR €455 to €608 from their Deputies.

Table 7.3 *Monthly remuneration for national elective positions outside the AN (FRF, net), 2001*

Senators	
Basic salary	42,668
Add. privileges concerning travel, telecommunication, secretaries, credits	
Members of government (basic salaries)	
Prime Minister	60,879
State ministers, ministers (remunerations of further mandates may not exceed 50% of this sum)	46,972
Add. privileges: official car + driver; rent rebate; free travels with the SNCF etc.; integration in the parliamentary system of pensions, i.e., of civil servants	
President (annual)	
Basic salary (incl. flat)	10,541,000
Office, administration, library, etc.	51,483,000

Source: Frémy and Frémy (2002: 1854–5).

During election campaigns all Deputies have to put material resources (e.g. secretaries, assistants) at the disposal of their parties (Table 7.3).

The French MPs are able to get the right to a pension in only one legislature (5 years), if they pay the double of the basis sum (1996: FRF6,721 [€1,025]) to the independent and obligatory pension system for MPs. In this case they have the right to a pension of €1,524 monthly, after 37 years of a maximum sum of €5,486.

These data show again that there are only two possibilities to live off politics: either the politicians win a national seat or they cumulate several local mandates—or preferably both. In the 1997 Assembly, 495 of 577 MPs (86 percent) held one or more local mandates. Among these were 305 mayors, a number which emphasizes the continuity of the *député-maire* as a successful career-pattern. A look at the cumulation of offices accentuates this fact: 97 of 208 MPs (53 percent) are cumulating two local offices, combining the office of a mayor with a mandate as *conseiller général* (followed by 18 for the combination of *maire/conseiller régional* and *conseiller général/conseiller régional*). Only three of twenty-nine MPs cumulating three mandates are not holding an office as mayor (*Le Monde*, Dossiers et Documents: Elections législatives, 25 May 1997, own calculations). The importance of a mandate as mayor confirms our argument of the “enduring notables”—in a modernized version: a local basis enhances the chances of re-election through access to human and material resources, which cannot be delivered in the same way by political parties. Holding a national mandate without a local base almost seems to be impossible, at least in the long run.

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7.4 THE POLITICAL CLASS AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

The most important reform during the political life of the Fifth Republic has been the introduction of the direct vote for President by referendum in October 1962. In spite of some criticism from within the political class, the French people approved

the constitutional revision by 62.25 percent of the votes, due to the crisis of French politics (e.g. decolonization) and the charisma of de Gaulle (Chagnollaud 1993: 456–7). This direct vote has led to a presidentialization of the entire political system which in turn has resulted in a strong personalization of politics (Wahl and Quermonne 1995). There is a direct connection to a weakening of the political parties as intended by de Gaulle. After the “*régime des partis*” in the Fourth Republic he wanted to strengthen the executive as well as its support by an independent administration. This was started with the founding of the ENA and subsequently led to a technocratization of the administrative elites in the 1950s.

Further institutional reforms concerning the Senate and the question of regionalization had been rejected in a referendum in 1969, causing de Gaulle to resign from his post. Through this course of action he founded the French political tradition of taking the result of referenda as direct proof of trust and legitimation of the President. This first attempt at decentralization and Georges Pompidou’s failed attempt to reduce the presidential term from 7 to 5 years (which in 1973 failed to get the three-fifths majority required for a constitutional amendment) show that two decisive structural deficiencies of the Fifth Republic were recognized early, but that reforms did not find a majority in the population or in the political class.

It was only in 1981, when the socialists took over, that decentralization was realized causing the most far-reaching structural change in the French state since its beginnings. The transfer of decision-making powers and budgetary competencies from the central to the local, departmental, and regional levels resulted in a reduction of central power as embodied by the prefect and in an upgrading of the *conseillers régionaux* and *généralistes*. Also connected to this is an increase of power for local politicians who are no longer subject to prefectorial directives, but have sufficient freedom of action at their disposal and will be measured by their policies on election day (Knapp 1991; Greffet 1995). Along with a certain confusion of competencies due to the decentralization, one further accusation is that larger budgetary competencies have led to more corruption among local politicians (e.g. Alain Carrignon, Jacques Médecin; see *Le Monde*, 27 February 1997; Ruggiero 1996). Nevertheless, the French population generally has more trust in local politicians than in MPs and ministers on the national level which confirms our argument that the negatively evaluated political class is perceived to be located in Paris.

The image of a corrupt political class increasingly emerged at the end of the 1980s when the illegitimate practices of party- and campaign-financing forced the government to pass several bills concerning the public financing in these domains (cf. Ruß 1993; Doublet 1997). But the simultaneous amnesty for the involved politicians damaged the reputation of MPs and party politicians even more, reinforcing the negative evaluation of the *classe politique*. The rapid growth of parliamentary candidates is one of the consequences of the party finance acts: in 1997 there were more than 6,300 candidates for 577 constituencies (20 percent more than in 1993, 45 percent more than in 1988). This development is due to the fact that, besides the parties represented in the AN, those parties able to nominate at least fifty candidates receive state grants (in 1997 FRF11.31 [€1.72] per vote). Thus, the smaller parties heavily

rely on public funding. In 1997, the FN received FRF35.5 millions (€5.4 millions), *Les Verts* FRF11.6 millions (€1.77 millions), *Génération écologique* FRF10.3 millions (€1.57 millions), and even the trotskyst *Lutte ouvrière* received FRF2.5 millions (€0.38 millions). But also in the case of the RPR state grants made up 62 percent of the party income, in the case of the PS 45 percent (*Le Monde*, 6 May 1997).

The 1985 act limiting the *cumul des mandats* (Knapp 1991) was a first attempt to reduce the unlimited possibilities for office cumulation. It was supposed to counteract the effects of decentralization, for example, the power of local politicians resulting from shifting competencies. But since the most attractive combinations of offices (for instance office of mayor and national mandate) were not to be touched by this bill, most of the MPs approved. As a consequence, the mandates most frequently given up have been those of *conseiller régional* or *général*, while the *député-maire* model can be found as often as ever (see above).

Another attempt to break up given structures was to be found in the plan of Prime Minister Edith Cresson (1992) to transfer the ENA to Strasbourg. Through this she wanted to separate the political and the administrative elite spatially, thereby counteracting the widely held opinion that the seventh *arrondissement* in Paris contains a closed, elitist and corrupt political class. However, strong criticism from political and administrative ranks doomed this reform attempt to a failure—only some phases of the educational program have been relocated.

Some further attempts at institutional reform which aroused very mixed reactions within the political class took place in 1985 and 1995. In 1985 the Socialist government introduced the system of proportional vote for the legislative elections and declared the democratization of the institutions a programmatic goal. But the government was confronted by strong protest even within its own ranks (Michel Rocard, Minister of Agriculture at that time, resigned), because this reform was not primarily motivated by a basic change of structures in the sense of a better representation of the voter's will. Rather the Socialists intended to split up the conservative-liberal electorate by giving parliamentary representation to the FN with the result that the scale of the expected socialist defeat could be limited. After the re-introduction of the majority vote by UDF and RPR, the discussion about electoral reform stopped.

In 1995 the newly elected President Jacques Chirac initiated the most important constitutional reform since 1962 (*Le Monde*, 1 August 1995; Eilfort 1997: 67–71). On the one hand his aim was to improve communication between the population and the government (that is the President) through an expansion of the referendum: He sought to extend the direct vote to questions of the organization of public power, the ratification of agreements, and to economic and social policies. On the other hand, Chirac wished to enhance the status of parliamentary work (mainly through a more regular control of the executive) by introducing a single session from October to June instead of two sessions of three months in autumn and spring. Opposing the governmental proposal of a maximum of 150 days in session, the MPs agreed on a maximum of 120 days in session which shows how little importance the Deputies themselves accord parliamentary work: "For the MPs the parliamentary work is less

important than their local and regional mandates which cover their local basis" (Eilfort 1997: 69–70).

The most recent institutional reforms—the introduction of the *quinquennat* (the reduction of the presidential mandate from 7 to 5 years) and of the *parité* clause into the constitution (2000) will perhaps change the political life in France significantly—but it is too early for results. Most of the changes on the institutional level concerning the political class resulted from the change of power in 1981. Yet they are not connected to an explicit reformist intention, but are more a reaction to unexpected developments like the uncovering of the financing practices by the media.

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