

Module - Western Europe: France and Germany

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France and Germany are at the heart of European politics. They are two of the largest states and economies in Europe, and have been centrally involved in the political developments in Western Europe for at least the last century and a half. They continue to be important states in the European Union and in global politics. For example, the governments of both states have been crucial actors in the attempts to deal with the economic and Eurozone crises since 2008. Some knowledge and understanding of French and German political institutions and policies is, therefore, essential for students of European and comparative politics.

France and Germany are interesting case studies in a course on comparative politics, as the two countries exhibit both differences and similarities in their post-World War II political developments. For the first 40 years or so of the post-war period, the differences were arguably more visible (for example, in the nature and stability of party systems, the nature and role of the executive branch, territorial state organization, economic policy frameworks, welfare state arrangements, immigration policies, and approaches to European integration). By contrast, in recent times, it appears that similarities in issues such as economic and immigration policy, approaches to European integration and party political developments have become more pronounced. Particularly salient have been the rise of newer and often populist parties (such as the Front National/Rassemblement National and Macron's party in France, and the AfD in Germany), the resulting challenges for 'mainstream' parties, and the increasingly central role of the politics of immigration in both countries.

This module is organised around a focus on developments over time in the party systems of France and Germany. It will, however, move beyond a narrow focus on parties and the strategies and actions by political actors, and explore the extent to which these developments are rooted in features of, and challenges and changes to, the post-war political and economic foundations of the French and German political systems. We will explore how processes of globalisation and European integration, as well as the post-2007 economic crisis, have affected the French and German states and how this may have affected party politics and political stability. The lectures for this module start with an account of the post-war political and economic foundations and the party systems in France and Germany, and then explore how these have been challenged and changed in recent years, as exemplified by the rise of right-wing populism. At the end of the module, we will look at the current state and the likely future development of the two countries' party systems.

This module will give students an introduction to some important features of and recent developments in French and German politics (although, of course, it is not aiming to provide full overviews of the politics of the two countries), and provide them with a better feel for how a comparative focus can help us understand the domestic politics of states.

Background and general materials

Specific readings for the supervision essays are indicated in the last section of this guide. It is, however, strongly recommended that students consult some background materials on post-war political developments in Western Europe more broadly, and on the recent political history of

France and Germany. This section provides some suggestions for this (‘•’ indicates those that are specifically recommended), as well as some general texts on French and German politics.

General overviews of post-war European political history

- Tony Judt, *Postwar: a history of Europe since 1945* (Pimlico, 2005). [Brilliant history of post-war Europe, but long and bit dense in places.]
 - Ian Kershaw, *Roller-coaster: Europe 1950-2017* (Allen Lane/Penguin, 2018). [Doesn't have the depth of Judt's book, but has more recent coverage.]
- William I. Hitchcock, *The struggle for Europe: the turbulent history of a divided continent 1945-2002* (Profile, 2003). [Good and readable overview of the main events, developments and political actors.]
- Peter Gatrell, *The unsettling of Europe: the great migration, 1945 to the present* (Penguin, 2019). [Interesting account of the nature and role of migration in the post-war history of Europe.]

France

- Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford University Press, 1997).
 - Emile Chabal, *France* (Polity, 2020).
- Jonathan Fenby, *The history of modern France: from the revolution to the present day* (Simon & Schuster, 2015).
- Anne Stevens, *The government and politics of France*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave, 2003).
- Andrew Hussey, *The French intifada: the long war between France and its Arabs* (Granta, 2015).

Germany

- Lothar Kettenacker, *Germany since 1945* (Oxford University Press, 1997).
 - John Kampfner, *Why the Germans do it better: notes from a grown-up country* (Atlantic Books, 2020).
- Simon Green et al, *The politics of the new Germany*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2011).
- Herbert Kitschelt and Wolfgang Streeck, eds., *Germany: beyond the stable state* (London: Frank Cass, 2004). Also published as: 'Germany: from stability to stagnation', special issue of *West European Politics*, 26, 4 (2003).

Political biographies

An interesting and enjoyable way of learning about French and German political history is to read biographies of some of the main political actors. Some interesting biographies are:

- Julian Jackson, *A certain idea of France: the life of Charles de Gaulle* (Allen Lane, 2018), or Jonathan Fenby, *The General: Charles de Gaulle and the France he saved* (Simon & Schuster, 2010).
- Philip Short, *Mitterand: a study in ambiguity* (Vintage, 2013).
- Sophie Pedder, *Revolution française: Emmanuel Macron and the quest to reinvent a nation* (Bloomsbury, 2018).
- Charles Williams, *Adenauer: the father of the new Germany* (Abacus, 2003).
- Paul Hockenos, *Joschka Fischer and the making of the Berlin republic: an alternative history of postwar Germany* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
- Matthew Qvortrup, *Angela Merkel: Europe's most influential leader* (Duckworth, 2016).

Documentaries and news reports

Another option is to look at some documentaries and news reports on French, German or European politics. Here are some suggestions for publicly available materials (of varying picture quality) which focus on key aspects of the post-war political history of France and Germany.

On Europe:

- [‘Postwar Europe: how to create the long peace’](#) (Then & Now, 2018) [13 mins].
- ‘The making and breaking of Europe’ ([part 1](#) and [part 2](#)) (Al Jazeera, 2017) [47 mins each part].

On French-German relations:

- [‘How the Germans learned to love France’](#) (ARTE, 2023) [43 mins].

On France:

- ‘Portraits of power - De Gaulle’ (1999), [part 1](#) (‘Force of Character’) [23 mins] and [part 2](#) (‘Republican monarch’) [23 mins].
- [‘May 68: when France took a stand’](#) (France 24, 2018) [12 mins]. (For a longer documentary on this theme with lots of authentic visual material: [‘1968 riots in Paris, French strikes’](#) (France Documentary, 2014) [39mins].)
- [‘France’s socialist experiment’](#) (AP, 1982) [18 mins].
- [‘Veterans: the French in Algeria’](#) (Al Jazeera, 2010) [23 mins].

On Germany:

- [‘1949 - One year, two Germanies’](#) (DW, 2019) [42 mins].
- [‘Portraits of power - Adenauer: Germany reborn’](#) (1999) [23 mins].
- [‘German reunification - a short history’](#) (DW, 2017) [43 mins].

On the recent leaders and politics in Germany and France:

- [‘Angela Merkel: a profile’](#) (BBC, 2017) [12 mins]. (If you would like to see more in-depth profiles of Merkel, you can look at [‘The making of Merkel’](#) (BBC, 2013) [59 mins] and [‘Eternal Chancellor’](#) (DW, 2019) [43 mins].)
- [‘Angela Merkel steps down: what next?’](#) (BBC, 2018) [15 mins].
- [‘Germany’s new Chancellor Olaf Scholz sworn in – what’s to expect’](#) (DW, 2021) [20 mins].
- [‘Germany’s troubled economy fuels far-right rise’](#) (DW News, 2023) [10 mins].
- [‘French election explained: Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen go head to head’](#) (Channel 4, 2017) [22 mins].
- [‘President Macron: populism’s nemesis or catalyst?’](#) (BBC, 2019) [14 mins]
- [‘French election: Macron defeats Le Pen, but faces battle to unite France’](#) (Channel 4, 2022) [10 mins].
- [‘President Macron loses majority in split French vote’](#) (BBC, 2022) [6 mins].
- [‘The ‘death of democracy’ in France: protesting, strikes and Macron’s pension reforms’](#) (ABC News, 2023) [6 mins].

It should also be easy to find information – such as news reports and videos – about recent political developments in the two countries (such as the performance of populist parties in the recent European elections, the French parliamentary elections called by President Macron in June 2024, and recent regional elections in Germany). These will provide further context for the issues discussed in the latter part of the module.

Lectures

This module consists of 6 lectures. The topics of the lectures are as follows:

1. Introduction and historical background
2. Post-war party systems in France and Germany in comparative perspective
3. The post-war states in France and Germany – features and challenges
4. Increases in political volatility and party system change in France and Germany
5. Right-wing populist parties in France and Germany (1)
6. Right-wing populist parties in France and Germany (2); Conclusions: the current state of French and German party systems

Supervisions

Students will do two supervisions for this module. Some students will do these supervisions in the first six weeks or so of Michaelmas term, while others will do one supervision near the end of Michaelmas term and the other early in Lent term. The lecturer will contact the students early in Michaelmas term to notify them of the specific arrangements (timing, supervisor, etc.).

The first supervision focuses on broad patterns in the party systems in the post-war party systems of France and Germany and how these relate to the post-war state in both countries. The second supervision focuses on similarities and differences in the factors that have induced the rise of (particularly right-wing) populist political actors and parties in France and Germany in recent years.

The exact essay questions and full reading lists for both supervision assignments are indicated below. When preparing their supervision essays, students are expected to read the indicated *Core readings* and also sample some of the suggested *Supplementary readings* according to their specific interests. These *supplementary readings*, which are organised in particular categories (French party system, broader French context, German party system, broader German context, and comparative or more general readings on party systems and the broader context), should also be useful when preparing for the exam. [Note that there is a considerable overlap between some of the readings in each category, so there is certainly no expectation or need to read many of them.] For the second supervision topic, which touches on more recent developments, students should also feel free to look themselves for additional resources for their essay.

Supervision 1

Essay question: Why has the party system generally been more stable in Germany than in France in the post-war period?

Core readings:

Gérard Grunberg, “The French party system and the crisis of representation,” in *Changing France: the politics that markets make*, edited by Pepper D. Culpepper et al (Palgrave, 2006), pp. 223-243.
 Simon Bornschier and Romain Lachat, “The evolution of the French political space and party system,” *West European Politics* 32, 2 (2009): 360-383.

Thomas Poguntke, "The German party system: eternal crisis?," *German Politics* 10, 2 (2001): 37-50.
 Herbert Kitschelt and Wolfgang Streeck, "From stability to stagnation: Germany at the beginning of the twenty-first century," *West European Politics* 26, 4 (2003): 1-34 (**only pages 1-10 relevant!**).

Supplementary readings:

Party system in France

Andrew Knapp, "France: never a golden age," in *Political parties in advanced industrial democracies*, edited by Paul Webb, David Farrell and Ian Holliday (Oxford University Press, 2002).
 Alistair Cole, "Stress, strain and stability in the French party system," in *The French party system*, edited by Jocelyn A.J. Evans (Manchester University Press, 2002). [available at <https://www.manchesteropenhive.com/view/9781526137746/9781526137746.00009.xml>]
 Robert Elgie, "The changing French political system: introduction," Joseph Szarka, "The parties of the French 'plural left': an uneasy complementarity," and Paul Hainsworth, "The right: divisions and cleavages in fin de siècle France," in *West European Politics* 22, 4 (1999).

Broader context in France

Vivien A. Schmidt, "French capitalism transformed, yet still a third variety of capitalism," *Economy and Society* 32 (2003): 526-554.
 Ben Clift, "Economic policy," in *Development in French politics* 4, edited by Alistair Cole et al (Palgrave, 2008).

Party system in Germany

Susan E. Scarrow, "Party decline in the parties state? The changing environment of German politics," in *Political parties in advanced industrial democracies*, edited by Paul Webb, David Farrell and Ian Holliday (Oxford University Press, 2002).
 Gordon Smith, "Parties and the party system," in *Developments in German politics* 3, edited by Stephen Padgett, William E. Paterson and Gordon Smith (Palgrave, 2003).
 Klaus Detterbeck, "Party cartel and cartel parties in Germany," *German Politics* 17, 1 (2008): 27-40.
 Michelle Hale Williams, "Kirchheimer revisited: party polarisation, party convergence, or party decline in the German party system," *German Politics* 17, 2 (2008): 105-123.

Broader context in Germany

Andreas Busch, "Globalisation and national varieties of capitalism: the contested viability of the 'German model'," *German Politics* 14 (2005): 125-139.
 Karl Ulrich and Stefan Hillmert, "New ways of life or old rigidities? Changes in social structures and life courses and their political impact," *West European Politics* 26, 4 (2003): 79-100.

Comparative and/or more general readings on party systems and context

Herbert Kitschelt, "European party systems: continuity and change," in *Developments in West European politics*, edited by Martin Rhodes, Paul Heywood and Vincent Wright (Macmillan, 1997).

- Peter Mair, ed., *The West European party system* (Oxford University Press, 1990), chapters by Lipset & Rokkan, Rose & Urwin, and Wolinetz.
- Barry Eichengreen, *The European economy since 1945: coordinated capitalism and beyond* (Princeton University Press, 2008), chapters 2-7.
- Colin Hay and Daniel Wincott, *The political economy of European welfare capitalism* (Palgrave, 2012), chapters 1-2.

Supervision 2

Essay question: To what extent are the factors behind the recent rise of populist parties in France and Germany similar?

Core readings:

- Yves Surel, "How to stay populist? The *Front National* and the changing French party system," *West European Politics* 42, 6 (2019): 1230-1257.
- Emile Chabal and Michael C. Behrent, "Between neo-liberalism and the nation: France's political landscape in 2022," *Modern & Contemporary France* 30, 4 (2022): 517-533.
- Patrick Chamorel, "Macron versus the yellow vests," *Journal of Democracy* 30, 4 (2019): 48-62.
- Uwe Jun, "*Volksparteien* under pressure: challenges and adaptation," *German Politics* 20, 1 (2011): 200-222.
- Charlie Lees, "The 'Alternative for Germany': the rise of right-wing populism at the heart of Europe," *Politics* 38, 3 (2018): 295-310.
- Anna Grzymala-Busse, "The failure of Europe's mainstream parties," *Journal of Democracy* 30, 4 (2019): 35-47.

Supplementary readings:

Party system in France

- Anja Durovic, "Rising electoral fragmentation and abstention: the French elections of 2022," *West European Politics* 46, 3 (2023): 614-629.
- Emile Chabal and Michael C. Behrent, "The deluge: France's 2024 legislative elections," *Modern & Contemporary France* 32, 3 (2024): 329-337.
- Andrew Knapp, "France's party system in 2022," *Modern & Contemporary France* 30, 4 (2022): 495-515.
- Camille Bedock, "Understanding the unexpected: explaining Emmanuel Macron's victory in the 2017 French presidential election"; Rainbow Murray, "All change? Partisan realignment and parliamentary reform under Emmanuel Macron"; Sylvain Crepon and Nicolas Lebourg, "2007-17 – from father to daughter: shifts and constraints in the Le Pen strategy. All in Helen Drake, Alistair Cole, Sophie Meunier and Vincent Tiberj (eds), *Developments in French Politics* 6 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
- Lise Esther Herman and Marta Lorimer, "Dancing with the devil? Emmanuel Macron, Marine Le Pen and the articulation of a new political divide in France," *Nations and Nationalism* 30, 3 (2024): 425-440.
- Gilles Ivaldi, "Contesting the EU in times of crisis: the *Front National* and politics of Euroscepticism in France," *Politics* 38, 3 (2018): 278-294.

Nonna Mayer, “From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: electoral change on the far right,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 66, 1 (2013): 160-178.

Aurelien Mondon, “The Front National in the twenty-first century: from pariah to republican democratic contender?,” *Modern and Contemporary France* 22, 3 (2014): 301-320.

Broader context in France

Susan Milner, “Socio-economic policy and governance: the difficult and contested politics of reform,” and Emilie Tran, “The yellow vests movement: causes, consequences and significance,” in Helen Drake, Alistair Cole, Sophie Meunier and Vincent Tiberj (eds), *Developments in French Politics 6* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

Vivien A. Schmidt, “French capitalism transformed, yet still a third variety of capitalism,” *Economy and Society* 32 (2003): 526-554.

Ben Clift, “Economic policy,” in *Development in French politics 4*, edited by Alistair Cole et al (London: Palgrave, 2008).

Pepper D. Culpepper, Peter A. Hall and Bruno Palier, eds., *Changing France: the politics that markets make* (Palgrave, 2006), Part One.

V. Guiradon, “Different nation, same nationhood: the challenges of immigration policy,” in *Changing France: the politics that markets make*, edited by Pepper D. Culpepper et al (Palgrave, 2006).

Patrick Simon, “Contested citizenship in France: the republican politics of identity and integration,” in *Developments in French Politics 5*, edited by Alistair Cole, Sophie Meunier and Vincent Tiberj (Palgrave, 2013).

Party system in Germany

Thorsten Faas and Tristan Klingelhöfer, “German politics at the traffic light: new beginnings in the election of 2021,” *West European Politics* 45, 7 (2022): 1506-1521.

Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, “The *Alternative für Deutschland* in the electorate: between single-issue and right-wing populist party,” *German Politics* 26, 1 (2017): 124–148.

Michael Hansen and Jonathan Olsen, “The Alternative for Germany (AfD) as populist issue entrepreneur: explaining the party and its voters in the 2021 German federal election,” *German Politics*, available online (2022).

Bartek Pytlas and Jan Biehler, “The AfD in the AfD: radical right intra-party competition and ideational change,” *Government and Opposition* 59, 2 (2024): 322-340.

Manes Weisskircher, “The strength of far-right AfD in eastern Germany: the east-west divide and the multiple causes behind ‘populism,’” *Political Quarterly* 91, 3 (2020): 614-622.

Ralf Havertz, “Right-wing populism and neoliberalism in Germany: the AfD’s embrace of ordoliberalism,” *New Political Economy* 24, 3 (2019): 385-403.

Susan E. Scarrow, “Multi-speed parties and representation: the evolution of party affiliation in Germany,” *West European Politics* 28, 2 (2019): 162-182.

Thomas Poguntke, “Towards a new party system: the vanishing hold of catch-all parties in Germany,” *Party Politics* 20, 6 (2014): 950-963.

Broader context in Germany

Andreas Busch, “Globalisation and national varieties of capitalism: the contested viability of the ‘German model,’” *German Politics* 14 (2005): 125-139.

- Reimut Zohnlhöfer, "Economic policy," in *Developments in German politics 4*, edited by Stephen Padgett, William E. Paterson and Reimut Zohnlhöfer (Palgrave, 2014).
- Sidney A. Rothstein, and Tobias Schulze-Cleven, "Germany after the social democratic century: the political economy of imbalance," *German Politics* 29, 3 (2020): 297-318.
- Simon Bulmer, "Germany and the Eurozone crisis: between hegemony and domestic politics," *West European Politics* 37, 6 (2014): 1244-1263.
- Simon Green, "Germany: a changing country of immigration," *German Politics* 22, 3 (2013): 333-351.
- Joyce M. Mushaben, "Wir schaffen das! Angela Merkel and the European refugee crisis," *German Politics* 26, 4 (2017): 516-533.

Comparative and/or more general readings on party systems and context

- Cas Mudde, "The populist zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, 4 (2004): 542-563.
- Hanspeter Kriesi, "The populist challenge," *West European Politics* 37, 4 (2014): 361-378.
- Cas Mudde, "Three decades of populist radical right parties in Western Europe: so what?," *European Journal of Political Research* 52, 1 (2013): 1-19.
- Ayhan Kaya, "The use of the past by the Alternative for Germany and the Front National: heritage populism, Ostalgia and Jeanne D'Arc," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 31, 2 (2023): 318-331.
- Erik Jones et al, eds., *Developments in European politics 2* (Palgrave, 2011), chapters by Paul Webb (on political parties), Erik Jones (on the effects of globalisation), Bob Hancké (on transformation to varieties of European capitalism), Elisabetta Gualmini and Martin Rhodes (on welfare states), and Joppke (on immigration policy).
- Peter Mair, *Ruling the void: the hollowing-out of Western democracy* (Verso, 2013), chapter 3.
- Barry Eichengreen, *The European economy since 1945: coordinated capitalism and beyond* (Princeton University Press, 2008), chapters 8-13.
- Virginie Guiraudon, "Economic crisis and institutional resilience: the political economy of migrant incorporation," *West European Politics* 37, 6 (2014): 1297-1313.

Mock Exam Questions

1. To what extent have the post-war party systems of France and Germany been shaped by different forces?
2. To what extent can social changes explain the rise of populist parties in France and Germany?