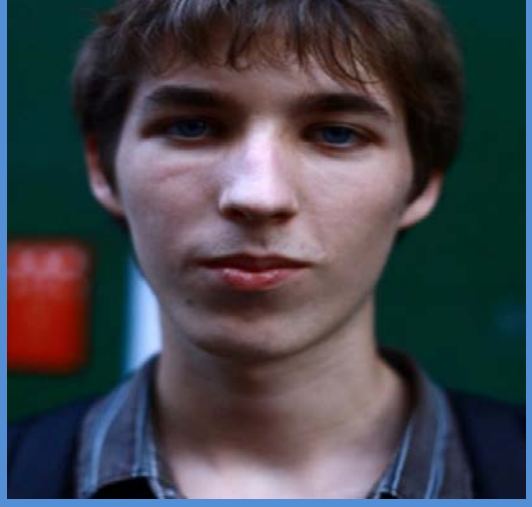
2016

Country Profile: France

Religious Literacy Project
Harvard Divinity School
February 27, 2016



Overview

France is a historically powerful Roman Catholic nation in Western Europe that has a strong tradition of secularism, known as *laïcité*. French *laïcité* emerged out of a revolutionary effort to abolish the influence of the Catholic Church in French politics, and manifests today as various boundaries that limit the expression of religious identity to private life while maintaining a secularized public sphere.[1]

Christianity remains the majority faith in France at roughly 65% and Catholic culture predominates in French society, though recent studies show that less than 4% attend weekly church services. Those who do tend to be older than the average French citizen.[2] Agnostics and atheists make up almost 25%, nearly 9% of French citizens are Muslim, and there are smaller communities (less than 1%) of Buddhists, Hindus, and ethnoreligionists. Though similarly small, France's Jewish community is the largest in Europe.[3]

Though religious and ethnic pluralism have always been a feature in France, it is expanding, bringing with it challenges to Republican "*laïque*" [secular] ideals. Especially relevant has been the growth of France's large Muslim minority population, the majority who are French citizens descended from immigrants hailing from former French colonies in North and West Africa, or are immigrants from those regions.

Contents

The Religious Literacy Project is directed by Diane L. Moore and all content is constructed under her editorial direction.

Image Source: James Cao (2014), Flickr Creative Commons, http://bit.ly/1R7tCUU

[1] Grace Davie, "Religion and Laïcité," in *Modern France: Society in Transition*, eds. Malcolm Cook and Grace Davie (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 195.
[2] Isabelle de Gaulmyn, "La France reste catholique, mais moins pratiquante," *La Croix*, December 28, 2009, http://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Actualite/La-France-reste-catholique-mais-moins-pratiquante-_NG_-2009-12-29-570979, accessed March 27, 2014; "ANALYSE: Le catholicism en France en 2009," *IFOP,* July 2009, http://www.ifop.com/media/pressdocument/43-1-document_file.pdf, accessed March 27,2014.
[3] "Country: France," *World Religions Database*, 2008, http://www.worldreligiondatabase.org/wrd_home.asp, accessed April 8, 2015.

These communities face levels of unemployment at twice the national rate and are disproportionately over- represented in low-income housing units in urban suburbs known as *banlieues*. As a result, many Muslims report difficulty integrating into French society and frustration with barriers to full "cultural" citizenship.[4]

On January 7, 2015, masked gunmen attacked the Paris offices of the French satire publication Charlie Hebdo, killing twelve people, including four cartoonists, the magazine's editor, and a policeman. The shooters were French nationals of Algerian descent representing the al-Qaeda branch in Yemen (AQAP), which had targeted the secularist humor magazine in response to its mockery of Islam, and especially for its controversial comics ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad. That same afternoon, another gunman killed four people and held another sixteen hostage in a kosher grocery store outside of Paris.[5] The complicated aftermath of the attacks included important discussions of free speech, minority politics, colonial history, anti-Semitism, and power.

The Charlie Hebdo shootings were followed by even larger-scale terrorist attacks in Paris. On Friday November 13, 2015, mass killings were arranged by ISIS to occur around the city, between the hours of 9:30pm and 12:30am. Hundreds were wounded, and a total of 130 people were killed. Eighty-nine of the victims were attending a concert at the Bataclan music hall when the venue was besieged by ISIS gunmen. Elsewhere in Paris, suicide bombers detonated their vests outside a soccer stadium, and bombed and opened fire on restaurant-goers at multiple locations. The victims were mostly French nationals, and included people of various faith backgrounds. In the days after the attacks, police carried out hundreds of raids across France and in Brussels, Belgium, in search of suspects. The suspected leader, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was killed during a raid.

Hate crimes were enacted against Muslims in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, including epitaphs "death to Muslims" written across Mosques. However, there was also a great effort to support and protect Muslims from such abuse, and to respond to the Paris attacks as an interfaith community. A series of interfaith events were scheduled in Paris from November 12–22, including a march called "Rally with Muslims of France for Peace and National Unity." Four days after the Paris attacks, the Episcopal Cathedral of the Holy Trinity hosted Muslim theologians on the World Union of Experts of Islam for Peace and Against Violence, and invited Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders to attend.

The police raids that ensued in November continued into 2016, because under the state of emergency the police were granted the authority to search without warrants. The homes of many Muslims living

[4] "Nombre de chômeurs et taux de chômage des immigrés et des non-immigrés selon le sexe et l'âge en 2013," *Insee,* 2013, http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATnon03346, accessed June 17, 2015.
[5] Franck Joannes, "A 17 heures, vendredi, les trois preneurs d'otages sont tués," *Le Monde*, October 1, 2015, http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2015/01/10/a-17-heures-vendredi-les-trois-preneurs-d-otages-sont-tues_4553226_1653578.html, accessed October 12, 2015.

in and near Paris have been searched, in addition to restaurants and mosques. These aggressive raids have produced new evidence about ISIS in France, but have also resulted in searches of many innocent Muslims' homes and worship spaces. On some occasions the raids have injured children and damaged these sacred spaces. As a result, France's response to the Paris attacks is contentious; many feel their extreme response is necessary and appropriate, while others fear their approach will alienate Muslim residents, encourage Islamophobia, and play into the hands of ISIS.

Historical Legacies

The French Revolution, the period between 1789 and 1799, radically transformed the relationship between the citizen, the church, and the state and gave rise to the French secular ideal. The Revolution led to a decade long break with the Catholic Church, and after the Revolution, a state-sponsored attack on Catholicism. Following the Revolution came the first full separation of church and state in modern times. While the conflicts between the church and state were mitigated to a certain extent during the Napoleonic era, the legacy of the Revolution continues to affect understandings of citizenship, *laïcité*, and the role of the church and state today.[6]

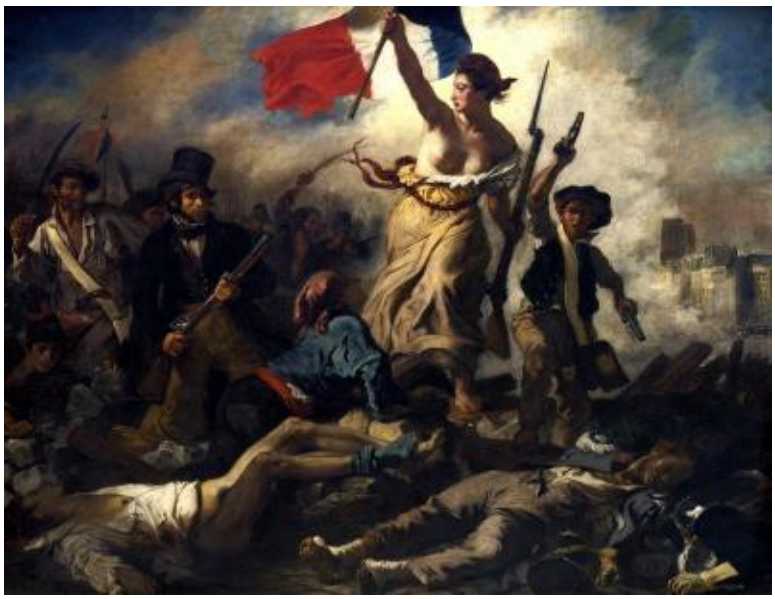
Prior to the French Revolution, France was a multi-religious society with small communities of Jews, Calvinists, and Lutherans, and yet in terms of numbers and influence, the Catholic Church remained by far the most powerful. Although the Church had been threatened during the Wars of Religion (1562–98), by the 17th century it had tens of thousands of churches, chapels, monasteries, convents, schools, and hospitals, and counted 28 million people as Catholics. In contrast, the community of 500,000 French Calvinists (Huguenots), fought to hold on to their religious practice after the Edict of Nantes (1598) was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685. While the Edict of Toleration of 1787 gave them increased rights, such as state recognition of births and marriages, they were still unable to practice their religion in public. In contrast, in Alsace, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) protected the community of nearly 200,000 French Lutherans. The 50,000 Jews that lived in France were divided between Ashkenazi communities in Alsace, where they were not even allowed to own land, and Sephardic communities in Bordeaux, Avignon and Bayonne.[7]

On the eve of the Revolution, the Catholic Church governed most aspects of collective life and civil society including education, medical, and social services, and was also the predominant force granting legitimacy to the French monarchy. By the late 18th century, the people's commitment to the church was varied. Some authors have argued the majority of the French people remained devoted to the Church and contend that many hoped that the Revolution would inspire religious reform and renewal.[8] Yet, others contend that many urban intellectuals questioned the role of the clergy, and that

[6] Timothy Tackett,"The French Revolution and Religion to 1794," in *The Cambridge history of Christianity*. Vol. 7, eds. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[7] Ibid, p. 537.
[8] Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780–1804*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America,

anticlericalism grew increasingly popular first among the French elite and court magistrates, and then among groups within the Parisian working class.[9] Some of this was due to internal religious struggles, notably between Jesuits and Jansenists, whereas external factors also affected anti-clericalism, such as the fiscal crisis tied to French participation in the American Revolution and the public's views of King Louis XVI's failure in leadership.[10]

Revolutionary leaders oversaw the seizure of Church property in France, severed foreign ties with Rome, changed the internal structure of the French Catholic Church, and transformed its institutional role within the state. However, attitudes towards religion were not uniform among revolutionaries, and changed over time. For example, some revolutionaries were entirely anti-religious, hoping to abolish public expression of religion, and to replace them with a celebration of the Republic instead, while others identified with Jesus and argued that he would have supported the revolution.[11] Despite this, the political events in the aftermath of the Revolution, such as the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790 (which required priests to swear an oath of allegiance to the Revolution and be elected by the French people, rather than named by Rome) created a break between the church and the post-Revolutionary regime by forcing clergy to choose between state and Pope.[12] In separating oath-taking "constitutional" priests from "non-juror" priests who refused to take the oath, the Civil Constitution also created a schism among the clergy and their parishioners.[13]



The post revolutionary period, beginning with the Reign of Terror (1793–1794), saw bloody and immensely destructive confrontations between revolutionaries, citizens, and members of the clergy.[14] By 1794, a de-Christianization campaign had spread in France, where radical revolutionaries closed down churches, forced priests to resign, destroyed religious symbols, and invented new Republican cults. The Directory

2000).

[9] Timothy Tackett,"The French Revolution and Religion to 1794," in *The Cambridge history of Christianity*. p. 539–541.

[10] Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[11] Suzanne Desan, "The French Revolution and Religion, 1795–1815," in *The Cambridge history of Christianity*. Vol. 7, eds. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[12] Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780–1804* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2000).

[13] Desan, "The French Revolution and Religion, 1795–1815," p. 558.

[14] John Bowen, *Why The French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 22; T. Jeremy Gunn, "Religious Freedom and Laicite: A Comparison of the United States and France," *BYU L. Rev.* No. 419 (2004), pp. 419–504.

(1795–1799), the post-Revolution Republican regime, experimented with separating church and state and continued to view Christianity as potentially subversive and pursued anticlerical or de-Christianizing policies.

Napoleon on his Imperial Throne, by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, 1806, http://bit.ly/1Gq9BZo

In 1795, the legislature voted that the state would no longer recognize or finance any religion, and religious practices and assemblies could only occur in private homes.[15] Interestingly, this separation of church and state gave Protestants and Catholics the same legal status for the first time, with neither of them receiving state aid nor public recognition. When Napoleon came to power in 1799 by overthrowing the Directory, he negotiated a new settlement with the pope (Pius VII). The Concordat (1802) re-established Catholicism in France and sought to make it dependent upon the state. It gave Catholics the freedom to worship in public, ended the Directory's separation of church and state, and continued to structure the relationship between the state and the Church through the 19th century. While the Concordat acknowledged the legal status that was granted to Protestants and Jews in 1789, Catholicism was acknowledged as "the religion of the majority of the French." The secular clergy and bishops would become salaried employees of the state and Napoleon convinced the pope to recognize as permanent the sale and transfer of church lands to the state. Just before the acceptance of the Concordat, Napoleon added his own set of Organic Articles without the knowledge or agreement of the papal envoy. These seventy-three articles created a new Ministry of Religion (Cultes) to oversee and negotiate with the Church.[16]

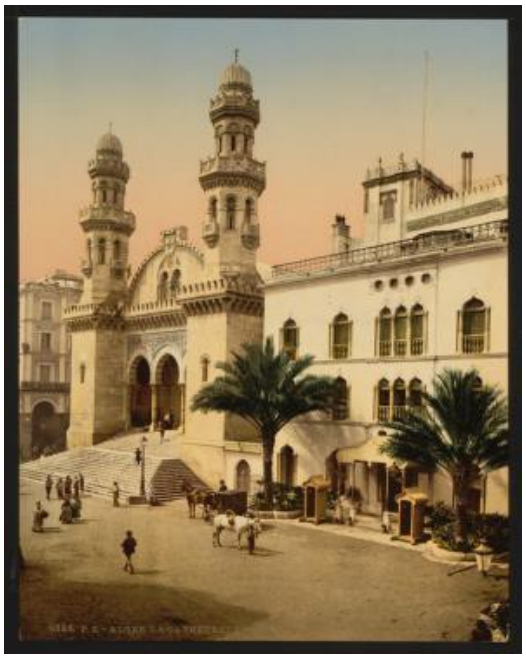
The Articles also granted recognition to Lutherans and Calvinists, and smaller sects, such as Mennonites were unofficially tolerated. While Jews had been granted full citizenship rights in 1789, they were not included in the Concordat. Napoleon set up institutions to communicate between the Ministry of Religion and Jewish leaders, often creating tensions in the Jewish community over official representation for the Jews, as well tying the Jewish community closer to the control of the state.

The Revolution and Concordat left their indelible mark on conceptions of citizenship in the French state. In the wake of the Revolution, the foundational relationship was no longer between the King and the Church, but between the King and the people.[17] Citizenship in the post-revolutionary state was redefined as a collective belonging to the nation, and religious affiliation could no longer be used to bar

[15] Desan, "The French Revolution and Religion, 1795–1815," p. 4.
[16] Ibid, p. 17.
[17] Gunn, "Religious Freedom and *Laïcité*: A Comparison of the United States and France."

citizens' political participation, although attempts at instituting religious tolerance for Jews and Protestants were met with resistance from the majority Catholic population.

While the concept of *laïcité* has roots in France long before the 18th century, the practice of *laïcité* evolved in the immediate aftermath of the revolution as French leadership experienced conflict and, later, cooperation with the Catholic Church. *Laïcité* is generally understood as the separation of church and state (seen for example in the prohibition of state funding for religious edifices and activities) as well as the attempt to circumscribe religious expression and practice to the private realm.[18] The understanding of *laïcité* and the relationship between the church and state changed again with the passing of the 1905 law that barred the French state from officially "recognizing" religion. The legacies of the Revolution, the Concordat, and the law of 1905, are considered among the major historical events that continue to frame understandings of the relationship between the church and the state, as well as the relationship between the citizen's religious practice and the state.



Cathedral, Algiers, Algeria (1890s), United States Library of Congress

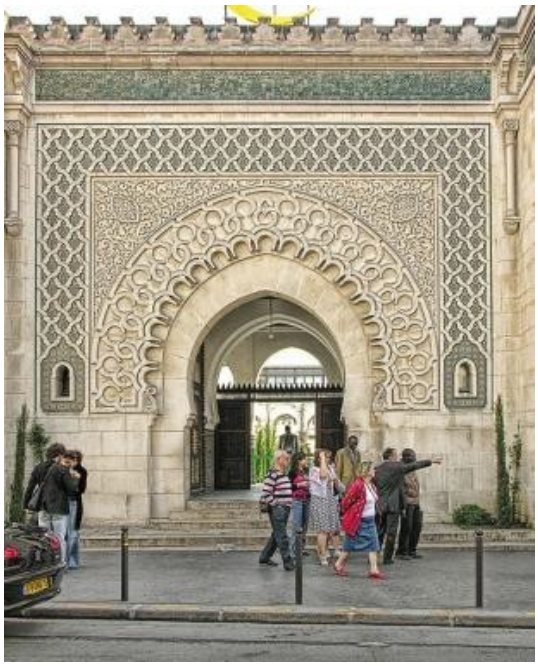
The Colonial Era

Contemporary debates over the relationship of religious minority institutions, religious life in the public sphere, and immigration are products of France's complicated colonial legacy. France was an imperial colonial power beginning in the 17th century and ending in the in the 1960s, with colonies in Africa, the Middle East, North America, and Southeast Asia. French colonialism was shaped by a variety of political, economic, and cultural factors, the most prominent among these being the *mission civilisatrice*, which promoted the advancement of French civilization, cultural norms, and political ideals in colonized nations by colonial officials and Catholic missionaries. French colonialism was not simply an expansion of French governance, but an active effort to assimilate colonized peoples into a French way of being.

Simultaneously, the *mission* was used to mask the basic political and economic motivations of colonialism.[19] Though it had vast colonial reach, the contemporary context in France is especially tied to colonialism in Muslim-majority regions.
France's colonial territories included Muslim lands in Africa, from French Somaliland to Mauritania.

[18] John Bowen, *Can Islam be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Jean Bauberot, *Histoire de la laïcité en France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
[19] Cathie Lloyd, "Race and Ethnicity," in *Modern France: Society in Transition*, eds. Malcolm Cook and Grace Davie (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 34–52.

In North and West Africa, the mission meant active opposition to, dismantling, and the reconstitution of local religious institutions. In West Africa, colonial leaders forged ties with mainstream Islamic institutions while suppressing alternative and potentially destabilizing expressions of Islam, such as Sufi brotherhoods.[20] This latter aspect was particularly noticeable in North Africa where anti-colonial resistance was often expressed in Islamic terms, for example, as a military *jihad*, led by political and spiritual leaders like Abdul Qadir al-Jaza'iri in Algeria.



Grand Mosque of Paris (2008), Eric Parker, Flickr Creative Commons

Throughout the Islamic French colonies, the French concept of *laïcité* was only promoted to the extent that it aided the preservation of French power. While *laïcité* in France manifested as the strict separation of government and religious institutions, the French colonial government in Algeria cultivated a form of official Islam that was loyal to the colonial state. For example, the 1905 French law officially separating church and state was not applied in Algeria. These decisions would profoundly shape the development of religious life and religious politics in Algeria and elsewhere into the 20th century.[21]

Anti-colonial movements rocked the globe in the mid-19th century. In some areas, independence proved bloody and traumatic. Algeria was designated as part of France in 1848 and had been populated with "*pieds-noirs*" [black feet], European colonists, some of whose parents and grandparents were born in Algeria and considered it their home. By 1945, there were nearly a million *pieds-noirs* in Algeria, and they controlled most of the wealth in the colony.[22] Institutionalized injustices against Algerians, the rise of anti- colonial ideologies, and a well-organized resistance—which both the military and *pieds-noir* population attempted to brutally suppress in order to retain control—resulted in the successful Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962).

The colonies, and, later, former colonial states, provided labor to feed France's growing economy following World War II. These laborers faced various forms of discrimination influenced by colonial power imbalances. Workers were segregated in "foyers," neighborhoods concentrated in the suburbs

[20] Muhammad Sani Umar, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 260.
[21] Naomi Davidson, *Only Muslim* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Marcel Maussen, "The Governance of Islam in France: Church-State Traditions and Colonial Legacies," in *Religious Newcomers and the Nation State: Political Culture and Organized Religion in France and the Netherlands*, eds. Erik Sengers and Thijl Sunier (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2010), pp. 131–154.
[22] David Longfellow, "Pieds-Noirs," in *Europe Since 1945: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Bernard Cook (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 398–399.

(*banlieues*) of cities like Paris and Lyon. Efforts by Muslim immigrants to create religious organizations were met with opposition, despite government support for religious and cultural life among Christian European immigrants.[23] The loss of colonial Algeria in 1962 was experienced as an insult to national and military pride by many in France, and triggered an intensification of racism and violence against immigrants on the part of right-wing groups.[24]

Ultimately, guest worker policies institutionalized and legitimized "unequal treatment, segregation and hierarchy" between immigrants and their neighbors.[25] By the 1970s, economic strain, a 1974 ban on immigration, and mounting tensions led to nation-wide protests among immigrants living in the foyers who demanded, among other things, Islamic ritual spaces and *halal* foods.[26] Public authorities and business owners accommodated these demands under the assumption that by allowing migrant workers to maintain their religious traditions, they would easily return to their country of origin.

Alfred Dreyfus, Ullstein Bilderdienst, Berlin, Wikimedia Commons

In 2005, a conservative political party succeeded in passing the French Colonialism Law, which mandated that high school teachers present the "positive" aspects of colonialism, particularly related to North Africa. A wide spectrum of educators and leftist politicians opposed the law, along with leaders of former colonial states (including the president of Algeria, who refused to sign a Friendship Decree with France), who accused the French government of "historical revisionism." Though the amendment was repealed in 2006, it has raised ongoing questions about France's relationship to its colonial past and to the construction of memory.[27]

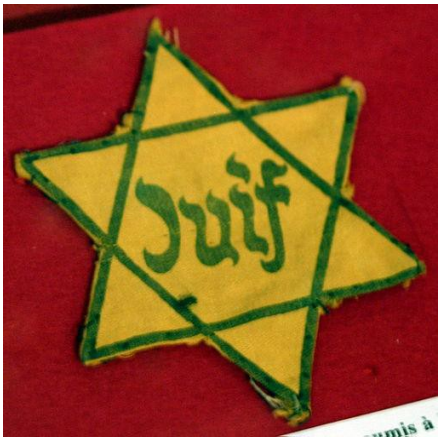
[23] Marcel Maussen, "The Governance of Islam in France: Church-State Traditions and Colonial Legacies," in *Religious Newcomers and the Nation State: Political Culture and Organized Religion in France and the Netherlands*, eds. Erik Sengers and Thijl Sunier (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2010), pp. 131–154.
[24] Lloyd, "Race and Ethnicity," pp. 34–52, p. 40.
[25] Maussen, "The Governance of Islam in France: Church-State Traditions and Colonial Legacies," pp. 131–154.
[26] Jane Freedman, "'L'affaire des Foulards': Problems of Defining a Feminist Antiracist Strategy in French Schools," in *Feminism and Antiracism: International Struggles for Justice*, eds. Kathleen M. Blee and France Vinddance Twine (New York: NYU Press, 2001), pp. 295–312.
[27] Benjamin Stora, "Début d'une dangereuse guerre des mémoires," *L'Humanite*, December 6, 2005, http://www.humanite.fr/node/340038, accessed April 3, 2014.

Modern Political Rule

By the dawn of the 20th century, France had seen a number of political and labor revolts and regime changes, the expansion of colonialism, and various wars with other European powers. Two prominent political tendencies had pitted monarchists—who hoped for the return of absolute monarchy—against Republicans, who supported constitutionalism.

The Catholic Church was mostly aligned with the monarchists and the upper classes, while Republicans received strong support from Protestants, Jews, and middle- and working-class citizens.[28]

One troubling trend that emerged from changes to French society was sweeping anti-Semitism, both in the broader public and among the Catholic clergy. Anti-Semitism became very public in 1894, when a French Jewish military officer named Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused of sharing military secrets with Germany. The trial split French society in two camps; anticlerical Republican "Dreyfusards" and mostly Catholic, pro-military "anti-Dreyfusards." The "Dreyfus Affair" resulted in the strengthening of Republican nationalists and a backlash against French Catholicism, the consolidation of socialism in France, and the rising intensity of French anti-Semitism.



A yellow star worn by French Jews during the German occupation of France in WWII, **Wikimedia**

Ongoing tensions with Germany exploded in World War I. Germany's humiliating defeat led to the return to France of large territories that had been taken by Germany in prior wars, to the French administration of previously German colonies, and to the French assumption of control over former Ottoman territories in Syria and Lebanon. With the 1939 German invasion of Poland, France once again declared war on Germany and by 1940 three quarters of France was under German occupation. The Vichy Regime, which governed unoccupied France, worked with the Nazis to maintain its own power and was complicit in the deportation of 76,000 French Jews to concentration camps.[29] The combined forces of the French resistance and Allied armies, along with a weakened Nazi government, took France back from Germany and contributed to the conclusion of World War II. The experience of the two world wars ended the longstanding conflict between the Catholic Church and the Republicans; by the end of WWII, Catholics had pledged themselves to the Republican cause.[30]

[28] Philippe Rigoulot, "Protestants and the French nation under the Third Republic: Between recognition and assimilation," *National Identities*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2009), pp. 45–57.
[29] Lloyd, "Race and Ethnicity," pp. 34–52.
[30] Celene Beraud, "France," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Politics*, ed. Robert Wuthnow (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007), pp. 306–308.

Post-war economic growth, a low birth rate, and the loss of young men in war led to rising demand for migrant labor from former colonial states. Beginning in the 1980s, the French government actively promoted "integration" as a way to culturally assimilate resident migrant populations, but many French citizens were uncomfortable with integrated immigrants. Immigration issues, combined with growing unemployment, triggered the rise of the far-right political party *Le Front National* (FN). Today, the FN is the leading voice in nationalist French politics, with support among conservative nationalists and among some Catholic conservatives.[31] Though French politics is dominated by two strains—socialism and conservatism—far-right conservatives and their emphasis on immigration and its real and construed impacts influences mainstream political narratives.

Ultimately, French citizens of widely different backgrounds are engaged in conversations over the values of the French Republic, and especially equality and *laïcité*, as ethnic and religious pluralism deepens. While these values assert an essential equality to be attributed to all French citizens, in reality, French society has yet to come to terms with who can be fully French, and if one can be French without discarding other religious and ethnic identity markers.[32] Such questions remain relevant around debates over the assimilation and integration of migrants and especially around public identity markers such as religious dress. Supporters of *laïcité* argue that it is an essential aspect of French life and society, and critical for solutions to political and social conflicts that threaten French national unity.[33] On the other hand, its critics argue that *laïcité* threatens possibilities for a peaceful multireligious and multicultural democratic France that encompasses the identity expressions of all of its diverse citizens.[34]

The President of France, Francois Hollande, belongs to the Socialist Party, and has been in power since 2012. Hollande is the first self-proclaimed atheist to hold this office. His two predecessors, Nicholas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac, were Catholic, like much of the French population. Hollande has gone on record saying he respects the faith of others, and in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo shootings Hollande attempted to dispel Islamophobic discourse by declaring that Islam is compatible with democracy.

One of Hollande's most publicized political opponents is Marine Le Pen, the Roman Catholic leader of the Front National. Le Pen has gained notoriety for her opposition to illegal immigration—a dominant concern in France—and the Schengen agreement, which enables free movement without border checks through many EU countries. After comparing Muslims praying in the street to the Nazi occupation, Le Pen has also faced charges for inciting racial hatred, and went on trial in October 2015.

---

[31] Beraud, "France," pp. 306–308; Lloyd, "Race and Ethnicity," pp. 34–52, 43.
[32] Lloyd, "Race and Ethnicity," pp. 34–52.
[33] James A. Beckford, "'Laïcité,' 'Dystopia,' and the Reaction to New Religious movements in France," *Critical Issues in Social Justice* (2004), pp. 27–40.
[34] Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Remy Leveau, *New European Identity and Citizenship*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2002).

Le Pen's father, from whom she is estranged, was the Front National's long-time leader. He himself was repeatedly convicted for inciting racial hatred, and has been described as anti-Semitic. Following the terrorist attacks in France, it is anticipated that support for Marine Le Pen will grow. In spite of these predictions the Front National suffered great losses in the regional elections of 2015.

Immigration

The "Calais Crisis" has been ongoing since a refugee camp was set up in Sangatte, France in 1999, to house the many migrants who were there without shelter. The refugee camp drew thousands of refugees hoping to be granted asylum. The closure of the Sangatte refugee camp in 2001 and 2002 led to riots, but migrants have continued to construct makeshift camps in Calais. A new migrant center was set up in 2014. Due to the dire living conditions there, the area is often described as "The Calais Jungle." The some 4,000 migrants of the Calais Jungle have embarked on treacherous journeys from countries such as Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. In these countries there is often civil unrest, and religious and political conflict, such as in the case of Syria. The danger does not end for these refugees at Calais—many individuals are killed by oncoming trains or vehicles while trying to cross the border to the UK.

French authorities have long struggled to prevent these people from illegally entering the UK, other areas of France, and Italy. Many undocumented migrants are arrested—upwards of 18,000 people were arrested by French police in a six-month period in 2015 alone. In 2016, the authorities ordered for 1,000 of the people staying in the "Calais Jungle" to be removed. In January 2016, both a makeshift mosque and a church for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians were bulldozed to make way for new security measures, and in late February, French authorities began the process of razing shacks and tents, resulting in protests and clashes within the camp.

Following the Paris attacks of 2015, the debate about migration in Europe, which reached had new heights, took a new turn. When a Syrian passport used to gain entry to Greece was found near to the body of an attacker, the Polish government blamed the influx of refugees for the terrorism. President Hollande of France, however, resisted this narrative and honored his commitment to receive tens of thousands of refugees. Many have cast doubts on the idea that refugees are in any way to blame for the acts of terror in Paris, and some have even postulated that the attackers planted the passport to cause further unrest.

Economic Policies & Ideologies

France is a founding member of the twenty-eight state European Union (EU), an economic and political organization of European nations that shares a market, a currency (the Euro), trade policies, and various other institutions. France is the second largest economy within the EU "euro zone," and is generally considered to be an economically prosperous nation, but the country's economic health has fluctuated over the past seventy-five years. These and past economic downturns have contributed to periods of increased social conservatism that have brought right-wing political parties to prominence.

Marion Le Pen (2012), Gauthier Bouchet, Wikimedia Commons

The immediate post-World War II period was followed by three decades of rapid economic growth and prosperity, which ended with a severe economic crisis and rising unemployment triggered in part by the 1973 oil embargo.[35] Riots in the 1980s—which foreshadowed riots in 2005—reflected the social impacts of economic changes that exacerbated ethnic tensions and widened the gaps between immigrants and others.[36] The economic crisis also prompted the emergence of the popular far-right political organization *Le Front National*. The Front National (FN) was at that point led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, who framed the declining economy and its social effects as an outcome of immigration.

The Front National, led today by Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter, Marine Le Pen, presents a conservative economic and social agenda that is sometimes linked to Christian (Catholic) values, not unlike some right wing political parties in the United States, though the majority of its supporters are not themselves conservative Catholics.

France continues to face high levels of unemployment, currently estimated at 10%. Unemployment rates disproportionately impact young people—youth unemployment peaked in 2013 at 26%—and especially those of low socioeconomic status and immigrant descent, a factor that contributed to the outbreak of riots in urban *banlieues* in 2005.[37] The majority of the rioters were the children and

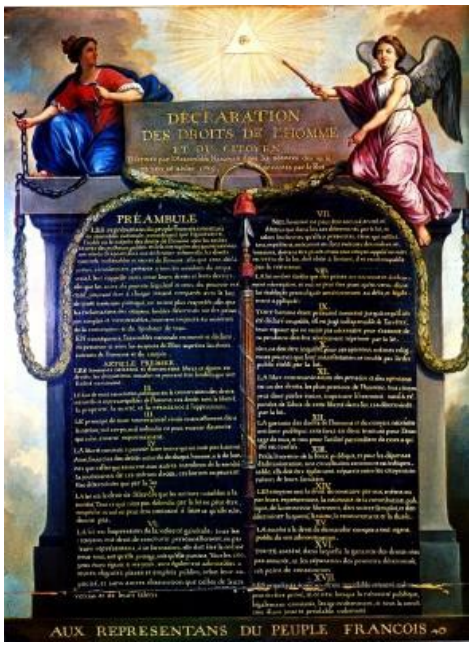
[35] Freedman, "'L'affaire des Foulards': Problems of Defining a Feminist Antiracist Strategy in French Schools," pp. 295–312.
[36] Jocelyne Cesari, "Ethnicity, Islam, and les Banlieues: Confusing the Issues," *Riots in France,* November 30, 2005, http://riotsfrance.ssrc.org/Cesari/, accessed April 2, 2014.
[37] "Migration Picking up but Rising Unemployment Hurting Immigrants," *OECD*, June 13, 2013, http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/migrationpickingupbutrisingunemploymenthurtingimmigrants.htm, accessed April 2, 2014; Clea Calcutt, "France adds employability to the university mission," *Times Higher Education*, January 23, 2014, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/france-adds-employability-to-the-university-mission/2010636.article, accessed April 2, 2014.

grandchildren of North African immigrants, leading many to place the blame on Islam instead of exploring underlying structural factors such as racism and unemployment.[38]

Like other nations in the EU suffering in the wake of the global recession, France has seen economic decline and rising unemployment within the past decade. These and past economic downturns have contributed to periods of increased social conservatism that have brought right-wing political parties to prominence.

Religion, Political & Legal Structures

The current Constitution of France dates to 1958 and was authored during the government of President Charles de Gaulle. It is influenced by the revolutionary document, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen [*Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, 1789] which promotes the concept of natural human rights, that is, those rights that are universally valid at all times and in all places. Article 10 of the *Déclaration* states: "No one may be persecuted on account of his opinions, even religious ones, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by the law."[39]



Declaration of the Rights of Man, by Jean- Jacques-François Le Barbier (1789), Wikimedia Commons

A 1905 law officially separated church and state, and the government grants no direct funding of any religious group (though officially recognized groups do receive certain tax exemptions, and churches and synagogues built prior to 1905 are maintained by the state). Following the 1905 Act, religion was understood be part of the private lives of French citizens, while its institutional roles were assumed by the state, especially in the realm of education.[40] The 1958 constitution ensures "the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race, or religion. It shall respect all beliefs."[41] It is illegal to personally interfere with the religious belief or practice of another citizen, and racial or religiously motivated attacks against French citizens are punishable by law.

[38] Kim Willsher, "French Socialists suffer as far-right and conservatives sweep elections," *The Guardian*, March 30, 2014, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/france-adds-employability-to-the-university-mission/2010636.article, accessed April 2, 2014.
[39] Bowen, *Why The French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, The State, and Public Space,* p. 22.
[40] Davie, "Religion and Laicite," pp. 195–215.
[41] "France," International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, *U.S. State Department* (2012), https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/france-adds-employability-to-the-university-mission/2010636.article, accessed April 2, 2014.

However, in the name of "public order," various controversial laws and policies restrict the expression of religious identity and permit monitoring of minority religious groups. For example, a 2010 law forbids wearing garments that cover one's face in public, referring specifically to forms of Islamic veiling (the *niqab*). Refusal to remove the face veil carries either a €150 fine or attendance at a course on French citizenship. A €30,000 fine is also given to anyone who coerces a woman to wear a face veil against her will, which is doubled if the woman is a minor. Public school students are barred from wearing any conspicuous religious symbols, which includes large Christian crosses, Islamic veils, Jewish skullcaps, or Sikh turbans.

Relations with Other Nation-States

As a powerful nation in Western Europe, France has cooperated with, colonized, fought against, and maintained various other kinds of relations with many other countries.

The French colonization of **Algeria** lasted from 1830 to 1962, during which the Mediterranean coastal nation was integrated as part of France and settled with European colonists (*colons*) later known as *pieds-noirs* ("black-feet"). Eventually, the *pieds-noirs* minority population came to dominate Algeria socially, politically, and economically, to the exclusion and exploitation of Algeria's largely Muslim Arab and Kabyle population. Colonial authorities cultivated amenable Algerian political leaders known as the *beni oui oui* ("yes-yes tribe"), and religious leaders, while most simmered with discontent. Even though Algeria was considered a part of France during the colonial period, Algerians were barred from seeking French citizenship until 1919, and even then citizenship required renouncing their Muslim personal status (this ended in 1946).

The bloody Algerian War of Independence—violently suppressed by the French military—met with success in 1962, resulting in the expulsion of over a million *pieds-noirs* and Algeria's Jewish community, which had been granted full citizenship under the Cremieux Decree in 1870. France has maintained close—though not always smooth—economic, military, and political relations with Algeria since 1962, and there is a large Algerian migrant population living in France.[42]

France and **Germany**, its northeastern neighbor, have deep historical relations. In the modern period, France and Germany fought several wars beginning with the 1870 Franco-German war (during which Prussia took the French regions of Alsace and Lorraine), World War I (framed by the French as a war of revenge against Germany), and World War II. Relations improved during the Cold War, and the two nations cooperated in political, economic, military, and cultural realms. France and West Germany were founding members of the European Union.

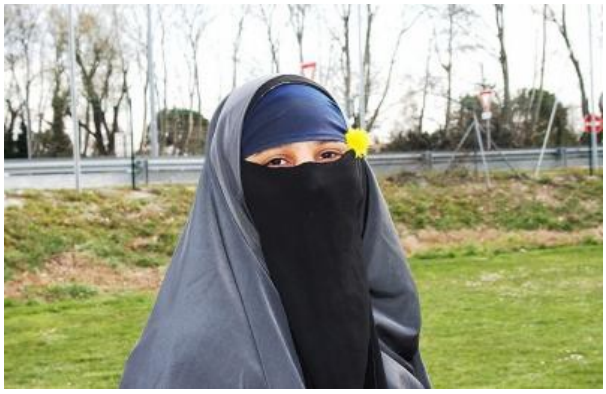
Relations between France and the **United States** have long been positive. Wars with the British in the 17th and 18th centuries forced France out of its North American colonies and led to French support

[42] Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), p. 45.

for the Americans during the Revolutionary War. The American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the American Revolution (1765–1783) would inspire many of the leaders of the French Revolution, and certain American revolutionary principles are echoed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789). France also owned the territory that would become the state of Louisiana, which it sold in 1803 (the Louisiana Purchase), and these southern regions share important cultural ties with the Francophone world through today, including Catholicism.

Though the coming century would see sometimes rocky relations, these were mended by 1884 when France presented the United States with the Statue of Liberty as a gift of friendship. Important intellectual and cultural exchanges took place in the 20th century between the two nations, along with alliances during the two world wars, the Cold War, and the First Gulf War (1991). The friendship strained during the Presidency of George W. Bush on account of the unpopularity of the "War on Terror" and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan among the French, sparking negative views of France among the American public, but these have largely been repaired, particularly with the Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

Religion & Women



French Muslim woman Kenza Drider, BBC World Service (2010), Flickr Creative Commons

In France, women's clothing is a significant marker of the visibility of the Muslim community and discourse around the Islamic veil (*foulard*) is politically charged. The veil was banned alongside other religious symbols in public schools in 2004, and in 2010 the Constitutional Council affirmed the legality of a ban on the Islamic face veil (*niqab*) in public spaces.[43] These laws are informed by interpretations that the veil, and especially the *niqab*, implicitly represent women as inferior, that they are forced upon women by male family and community members, that they bar individuals from fully participating in public space, that they challenge the equal status of women and in so doing encourage violence against women, and that they represent a "symbolic violence" against all women.[44] Anti-veiling narratives were ultimately dominated by the notion that banning the veil would preserve women's dignity.[45]

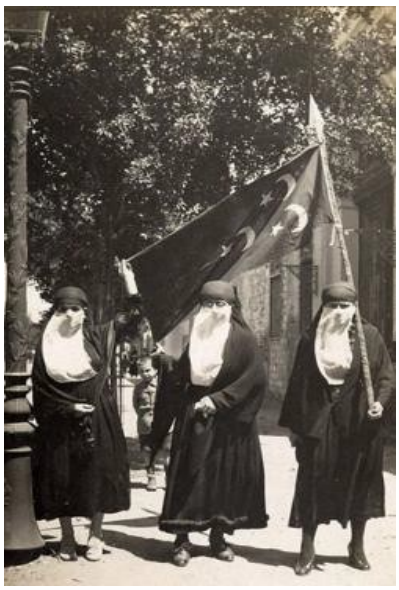
The controversy did not emerge from a vacuum. The public school system had long been a site of contestation over the role of religion in the public sphere, and France was among the first majority

[43] Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
[44] "French veil law: Muslim woman's challenge in Strasbourg," *BBC*, November 27, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25118160, accessed April 2, 2014.
[45] John Bowen, "How the French State Justifies Controlling Muslim Bodies: From Harm-Based to Values-Based Reasoning," *Social Research*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (2011), pp. 325–348; Bowen, *Why The French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, The State, and Public Space*, p. 208.

Catholic nations to end the Church's institutional influence over public education. Additionally, the public school system is regarded as a place where French citizenship is inculcated and migrants integrated. Thus, some viewed the veil as an incursion of religious symbolism that threatened to differentiate some students from others in contrast to the mandate of a unified French citizenship.

However, questions around veiling in schools also occurred in the fraught political and economic context of the 1980s and 1990s, during which immigrants—and especially immigrants of North African descent—were vilified, and veiled women personified as the vanguard of a foreign and dangerous Islamic "infiltration" of France.[46]

Finally, the discourse of veiling is grounded in the history of France as a colonial entity; within the former French colonial states of North Africa, colonial leaders promoted "unveiling" as a means by which Muslim women could become "modern" women, and justified this with the claim that women themselves sought to be free of the "oppressive" and "backwards" culture of Muslim society. Simultaneously, efforts to unveil the colonial subject turned the veil into a symbol representing the identity of the colonized, such that the veiled woman herself embodied resistance to colonialism.[47] The veil today continues to carry a range of meanings that shift according to perspective, including assumptions around oppression/independence, tradition/modernity, Muslim/French, isolation/assimilation and, especially, them/us.



Veiled protesters in Cairo (1919), photographer unknown, Wikimedia Commons

Notably, major French feminist organizations and outspokenly feminist politicians participated in the highly politicized debate over the *foulard* from the start, claiming that it is a symbol for the oppression of Muslim women. Emphasis on the headscarf heightened assumptions that Islam represented the main cleavage in French society over other potential factors, such as socioeconomic status, and assumed that Muslim women needed to be rescued by the benevolent, secular state.[48] French feminists and others were and continue to be criticized by Muslim activists—many of whom also identify as feminists—who denounce their inability to hear Muslim women's voices and concerns, or to recognize their problematic role as white women in a post-colonial context speaking on behalf of Muslim women.[49]

[46] Freedman, "'L'affaire des Foulards': Problems of Defining a Feminist Antiracist Strategy in French Schools," pp. 295–312.
[47] Reza Rahbari, "Unveiling Muslim Women: A Trajectory of Post-Colonial Culture," *Dialectical Anthropology*, No. 25 (2000), pp. 321–332.
[48] Riva Kastoryano, "Territories of Identities in France," *Riots in France,* June 11, 2006, http://riotsfrance.ssrc.org/Kastoryano/, accessed April 2, 2014.
[49] Jane Freedman, "'L'affaire des Foulards': Problems of Defining a Feminist Antiracist Strategy in French Schools," pp. 295–312.

Though the ban on the face veil is popular in France—a 2013 survey showed that 86% of French people supported it and 83% supported its expansion to include private businesses—it has been challenged.[50] In November 2013, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg began examining the ban after an unnamed French Muslim plaintiff asserted that it violated her religious, speech, and privacy rights accorded by the European Convention on Human Rights. She added in her submission that she wears it of her own free will and that she is willing to remove it for security reasons if requested. In June 2014, the Court determined that France is legitimately protecting its societal norms by banning the veil, and in doing so is protecting its diverse citizenry.[51]

[50] Soeren Kern, "France: Muslim Woman Sues Over Burqa Ban," *The Gatestone Institute*, December 6, 2013, http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4079/france-burqa-ban-lawsuit, accessed April 2, 2014.
[51] Alan Cowell, "French Ban on Face Veils Upheld by European Rights Court," *New York Times*, July 1, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/02/world/europe/european-rights-court-upholds-frances-ban-on-full-face-veils.html, accessed July 2, 2014.