Syllabus

Course description

This 12 weeks lecture in political science is dedicated to the presentation, discussion and analysis of the main stakes of French political life, with a particular focus on presidential elections. Its main objective is to enable students unfamiliar with French politics to understand and participate in the political debate during their stay in France, as well as decipher the news coverage of French politics. More precisely, this course will consist in explaining the historical institutional role and attributions of the main power figures in French politics (President of the Republic, Prime minister, leaders of the National assembly and Senate, MPs) and outline the stakes of recent and past presidential elections (1981, 2002, 2007, 2012); it will also present the main political parties, the essential actors as well as the ongoing questions of French politics, and relate them to French political history since the birth of the current Fifth Republic in 1958. How did the Left win the elections in 2012? What political situation after the 2015 Paris attacks? How to understand the rise of National Front in French politics? Can François Hollande be re-elected in 2017? These are some questions, among others, that will be answered during this lecture.

About the instructor:

Dr. Vincent Martigny is Assistant Professor in Political Science at Ecole Polytechnique and Research associate at Sciences Po-CEVIPOF. A graduate from Sciences Po (PhD, 2012), the University of Cambridge (MPhil Trinity Hall, 2001) and the LSE (MSc., 2000), his research is on contemporary French politics, and more specifically on the study of French nationalism.

Course plan

The course is divided in 12 lectures

Lecture 1: Introduction. The legacy of Gaullism and the birth of the Fifth Republic

Lecture 2: Power distribution in the French political system

- How do institutions work in France?
- What are the powers of the President? The Prime Minister? Parliament?
- What are the mechanisms of the presidential election?

Lecture 3: State, Republic, Nation in France
Lecture 4: The Elite system in power
- Political and social elites & elite groups
- ENA and the issue of governance in France

Lecture 5: Party politics (1) The Left
- Birth and history of the Left in France
- Contemporary evolution, strategy and transformations

Lecture 6: Party politics (2) The Right
- Birth and history of the Right in France
- Contemporary evolution, strategy and transformations

Lecture 7: Party politics (3) Radical political forces and protest groups: The National Front
- Birth and history of the extreme-Right in France
- Contemporary evolution, strategy and transformations

Lecture 8: French electoral behaviour
- Voting patterns
- How to analyse political gaps and polarisation of French politics?

Lecture 9: Presidential elections in 1981: the Left’s dream
- How and why did the Left win?
- Was François Mitterrand’s election a positive sign for democracy?

Lecture 10: Presidential elections in 2002: the candidates’ nightmare
- Why did Jean-Marie Le Pen reach the 2nd round of the election?
- Did the 21st April reshuffle the cards of party politics?
- How did the Left get over the elimination of its candidate?

Lecture 11: From 2007 to 2012: a political renewal?
- A real shift in candidates?
- What were the topics around which these elections revolved?

Lecture 12: France in turmoil: what political situation of the country one year before the 2017 Presidential election?
- What consequences of the Paris attacks on the political scale?
- Are we witnessing the emergence of a three-party system?
- What are the stakes of the forthcoming 2017 presidential election?

Assessments and grades:
Mid-term exam (40% of the overall grade)
Take home final essay (60% of the overall grade)

Bibliography:


“France’s political institutions at 50” special issue in *West European Politics*, (2009-03) vol.32: °2, p.243-437


Nicholas Atkin, *The Fifth French Republic*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005


Richard Conley, *From Elysian fields to the guillotine? The dynamics of presidential and prime ministerial approval in Fifth Republic France*, Comparative Political Studies (2006-06) vol.39: n°5, p.570-598