



**PO/SO 312 FRANCE TODAY: POLITICS AND SOCIETY  
FALL 2025  
IES PARIS BIA**

**CREDIT HOURS:** 3 credit-hour class.

**TIME:** Wednesday 15.00-18.00

**INSTRUCTOR:** Mathieu Zagrodzki

**CONTACT:** [mathieu.zagrodzki@gmail.com](mailto:mathieu.zagrodzki@gmail.com)

**METHOD OF PRESENTATION:** lectures, class discussions, student presentations, class debates.

**LANGUAGE OF PRESENTATION:** English

**DESCRIPTION:**

France has always fascinated foreign observers; on the one hand, it lays claims, through its revolutionary tradition to being a pioneer for change; on the other hand, imbued if not imprisoned by the weight of its history, it is viewed by many outsiders as a bastion of conservatism. To quote, Charles de Gaulle, reforms in France only come in the wake of a revolution.

This class aims to understand this France with all its exceptions and its peculiarities. It will take you on a journey through France's past and bring you to the present. It will analyze the effects of the various forces that today challenge France. We will look at the legacy of World War Two, of the post-war economic boom, of European integration, as well as its contemporary politics. Using a thematic approach, this course will encourage students to engage in and discuss key issues that have challenged French society in the post-World War II era.

As a way of a general introduction, students who choose this class are encouraged to purchase and read the following books.  
Cecil Jenkins, *France People, History and Culture: a brief history* Constable and Robinson, 2011

And

Rod Kedward, *La Vie en Bleu: France and the French since 1900*, Penguin, 2006

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of France's recent history
- Articulate the various political opinions within French society
- Evaluate some of the policies that the French government has adopted.
- Contextualize and compare where necessary the various concerns that affect French society today
- Discard some of the clichés that often exemplify France for the outsider

**REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:**

**ORAL ASSESSMENT:**

- Discussion based on the readings and newspaper articles: 15%
- Oral presentation: 25%



#### WRITTEN ASSESSMENT:

- In class quiz: 10%
- Midterm exam: 25%
- Final Exam: 25 %

#### ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

Regardless of the quality of work, plagiarism is punishable with a 'failing grade' in the class. Plagiarism may be broadly defined as "copying of materials from sources, without acknowledging having done so, claiming other's ideas as one's own without proper reference to them, and buying materials such as essays/exams."

#### A NOTE ON ELECTRONIC DEVICES:

As a courtesy to your instructor and fellow students, please do not use cell phones, laptops, tablets, e-readers, or other electronic devices during class, even to check the time. Make sure phones are turned off. Use of these devices will lower your participation grade.

#### LATENESS:

Please arrive on time for each class meeting. Arriving late for class is disruptive for faculty members and students alike and will prevent you from maximizing your learning.

- 0 to 15 minutes = late

- Over 15 minutes = 1 absence

If you arrive late 3 times, it will be counted as an absence.

#### ABSENCE POLICY:

If you must be absent, please email both your professor and the academic team as soon as possible (mfedon@iesabroad.org ) and (emaines@iesabroad.org). Absences for medical reasons and/or emergencies will be considered excused, but justification will be required. In this case, we will need: a certificat medical from a French doctor, which must be submitted within 24 hours of the absence, or proof of upcoming medical appointment.

If you are absent for an exam, presentation, or other graded in-class assignment, you must provide justification for the absence, or you will receive an automatic F.

Our attendance policy allows each student to miss one 3h course and two 1.5h class sessions without it affecting the final grade of the class. Above that, your final grade will be lowered. The following example is for a 1.5h class:

Final grade: A-

1 unexcused absence: A-

2 unexcused absences: A-

3 unexcused absences: B+

4 unexcused absences: B

And so on...

Lastly, an important reminder! For any and all absences students are required to fill out the ABSENCE FORM, which can be found using the following link: <https://airtable.com/appwRScHoi8XeQUhz/shrkeAL2VXGdy1RH5>

Any documentation FOR AN EXCUSED ABSENCE must be uploaded to this platform.

## CONTENT:

Week & Session	Content	Assignments (Reading, homework, project due dates, exams)
<b><u>Week 1: Sept. 10<sup>th</sup></u></b>	<p><b>Introduction: Lecture topic: What is 'so French about the French'? A political and philosophical history of France</b></p> <p><b>Key Topics:</b> How different is France to....?</p> <p><b>Discussion around the readings.</b></p> <p><b>Theme of discussion around the documents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do the documents reveal about France?</li> <li>- In what way do they point to differences between the United States and France?</li> <li>- What are the similarities between the two countries?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Declaration of the Rights of Man, 1789 (Approved by the National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789)</li> <li>- Ernest Renan, excerpt from 'What <u>is a Nation?</u>' (<u>Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?</u>), Lecture at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882</li> <li>- La Marseillaise, the lyrics</li> <li>- Alex Marshall, 'The Twist and Turn of the Marseillaise', <i>New York Times</i>, December 2016.</li> <li>- Olympe de Gouges, <i>Declaration of the Rights of Women</i></li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 2: Sept. 17<sup>th</sup></u></b>	<p><b>Lecture topic: France, short history: continuity or change?</b></p> <p><b>Key Topic:</b> Why so many revolutions?</p> <p><b>Theme of discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is France the country of contestation?</li> <li>- Why do the French contest?</li> <li>- Is it different to other countries?</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion around the readings.</b></p>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cecil Jenkins chapters 6 and 7</li> <li>- Helen Drake chapter 1</li> </ul> <p><u>Oral presentation: The May 1968 protests</u></p>
<b><u>Week 3: Sept. 24<sup>th</sup></u></b>	<p><b>Quiz 1/ this will cover lectures and readings so far as well as Drake, chapter 1</b></p>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Charles de Gaulle, Speeches broadcast through the BBC 18- 19 -22 June 1940</li> <li>- Charles de Gaulle, speech at the Paris Town Hall, 25 August 1944</li> </ul>

	<b>Lecture Topic: France: defeat, occupation and liberation</b> <b>Key Topics:</b> The effects of the Occupation on France; The Vichy syndrome: its effects on collective memory <b>Theme of discussion:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The weight of history</li> <li>- Collective memory</li> <li>- A comparison with other countries</li> <li>- Charles de Gaulle, the man, the politician, the hero ... myth or reality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When Charles de Gaulle met Franklin D Roosevelt, <i>The Independent</i>, 23 March 1996</li> <li>- Jenkins chapter 9 and 10</li> </ul> <p><u>Oral presentation: The purges and trials of collaborationists in post-WW2 France</u></p>
<b><u>Week 4: Oct. 1st</u></b>	<b><u>CLASS EXCURSION: the Museum of the Liberation of Paris</u></b>	
<b><u>Week 5: Oct. 8<sup>th</sup></u></b>	<b>Lecture topic: Politics and political culture</b> <b>Discussion around the readings</b> <b>Themes of discussion;</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The founding myths and historical rivalries</li> <li>- French motto: liberty, equality, fraternity: what do those words really mean?</li> <li>- Colonialism</li> <li>- Race, religion, state, gender: comparison with the United States.</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helen Drake, chapter 3</li> <li>- Jean Fabien Spitz, 'The Twilight of the Republic?' in Nadeau and Weinstock, <i>Republicanism: History, Theory, Practice</i> (2004)</li> <li>- Owen Connelly, <i>The epoch of Napoleon</i>, chapter 3 'Napoleonic France'</li> </ul> <p><u>Oral presentation: What is French "laïcité" and how is it different from other countries?</u></p>
<b><u>Week 6: Oct. 15<sup>th</sup></u></b>	<b>Lecture topic: the institutions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic</b>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helen Drake, chapter 4</li> </ul> <p><u>Oral presentation: The 2024 Political Crisis in France</u></p>

<b>Week 7: Midterm, Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>Lecture topic: French political parties and elections</b> <b>Theme for discussion:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political parties: What are the similarities and differences between the United States and France?</li> </ul>	<b>Look at the following website</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="https://parti-rennaissance.fr/">https://parti-rennaissance.fr/</a></li> <li>- <a href="http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/">http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/</a></li> <li>- <a href="https://www.republicains.fr/">https://www.republicains.fr/</a></li> <li>- <a href="https://rassemblementnational.fr/">https://rassemblementnational.fr/</a></li> <li>- <a href="https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/">https://lafranceinsoumise.fr/</a></li> <li>- <a href="http://www.mouvementdemocrate.fr/">http://www.mouvementdemocrate.fr/</a></li> <li>- <a href="http://eelv.fr/">http://eelv.fr/</a></li> </ul> <b>Oral presentation: Are French politics becoming increasingly conservative?</b>
<b>Week 8: Nov. 5<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Lecture topic: the educational system and the welfare state</b> <b>Themes for discussion :</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The ideals of the French Republic, as seen through its constitution.</li> <li>- Based on your findings on the websites, comment on the French educational institutions. How do the French educational institutions differ / resemble the American ones?</li> <li>- How important is the welfare system?</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helen Drake, chapter 5</li> <li>- Eugene Weber, <i>Peasants into Frenchmen</i>, chapter 18 'Civilizing in earnest; schools and schooling'</li> </ul> <b>Oral presentation: Is the French educational system a performant one?</b>
<b>Week 9: Nov. 12<sup>th</sup></b>	<b><u>CLASS EXCURSION : Visit of the Pantheon</u></b>	
<b>Week 10: Nov. 19<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Lecture topic: French cultural Policies</b> <b>Theme for discussion:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The political importance of cultural diplomacy to France.</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helen Drake, chapter 6</li> </ul> <b>Oral presentation: How does the French government protect the French language?</b>
<b>Week 11: Nov. 26<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Lecture topic: French Foreign Policies</b> <b>Theme for discussion:</b>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helen Drake, chapter 8</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does France play an important role in world affairs?</li> </ul>	<u>Oral presentation: France, the EU and the war in Ukraine</u>
<b><u>Week 12: Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup></u></b>	<b>Lecture topic: French Economy and Business</b> <b>Theme for discussion:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are economic policies run in France?</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helen Drake, chapter 7</li> </ul> <u>Oral presentation: Is France an economy in decline?</u>
<b><u>Week 13: Dec. 10<sup>th</sup></u></b> <b><u>(1.5 hour)</u></b>	<b>Guest lecturer (TBA)</b>	
<b><u>Final Exam: TBA</u></b>		

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

Text book:

**Helen Drake, *Contemporary France*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011**

Other articles and documents assigned every week will be posted on Moodle.

#### INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY:

Mathieu Zagrodzki is Associate Researcher in Political Science at the University of Versailles. He holds an MA in Political Science and a PhD in Public Policy (Sciences Po Paris). His dissertation focused on the implementation of community policing in the Los Angeles and Paris police departments. He spent a semester at UCLA's School of Public Affairs and did a field research about police-community relations in the city of Los Angeles. He has been working as a lecturer in various higher education institutions since 2005. He also serves as a policy consultant for several French and foreign public organizations.