

Mon Dieu - it's October!

Some (Internally) Comparative Thoughts on the Current Constitutional and Political Situation of the V. French Republic

Introduction

6 October 2025 began with a major surprise (?): *Sébastien Lecornu*, who had only been appointed as prime minister of France in September 2025,¹ resigned shortly after the composition of his cabinet was announced.² This was obviously caused by different cabinet composition approaches of the political parties involved.³ As a result, France sees an already long period of political crisis once more prolonged. The question might occur whether this unprecedented (for

¹ Cf. *Paul Kirby*, *Macron names ally Sébastien Lecornu as new French PM*, *bbc.com* (9 September 2025), accessed through <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crmenp1k0mjo> (last access on 6 October 2025).

² Cf. *Laura Gozzi/Hugh Schofield*, *France in fresh political crisis as PM Lecornu quits after 26 days* (6 October 2025), accessed through <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cewn9k0w9rxo> (last access on 6 October 2025).

³ Cf. *ibid.*

the experience of the Fifth Republic) situation could cause major constitutional-political changes in the country?

Let's have a look on what the respective situation was at the brink of each of the previous French Republics: Interestingly, the month of October has been of particular significance, at least in the relevant 20th century developments of the Fourth and Fifth Republic.

I. Première République française (1792-1804)

The Première République française (First French Republic) had already been proclaimed in September 1792, amid the turmoil of the French Revolution; the reign of *Louis XVI* effectively ended in August 1792, mirroring the population's dissatisfaction about the political and general situation. Political power subsequently passed to the National Convention, and a centuries-old monarchy, one of the oldest in Europe and the world, thus came to an end.

The First Republic did not develop steadily though, lacking stability (the National Convention soon being replaced in power by the Committee of Public Safety, and later by the Directory). Hence, it took various forms over the course of its existence, culminating in the consulate of *Napoléon Bonaparte* in 1799, who effectively finished the First Republic on his coronation as Emperor of the French in 1804. What followed was a period of monarchy: The French Empire lasting until 1814/1815, then being followed by the restauration of the Royal family (*Louis XVI*' siblings, namely *Louis XVIII* and *Charles X*) until 1830, and the office term of King *Louis-Philippe* afterwards.

II. Deuxième République française (1848-1852)

Another *Bonaparte*, *Napoléon's* nephew *Louis Napoléon Bonaparte*, played an important role in the *Deuxième République française* (Second French Republic): After the February Revolution of 1848, which overthrew the House of Orléans and *Louis-Philippe*, the younger *Napoléon* ultimately was elected President of the French Republic at the end of December of that year. Soon tired of this, however, *Louis Napoléon Bonaparte*, who had already ruled in an authoritarian manner since the end of 1851, subsequently sought the restoration of the French Empire - and became Emperor *Napoléon III* in 1852.

III. Troisième République française (1870-1940)

The longest republican period France ever experienced (so far) should follow in 1870: After the defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War (which was provoked by Prussia), this empire also ended, and the *Troisième République française* (Third French Republic) started over. It was soon to be riddled with scandals though (such as the *Dreyfus* Affair) and experienced the turbulent period of the First World War, the interwar period, and the beginning of the Second World War, before it, too, had to come to an end due to the Vichy regime's collaboration with the Nazis in Summer 1940.

After the fall of the Vichy regime in 1944, a military hero, General *Charles de Gaulle*, assumed state power in France for the first time, within the framework of a Provisional Government. It was not to be the last time he would have been involved.

IV. Aiming For, But Not Finding Stability: Quatrième République française (1946-1958)

After the end of the Second World War, the Quatrième République française (Fourth French Republic) came into being **in October 1946**. In terms of political instability and the fluctuation of successive cabinets, this government resembled the Third Republic, and ultimately it failed - due to political pressure created by the independence movements and independence wars, particularly in North Africa. President *Coty* actively sought for the help and active political re-involvement of *de Gaulle* in 1958, understanding that the situation needed a person who could (to a certain extent) reunite the French.

V. Returning The Floor To *de Gaulle*: Cinquième République française (since 1958)

That is actually how 12 years later, again **in October** – the one of **1958** – the Cinquième République française (Fifth French Republic) commenced. It is based on France's current constitution (1958), which brought an end to the great fluctuation of French constitutional texts since 1789, and achieved for decades a level of political stability previously unknown. Featuring a strong executive at its core, it has produced a series of very prominent presidents - beginning with *de Gaulle*, and followed, among others, by *Pompidou*, *Giscard d'Estaing*, *Mitterand* and *Chirac*.

And now?

The system now, **in early October 2025**, appears to have reached a difficult crossroads. President *Macron*, in power since 2017 and being in his second and last office term, since he was re-elected in 2022, has experienced a grave political crisis, basically since 2024: He felt obliged to dissolve parliament prematurely in summer 2024, following the 2024 European elections. Since then, none of the political parties represented in parliament has held a parliamentary majority. This calamity has led to three consecutive prime ministers being appointed by Macron since the summer of 2024, so far (*Barnier*, *Bayrou*, *Lecornu*; *Barnier* and *Bayrou* failing to gain parliamentary support in regard to the State budget, *Lecornu* not even coming that far). The president right now finds himself in the situation of either appointing a new prime minister or, once again, dissolving parliament prematurely.

As depicted above, previous French Republics either came to an end by returning to the monarchy (1804; 1852) or during a war (1940) or following wars which actively included France (1870, more or less 1946 and 1958). None of these situations appears to be *stricto sensu* comparable to the current French situation. It remains to be seen though whether the constitutional framework of the Fifth Republic will be capable of surviving contemporary political instabilities.