



AP Comparative Government & Politics 2000 Student Samples

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The political party systems in Fifth Republic France and the post-Communist Soviet Union under the Yeltsin Constitution of 1993 have struggled with a plurality of parties representing many different interests. These parties, which encompass all ends of the political spectrum, are most often represented during presidential elections. The difficulty, then, is to establish a true national leader who will gain popular support; popular elections in France and ~~Soviet Union~~ Russia are often held with five or more candidates in the first runoff, so a majority is unlikely. The system of majority voting with runoffs has thus aimed at two ends: establishing a true national majority to give legitimacy to the candidate, and to encourage coalition building among ideologically similar parties.

In France, the efforts at electoral majority have helped stabilize the President's power to a limited extent. The legitimacy of the French ruler has often been in question due to the influence of the rebellious National Assembly, particularly during cohabitation periods such as the current Gaullist (RPR) - Socialist rule under Chirac and Jospin. Under the majority system, however, it is guaranteed that even in French elections that include five parties or more (RPR, Socialist, FN, Communist, Ecologist, etc.), a definitive winner will be had that can claim a majority of support from French citizens, unlike the U.S. electoral college, where

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The president is often elected, without a majority. This gives Chirac some leverage against his Nat'l Assembly that Clinton may not have against a Republican Congress. Additionally, the concept of coalition-building has impacted the French elections tremendously of late. In the recent Presidential election, Chirac was 2nd after a first vote, but due to a Union of the Rightist parties, was able to win the majority in a runoff over the Socialist candidate. Had there not been such a Union, the French majority ideology, which lay on the right, would not have been expressed in the Presidency due to factionalism.

The post-Cold War Soviet Union has also seen benefits for the legitimacy of its candidates due to runoff election systems. The Russian system is perhaps even more factionalized than France, meaning a clear majority is unlikely to be achieved. The course of an emerging Russia from economic turmoil and a disastrous war in Chechnya demands a popular, legitimate leader, which is what the majority election of Vladimir Putin is hoped to create. Additionally, Putin himself made similar use of coalition tactics in his election victory. The 'Union of Right Forces' used by Putin elevated his popularity with Russia voters and established a dominant ideology for the President that is another tenet of legitimacy.

It is certainly true that the notion of

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legitimacy is essential to the role of government. In France and Russia, this has been established by linking it to the electoral process, gaining popular support prior to entering into office. The attempt to secure popular support and ideological unity among a nation that has been plagued by factionalism and turmoil, as France and Russia have in the post 1962 and 1993 periods respectively, is a logical first step to unifying and normalising public support.

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When a country establishes a presidential electoral system based on a majority vote that requires runoff elections it often hopes to achieve greater legitimacy and accountability to the electorate. This type of presidential electoral system can create legitimacy, ~~create~~ the belief of citizens that a government has the right to run a country, if the elections are carried out regularly and fairly, so that the people feel they are ~~choosing~~ selecting their leaders. This is similar to how a presidential system can create accountability to the electorate if the elections are direct. In indirect elections the citizens are selecting their leaders and if a leader does not please them they may select a different one, thus leaders are accountable to their electorate.

In 1962 De Gaulle ^{was instrumental in} established ^{ing} a French constitution designed to create a strong, legitimate, and accountable president. ~~But~~ Because the French president is directly elected from ~~among~~ multiple candidates

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he gains legitimacy and accountability. The ~~the~~ French president is elected every five years and these regular elections ensure that a president who is not acting according to the electorate's wishes will be dismissed from office.

Because the president is accountable to the electorate in these elections they feel he has a right to rule and is thus legitimate.

Since 1993 Russia's electoral presidential electoral system has not had the same degree of legitimacy or accountability. Because ~~Because~~ During this time Yeltsin has undermined the constitution, acting against it to further his economic goals. ~~Because~~ Because Yeltsin did not respect his own constitution his legitimacy was lowered. ~~Furthermore~~ Furthermore traditional Communists continue to regain their foothold in the Russian government, if they ~~did~~^{do} come to power it is questionable whether fairly contested elections would continue. Since ~~So~~^{elections} while for the time being the Russian

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president is held somewhat accountable for his ~~policy~~ policies, the Russian government is so unstable that this accountability may be in jeopardy.

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By establishing a presidential electoral system based on a majority vote that requires runoff elections, a country hopes to achieve many goals. Two of these goals are a smaller number of parties with representation and another is political legitimacy.

When a country establishes a smaller number of parties with representation, it ~~has~~ has a number of beneficial effects, one of which is consolidation of parties. Extreme parties fuse with more central parties creating less ideological tension ~~in~~ among parties in opposition to each other. This benefits highly with the increased ease of passing legislation that results. France has accomplished this very well. They have gone from having over eight major parties in the Fourth Republic to about four right now under the Fifth Republic. It has also caused extremist groups such as the Communist Party of France to work more closely with groups further in towards the center, such as the socialists. Although this did not succeed ~~at~~ first in Russia, with odd parties such as the "Beer lovers", over time Russia has seen a sharp decrease in its amount of parties similar to France. The difference being that parties aren't coming into the center from the far left. However, reform parties are consolidating and it's looking to be more and more like a four party system.

Political legitimacy is a very important goal that a country hopes to obtain when creating a presidential electoral system. By having a majority vote and a strong executive, the country hopes he will bring order. This is very true in France. After years of chaos and political instability in the French government, Charles De Gaulle was able to get his constitution passed and he founded the Fifth Republic. De Gaulle was viewed upon as a savior by the French people for bringing order to the corrupt system. Unfortunately, this did not have the same affect in Russia. Despite the establishment of a presidential electoral system, the government gained no legitimacy. The executive, Boris Yeltsin, was ridiculed by the public.

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For the damage his drastic economic reforms did. Corruption also was rampant. The mafia became very powerful as various industries were released from state control.

It is apparent that while ~~many~~ ^{countries} may establish a presidential electoral system for similar reasons, it is very hard to judge whether it will work. Some countries just don't have the right conditions for some of the goals they wish to achieve.