

Political economy and social blocs

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A political economy of institutions

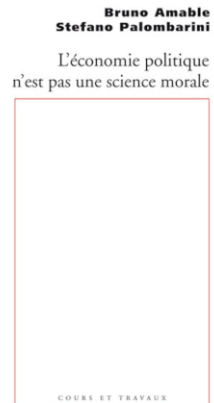
- How are politics and the economy linked?
- (economic) policy decisions are political decisions
- Are political decisions (more or less strictly) determined in the economic realm?
 - Mainstream economics: economic “laws” from which no government can escape without costs
 - Marxist tradition: infrastructure and superstructure
 - "Keynesian" tradition of economic policy: to achieve a well-defined goal, lower unemployment, dampen the business cycle, etc.
 - ...
- Institutions are not “social technologies”
 - Socio-political compromise

The political nature of social conflict

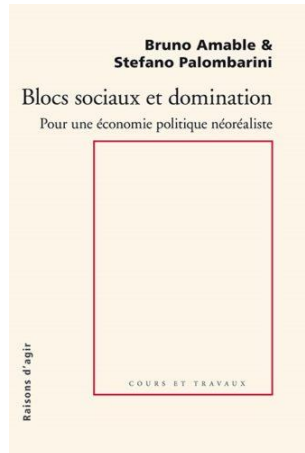
- Amable & Palombarini (2005, 2009...2024, 2025): *neorealist political economy of institutions and change*
 - This approach analyses the institutional dynamics starting from the **diversity of socio-economic interests** at the individual and collective levels, and the conflict that such diversity brings
 - **This conflict is political**, reducible neither to simple direct economic determinants nor to moral considerations
 - The differentiation of situations generated by the **economic dynamics** influence this conflict...
 - ... but agents' interests must be carried by a **collective action** and defended in the social and political sphere

Joint work with Stefano Palombarini

Theory



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A neorealist approach to institutional change and the diversity of capitalism

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NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2023.2215701>



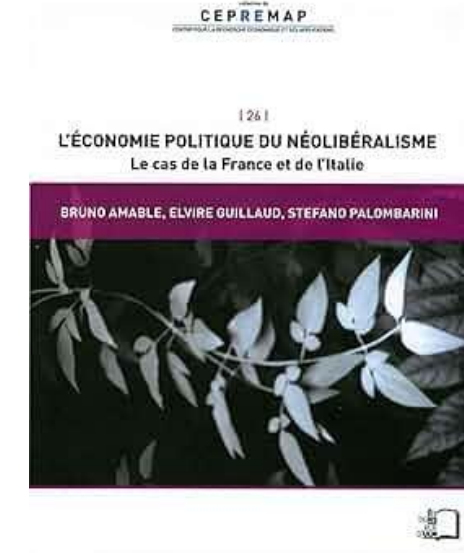
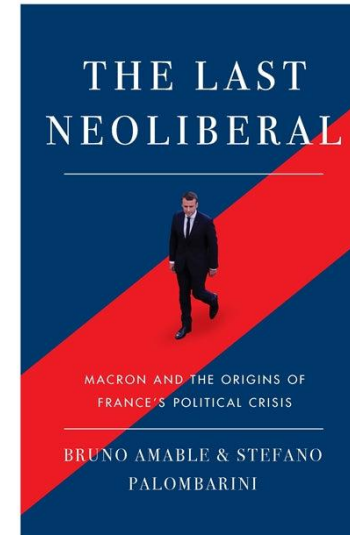
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Multidimensional social conflict and institutional change

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Theory + Application



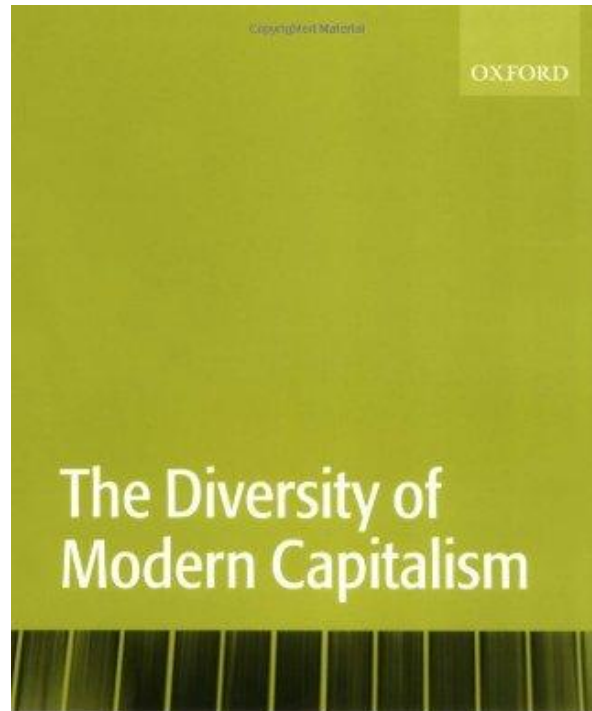
7. The *bloc bourgeois* in France and Italy

Bruno Amable and Stefano Palombarini

2 The emergence of an anti-bourgeois bloc in France

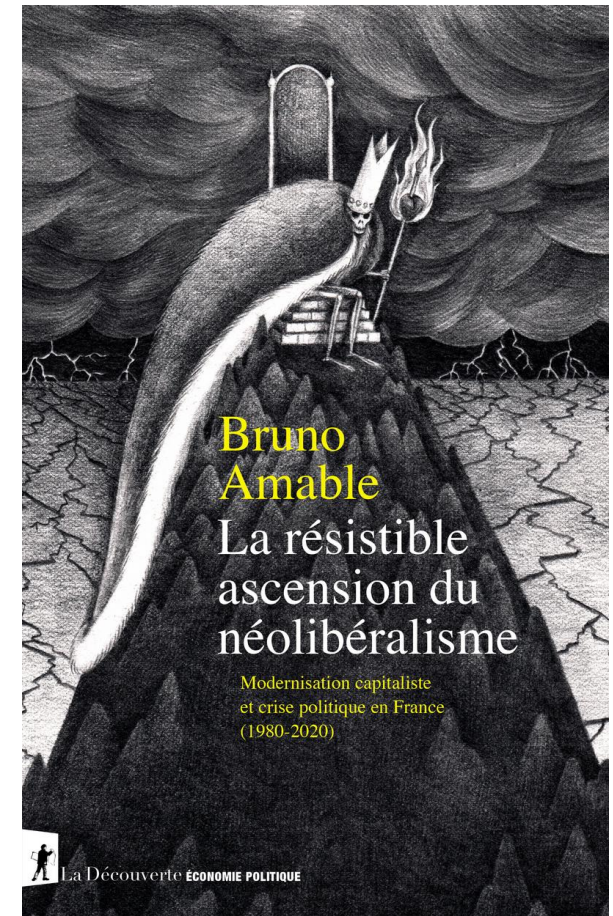
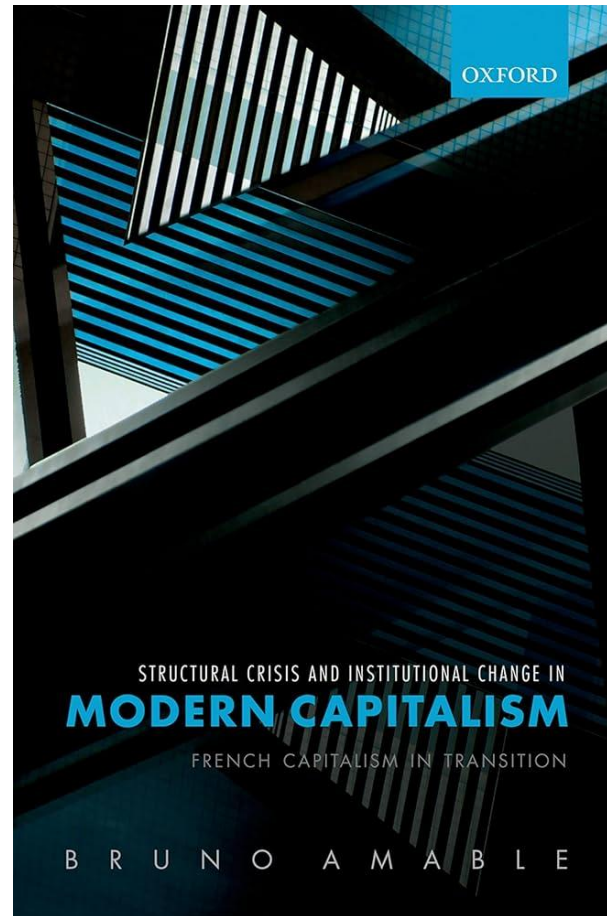
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Political economy of capitalism



Bruno Amable

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Social Conflict

- A conflict rooted in the *diversity of positions* occupied within the social structure
- Ideology and institutions play a role on two levels:
 - a/ in the *transition from the 'objective' positions* occupied within the structure to *expectations regarding public policy and social development*
 - b/ in the development of *political strategies that select from among the existing expectations* and propose a compromise between certain socio-political groups
- The clash between different mediation strategies is resolved by the ability to generate *political support*

- Political power (the ability to generate support) is distributed asymmetrically among different social groups.

- Political support is not simply electoral support.

Expression	Decisive factor	Action	Link to the economy	Social groups concerned
Voting	Number	Participation in elections	Irrelevant unless voting rights are restricted by law or in practice	All except if census suffrage
Choice of investment or employment	Capacity for action and importance in the productive sphere	Relocation, tax optimisation, etc.	Essential	Investors, employers, companies, management
Lobbying/corruption/financing	Economic capital	Transfers to parties or individuals with decision-making power or influence	Crucially, the ability to provide support depends directly on economic resources	Employers / Special interest groups / Legally or illegally organised groups with financial resources
Lobbying / influence Symbolic power	Cultural capital	Provision of intellectual products (reports, specialist publications, legal texts, etc.)	Indirect	Directly: intellectual groups Indirectly: groups that finance intellectual activities
Media power	Economic capital, social capital	Ability to steer public debate, highlight or legitimise certain issues at the expense of others	Direct but variable depending on legislation	Large industrial and financial groups, intellectual groups
Strikes / demonstrations / civil resistance	Number or location within the productive apparatus/social structure	Work stoppages / blockades of activity / occupation of public space	Varies depending on the activity concerned	Employee groups / Organised and numerous groups
Physical violence	Determination and relative impunity	Intimidation, assaults, murders, coups d'état, etc.	Indirect	Groups specialising in the use of violence (police, regular army, paramilitary groups, mafias, etc.)

Table 1. The different expressions of political power.

Social Bloc

- Not a simple coalition of voters.
- Not an alliance of political parties.
 - See Weimar, Switzerland, etc.
- Not Gramsci's 'historical bloc'.
 - Gramsci uses expressions such as 'social bloc', 'national bloc', 'intellectual bloc', 'urban bloc' and 'rural bloc', 'mechanical bloc of social groups', 'industrial-productive bloc', 'liberal bloc of the right and centre', 'bloc of all right-wing forces', etc.
- A set of social (socio-political) groups that identify *to varying degrees and possibly for different reasons* with the same political project because it sufficiently meets their diverse expectations
- A social bloc is dominant when the political strategy that corresponds to it is able to establish itself in the long term
 - the strategy manages to renew the political support that enabled it to establish itself

Social blocs

- It is **not necessary that all the expectations of the social groups belonging to the bloc be met.**
- Some of these demands and expectations may be contradictory with others deemed more important by political actors, while others may be superfluous to gain political support.
- Thus, a social bloc implies not only a separation between the groups that participate in it and those that are excluded, but also an **internal articulation between the central and constitutive groups of the bloc and the integrated groups in a peripheral position**

Dominant Social Bloc

- A social bloc supporting a winning strategy of power conquest is a ***dominant social bloc*** (DSB).
- A stable DSB exists when a certain political mediation wins in the political competition on the basis of the policies and institutional change it implements.
- The existence of a DSB is a necessary condition for the regulation of social conflict.
- This corresponds both:
 - to the **viability of a political strategy** capable of reproducing the support necessary to impose itself in the political space,
 - and to the **relative stability of the frontier that separates the dominant groups**, included in the bloc and whose expectations will be at least partially taken into account in the formation of public policies, **from the dominated groups**, whose expectations will be neglected

- This definition of (dominant) social blocs is different from that found in earlier contributions to the *théorie de la régulation*.
- Lipietz (1988) defined a social bloc as '*a stable system of relations of domination, alliances and concessions between different social groups (dominant and subordinate)*'.
- For Lipietz, a bloc becomes *hegemonic* when '*it has its arrangements recognised as being in the interests of the nation as a whole*'
- consequently, Lipietz considered that '*in a hegemonic bloc, the fraction of the nation whose interests are not taken into account at all must be in a very small minority*' .
 - He thus distinguishes a '*bloc des possédants*', which includes industrialists, shopkeepers, peasants and savers, for the period covering the Third Republic.
- However, at least one social class, the working class, left out of this bloc did not seem to be such a demographic minority.
- Note that this is different from the Gramscian concept of “historical bloc” which is not a coalition of social groups but, to put it simply and taking up Marxian terms, the unity of the superstructure and the infrastructure.

Social blocs: core, peripheral groups, dominated classes

- A social bloc is **aggregated by a political initiative** that **selects the demands** that will be at least partly met by the implementation of public policy and regulatory action according to the support given by the social groups that express them.
- This choice of expectations and therefore of social groups establishes a **hierarchy based on the political weight of the groups**, which cannot be reduced to demographic or electoral weight.
- Some social groups 'have more weight' for reasons that depend on the institutional environment, including that of political institutions, or on the historical context.
- A **central group** for a given social bloc may be an **economically powerful or well-organised** social group, a group whose main expectations can be met as a basis for a public policy offer that will aggregate other, more peripheral social groups around the central groups
- **A social bloc is therefore not homogeneous** but structured according to the political weight of the social groups that make it up.

Three dimensions of autonomy (Amable & Palombarini 2023, 2024)

1. (Cultural) Hegemony and the formation of expectations regarding the social structure
 - Gramsci, forming a **political conscience**
 - Expectations are conditioned by the economic structure but are not strictly determined by it; **going beyond the corporate level**
 - Close to the conflict of legitimacy considered by Bourdieu (1997), who considers the **struggle ‘for the power to impose the legitimate vision of the social world’**
 - the **correspondence between social structures and mental structures** has a political function
 - **Leadership** capacity of certain social groups within a bloc

Three dimensions of autonomy

2. the strategic capacity of political actors to form compromises
 - developing **strategies** aimed at reaching compromises between some of the expectations involved
 - **choose** among the existing social expectations and demands those that will be at least partly satisfied and those that will be ignored.
 - However, one should not see political mediation as simply looking for a balance between pre-existing, given, demands.
 - **These demands are not exogenous to political mediation**, which plays a role in the elaboration of a common vision of a possible and desirable future to which bearers of different but possibly compatible expectations and demands can adhere
 - The political mediation that is at the root of the **construction of a social bloc** can therefore hardly be likened to simple bargaining between different groups

Three dimensions of autonomy

3. the logic of politics

- the setting of public policies is not functional to the protection of interests that could be qualified as dominant by the simple analysis of the productive sphere, independently of the political dynamics that is best characterised by a ***specific logic of accumulation/conservation of power.***
- Time dimension: the functioning of an institution or social organisation is **not reducible to the interests or compromises which were at its origins**
- **public action does not *invariably* respond to the need to guarantee the viability of the capitalist mode of production**

Three dimensions of domination

- **Political:**
- The expectations of *politically dominant groups*, which are integrated into the BSD, will be taken into account by public decision-makers, who will try to satisfy them.
- Groups excluded from the BSD are *politically dominated*, which means that their expectations do not significantly influence the definition of public policies or regulatory and legislative action.

Three dimensions of domination

- **Institutional:**
- A group whose perceived interests are favoured by the existing institutional architecture is dominant in this area
- It is dominated if the institutions have negative consequences on its interests as it perceives them.

Three dimensions of domination

- **Ideological:**
- A distinction must be made between groups whose expectations are *compatible with the dominant ideological paradigm*
- and groups whose expectations are *disqualified by that paradigm* as illegitimate, unrealistic, outdated, economically harmful or morally reprehensible.
- Different from Gramsci's definition

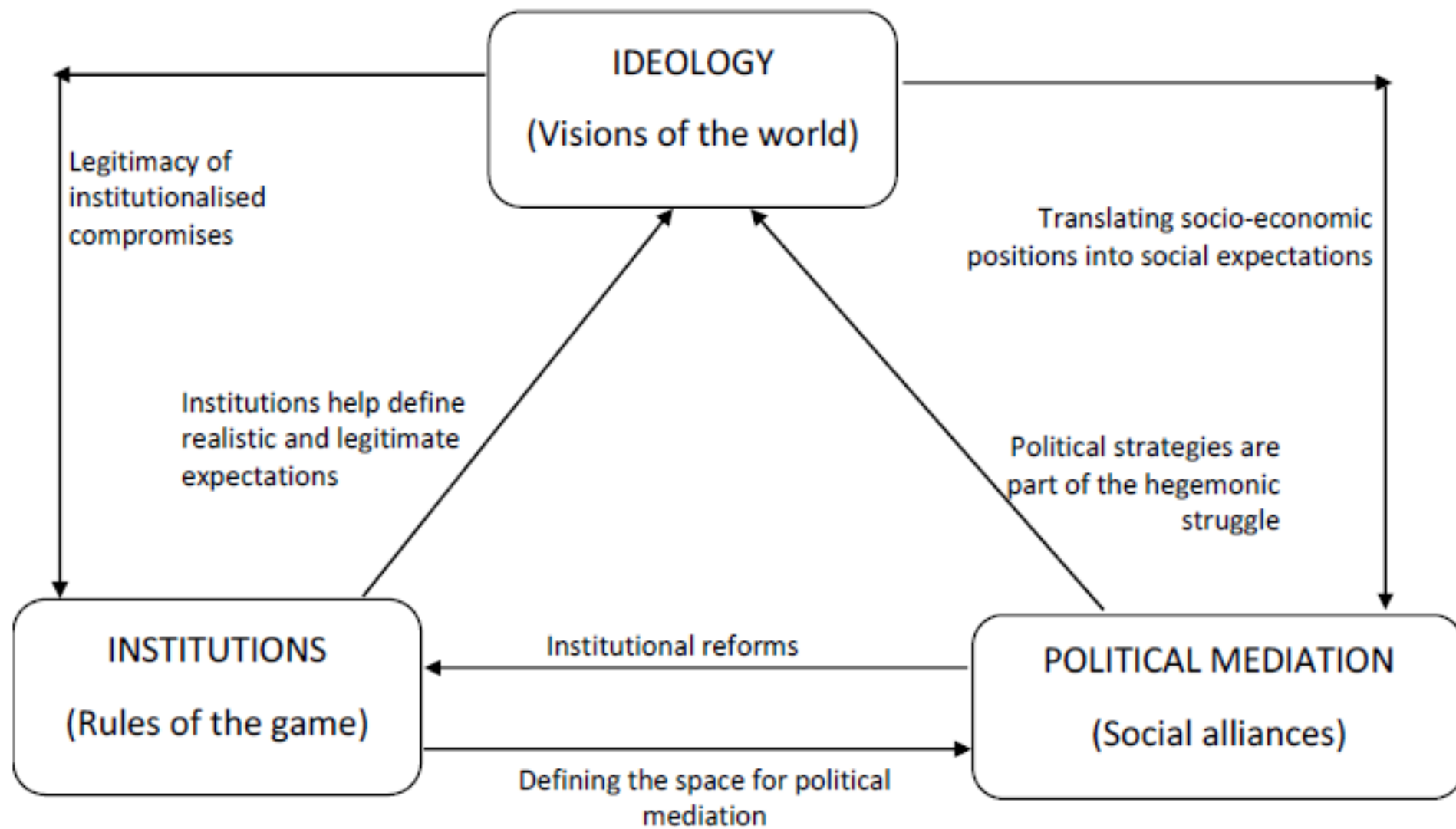


Figure 1. The three dimensions of domination. Source: figure 5.2, Amable & Palombarini (2024).

Hegemony and political domination

- Hegemony refers to a **vision of the functioning of the economic system, the role of the state, the hierarchy of the dimensions of political differentiation**, which affects the translation of the positions objectively occupied in the structure into social expectations.
- Political actors can engage in **hegemonic struggles**, the outcome of which, however, is largely beyond their control.
- **Political domination**, on the other hand, is determined in the political arena by the competition between different propositions of political mediation regarding the existing social expectations, the possible constitution of a dominant bloc and the definition of the boundary it implies between politically dominant and dominated groups.

A classification of social groups

		P (belonging to the DSB)	p (excluded from the DSB)
I	H	Dominant and self-confident groups; the core of the DSB	Groups in a position of strength but who do not accept the current political compromise a possible core for a new DSB
	h	Contested conservative dominant groups	Conservative declining classes
i	H	Reforming dominant groups	Rising classes
	h	Contested and marginal dominant groups	Dominated and marginalised groups

- A capital letter signals dominance in one dimension: P for politics, I for institutions, H for hegemony

- In the DSB (P)

	H	h
I	High administration in “dirigiste” France	Agricultural sector (France)
i	Finance sector (France) post-1980s	Blue collars in the left bloc (France 1980s)

- Outside of the DSB (p)

	H	h
I	Neoliberal hardcore	<i>“Pieds-noirs”</i> before independence
i	Neoliberal groups (France) in the 1980s	<i>Gilets jaunes</i>

Political conflict: a wide variety of scenarios are possible (although not all of them are equally likely to occur)

Table 3. Political conflict and perspectives for the DSB.

Core of the DSB	1. Dominant and self-confident groups	2. Contested conservative dominant groups	3. Reforming dominant groups	4. Contested and marginal dominant groups
Opposition to DSB				
5. Groups in a position of strength but who do not accept political compromise	Enlargement of DSB at the cost of ideological extremism and expulsion of peripheral groups	Strong and difficult to counter contestation of the politically dominant compromise. Very likely political shift (DSB change)	Possible enlargement of DSB if institutional reforms slow down	Uncertain viability of a DSB strongly contested on its legitimacy, and that of its proposed institutional reforms
6. Conservative declining classes	Ideological conflict, search for a DSB enlargement through ideological revision	Possibility of uniting all these classes in a conservative bloc through mediation based on a backward-looking ideology	Reformism of the dominant, conservatism of the dominated	Conflict between ideologically dominated and institutionally divided classes. Common destiny outside the DSB
7. Rising classes	Possible institutional compromise for marginally modified DSB	Conflict on all dimensions. Strong challenge to institutional architecture, likely destabilisation of the DSB.	Possible expansion of the DSB as a result of institutional reforms	Conflict between different sources of legitimacy (political vs. ideological) to support institutional changes in opposite directions.
8. Dominated and marginalised groups	Open conflict, repression of social protest	Institutional changes demanded by the dominated groups and refused by the dominant. No mediation possible. Likely violent repression of social protest	Open conflict, repression of social protest but possible punctual support of a fraction of the dominated for certain reforms	Conflict between ideologically and institutionally dominated classes separated by identity criteria.

Political crisis

- Political crisis: **fracture or loss of political power of a previously dominant bloc**: the crisis thus contrasts with a social conflict regulated by the presence of a BSD, i.e. a political strategy that is validated by the social groups it protects.
- A political crisis is not instability caused by competition between political groups vying for power by relying on the same social bloc, or on blocs that differ only in terms of the groups they include in subordinate positions
- Political crisis is **not necessarily the consequence of changes external to public action, occurring in the economic sphere**: the functional irreducibility of politics to economics implies that political crisis can be the unintended product of public action guided by the ability to generate support.
- The crisis is produced by the interaction between social subsystems that respond to different and possibly contradictory logics.

Possible outcomes of a political crisis

- The political crisis can sometimes be resolved by **changing the political institutions** themselves.
- **Institutional change can reopen a space for mediation** between the groups that make up the BSD.
 - In this case, the political crisis involves **redefining certain social institutions**, but its outcome is a continuation of the existing political power relations.
- Creation of a new BSD within the existing institutional framework.
 - However, it is very likely that once in power, the new bloc will propose reforms to certain institutions in line with the new dominant interests
- An unresolved political crisis:
 - may provoke widespread opposition to all institutions;
 - will push political strategies aimed at forming a BSD to **incorporate major institutional changes**. The political crisis then leads to a **crisis in the institutional architecture**

Crisis in institutional architecture

- **Widespread questioning of institutionalised compromises and their arrangement within a structure characterised by complementarities and a specific hierarchy.**
 - Possible consequence of a political crisis.
 - Possible consequence of an ideological upheaval that leads to questioning the effectiveness or fairness of certain social rules.
 - Possible consequence of a dynamic specific to the institutional dimension.
- However, institutional change is not limited to periods of crisis
 - Response to fundamental expectations held by social groups participating in the BSD
 - Condition for the viability of the dominant compromise
 - Consideration of demands from groups excluded from the dominant alliance

Hegemony crisis

- **An ideological paradigm is dominant when it shapes the expectations of the majority**
 - the ability to impose a certain conception of the public interest, efficient economic organisation or the role of public authorities as self-evident truths, obscuring their constructed and conflictual nature
- A crisis of hegemony coincides with the loss of this capacity
 - belief in the legitimacy of those who exercise domination wanes, the capacity to gain acceptance for dominant discourses and representations weakens, and the links between the worldview they convey and the interests it protects resurface
- Representations, the cognitive framework, the 'natural' character of an economic and productive organisation, conceptions of what is realistic and legitimate to expect from public policies, and even the terms of 'reasonable' political debate are increasingly widely contested
- Expectations previously dismissed as illegitimate or unrealistic are regaining a place in social conflict

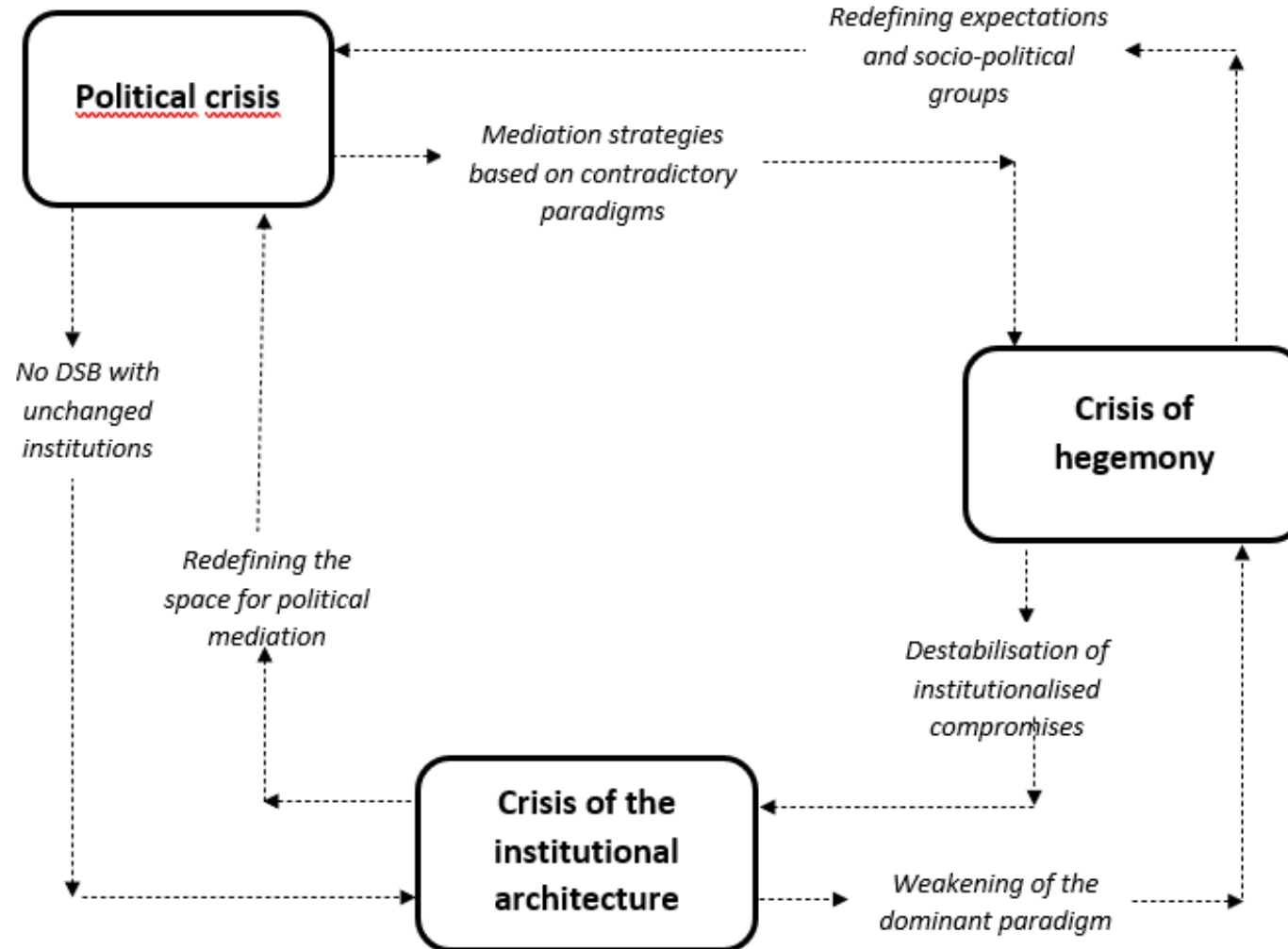
Hegemony crisis

- The crisis of hegemony coincides with the questioning of the paradigm that structures the worldview of socio-economic groups and ruling elites. It is not a phenomenon involving strictly ideological determinants.
- The probability of a crisis of hegemony increases when, within a given political, institutional and ideological framework, the gap between the expectations of a politically significant number of social groups and the subjective and objective chances of those expectations being met becomes too great
- The ideological struggle does not evolve separately from the conflict that characterises the institutional dimension and that of political mediation

Ideologies and ideological (hegemony) crises

Dominant ideology	Social groups	Promises / expectations	Outcomes / problems	New expectations	Dominant ideology	Social groups	Promises / expectations	Outcomes / problems	New expectations
“Keynesianism” / “social democracy” (Fordist period)	Administration	Extension of the sphere of intervention; possibility of rationally steering economic development	Increasing public expenditure perceived as excessive in a context of low growth; inability to cope with the crisis of Fordism	Paradigm shift; Neoliberalism; New Public Management	Neoliberalism	Employers	Greater opportunities for expansion once freed from administrative constraints	Certain sectors favoured (finance, services), others disadvantaged (industry)	Protections and subsidies; transfer of risk onto employees
	Employers	Steady market growth; stability of profitability	Instability; decline in profitability	Tax cuts; flexibility...		Employees	Equal opportunities; return to rising living standards	Job insecurity; inequality; income stagnation	Return or maintenance of protections; continued dismantling of the welfare state targeting certain groups as scapegoats
	Employees	Employment and rising living standards	Unemployment; job insecurity	Greater protection for employees threatened by social decline; equal opportunities in a neoliberal context for the better-qualified employees	“State socialism” or “state capitalism”	Administration / Party	Rational administration of socialism; stability of their dominant position	Growing inability to manage the economy and politics effectively	For some, democratic reforms; for others, conversion to capitalism
Neoliberalism	Administration	Leaner but more efficient administration; better pay and recognition of skills	Dismantling of public services; insecurity; inefficiency; corruption	Differentiation: return to public service vs. careers in the private sector		“Employers”: economic managers	Rational management of the economy; standard of living	Corruption and inefficiency; relative poverty compared with the “West”	Depoliticisation of the economy; introduction of market mechanisms
						Employees	Security and prosperity	Poverty and frustration	Growth and consumption

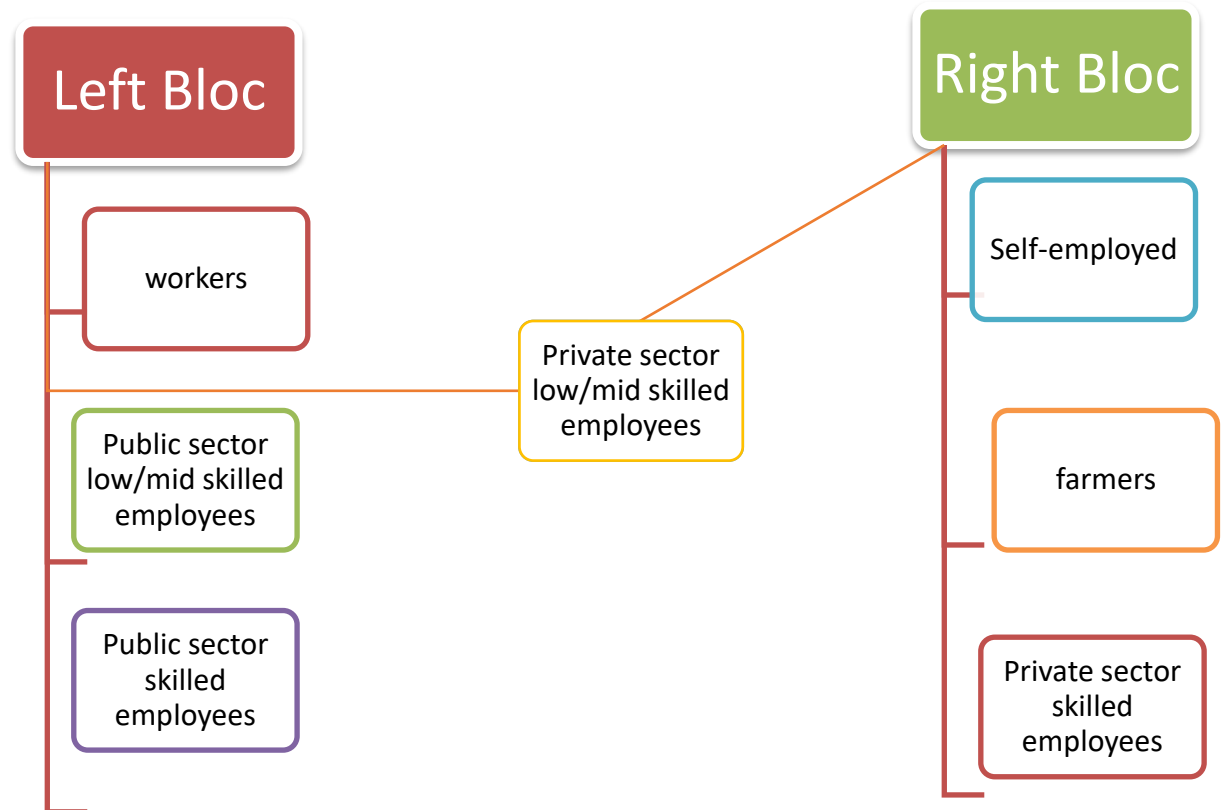
Crisis



Neorealist political economy in practice: the French structural crisis

France's political crisis

- Rupture of the two social blocs that had structured the political competition during the 5th Republic.
 - Left bloc: majority of the employees of the public sector and the working class
 - political representation was the various left parties led by the PS
 - Right bloc: medium and superior categories of the private sector, the self-employed and professionals and farmers
 - political representation: an alliance of centrist, liberal and Gaullist parties



...with different political demands

		Socio-political Groups	Expectations
	Right bloc	Self-employed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low taxation • Limits to redistributive social protection
		Skilled private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low taxation • Public intervention in favour of competitiveness
		farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transfers publics, defence of CAP • Protection against extra-EU competition
		Low/mid skilled private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of real wage • Demand-oriented macroeconomic policy • Social protection
Left bloc		Public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservation/extension of the public sector • Demand-oriented macroeconomic policy • Rise of real wage
		workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of real wage • Demand-oriented macroeconomic policy • Nationalisations • Social Protection and social rights • Protection against external competition

Tensions in the social blocs

- Political victory of the Left in 1981
 - Widely (and wrongly) interpreted by as the political majority catching up with the sociological majority (solving the modernists' contradiction)
 - For Lipietz (1984): this led the left to believe that the problem of its social base was already solved, neglecting the tensions within the left bloc between on the one hand the expectations of a state-controlled economy protecting existing jobs (old left), and on the other hand the demands for autonomy and an alternative mode of development (new left)
- Lipietz is right about the existence of a rift but his analysis of it is wrong
 - Expectations of the bulk of the left's social base was pretty much "traditional": real income, social protection, industrial democracy...

Neo-liberalism rising

- 1970s: economic crisis, slow growth, increasing unemployment
- 1970s: Giscard d'Estaing's presidency with Barre as PM (1976): a new critique of state intervention
- Degeneracy of modernism into neo-liberalism on the left
 - “second left”: anti-Marxist, favouring “social dialogue” and contract instead of class struggle and protective law...
 - “reformist” trade unions...
- Key figure of Jacques Delors: staff member of a modernist right PM (1969) and minister of economy and finance 1981-83, and president of the EC (until 1995)

Rupture of the social blocs

- **Right Bloc**

- 1980s, contrasted reactions to the rise of unemployment:
 - a Thatcherite policy expected by the self-employed and highly-skilled private sector employees;
 - demand for protection from mid/low skilled private sector workers (the failure of the neoliberal experience in 1986-1988 will have a long-lasting impact on the Right's political strategies)
- Acknowledgement of the contradictions within the bloc and repeated attempts to find solutions:
 - Repeated hesitations on the strategy: protecting state (*fracture sociale*) or neoliberal strategy (“brutal rupture”, “structural reforms”, welfare state retrenchment)
- Rise of the *Front National* as a consequence of these hesitations (but the same contradiction exists within the FN's social base)

- **Left bloc**

- 1980s, choice between

- A Keynesian macroeconomic policy and a social-democratic model of capitalism...
 - ...and the pursuit of European integration with a neoliberal economic policy

- “U-turn” 1983

- New classical macroeconomic policy and neoliberal reforms in domains initially considered as of low importance in the institutional hierarchy of the Left bloc (e.g. The financial system)
 - Consequences for the socio-political base of the government left: the working class drifts away

- Looking for a new social base :

- Possibility of an alliance with the fraction of the Right bloc the less exposed to the risk of unemployment and the consequences of economic stagnation (*bloc bourgeois*, Amable & Palombarini 2014)
 - This alliance project between the “centre” and the PS is made credible by the diverging expectations within the Right bloc w.r.t. The neoliberal reform program

Neoliberalisation through European integration

- 1995 Juppé reform: justified in reference to EMU
- Europe as a *'life insurance against socialism'* (A. Madelin)
- E.A. Seillière, President of Medef: the *'European constraint'* is a way to orient France towards a certain type of reforms.
- D. Kessler former Medef VP: *'Europe is a machine to reform France against its will'*
- Lamy, chief of staff of Delors at the European Commission and later director-general of WTO: *'the reordering and the "marketisation" of the French economy [...] were made by Europe, thanks to Europe and because of Europe'*.
- Pisani-Ferry, former economic advisor of D. Strauss-Kahn and "Programme and Ideas Manager" for Macron in 2017: *'Europe was our structural adjustment program. [...] From the opening of the borders to the opening of service markets to competition, through disinflation and the reduction of budget deficits, France has let European integration play the role that the IMF or the World Bank play for poorly governed countries'*
- Schäuble... a Troïka for France

Neoliberal reform strategy

- The social base of the neoliberal strategy :
 - Neoliberal hard core(similar in most OECD countries, a minority of the electorate) :
 - self-employed, shopkeepers, "highly-skilled" (or rather highly-paid) employees in the private sector, small entrepreneurs...
 - possible alliance with some wage-earners of the private sector
- Aim: reconcile contradictory demands
 - labour market:
 - flexicurity to reconcile demands for flexibility expressed by the self-employed and entrepreneurs with demand for security expressed by wage-earners
- In France, Sarkozy's program of neoliberal *rupture tranquille* was designed as a mediation between the expectations of the "hard core" on the one hand and the bulk of private sector wage-earners on the other hand

The EU / structural reforms divide and the recomposing of political support

- Structural reforms (and austerity) linked to further EU integration
 - social protection reform, labour and product market liberalisation...
- A new social coalition centred on the educated middle classes, *the bloc bourgeois* (Amable & Palombarini 2014) emerges, gathering the fractions of the left and right blocs favourable to European integration and the implied reforms of French capitalism
- The political representation of this bloc would be based on the mainstream centre-left and centre-right parties
- As a complement of this bloc, an “*anti bourgeois bloc*” could gather the social groups excluded from the *bloc bourgeois*, mainly the working classes
 - Still looking for a political representation in spite of several attempts

What social alliance?

- From an **alliance between employees and a fraction of capital** (Fordist compromise)...
- ...to an **alliance between (financial) capital and a fraction of employees?**
 - Segmentation, inequalities...: not unfortunate side-effects but structural requisites of the new regime
- Institutional elements favouring segmentation/inequality
 - Differentiated protection regular/temporary (cf. the revival of insider-outsider theory) or labour market liberalisation?
 - Welfare state retrenchment
 - Tax cuts, lower public investment...

French capitalism since the 1980s

- Hybridisation of the French model in a neoliberal way under two different political alliances
 - The Right governments privatised and made some partial labour market and social protection reforms
 - The Left governments deregulated the financial sector and privatised but left mostly intact the EPL and social protection
- Each political alliance preserved or attempted to reform institutions according to the hierarchies of their respective social bases
 - Wage labour nexus: crucial for the social groups supporting the left
 - Neoliberalisation: demanded by a fraction of the Right social base but feared by another fraction
 - European integration issue splitting both Left and Right social alliances
 - ...

Identifying the bloc bourgeois

Revue de la
régulation

Revue de la régulation

Capitalisme, institutions, pouvoirs

31 | 2nd semestre / Autumn 2021 | décembre 2021

Capitalismes et régimes rentiers

In search of the bloc bourgeois

À la recherche du bloc bourgeois

En búsqueda del bloque burgués

Bruno Amable

- use data from the French Electoral Study 2012 (FES2012) to identify the structure of the French electorate according to policy demands
- analyse the breakup of the left and right blocs
- identify the core social group(s) of the bloc bourgeois
- assess the possibility of extending the bloc bourgeois / compatibility of policy demands

Policy demands

Respondent's position on:

- the single employment contract: Very favourable / Somewhat favourable / Somewhat unfavourable / Very unfavourable / no answer, do not know.
- the power of the French state vs. Europe, from 0 (French state) to 5 (Europe), and no answer / do not know.
- Sarkozy's pension reform, from 0 (unfair) to 5 (fair), and no answer / do not know.
- the proposition 'the government should reduce income inequalities': strongly agree / somewhat agree / somewhat disagree / strongly disagree / no answer, do not know.
- nuclear plants, from 0 (stop) to 5 (continue), and no answer / do not know.
- immigration, from 0 (stop immigration) to 5 (welcome new immigrants), and no answer/do not know.
- the number of civil servants, from 0 (reduce) to 5 (increase), and no answer/do not know.
- privatisations: Very positive / Fairly positive / Fairly negative / Very negative / no answer, do not know.
- the priority for economic policy in the forthcoming years: improve firms' competitiveness / improve employees' condition / no answer, do not know.

Degree of approval of the proposition:

- 'The unemployed could find work if they really wanted to': strongly agree / somewhat agree / somewhat disagree / strongly disagree / no answer, do not know.
- 'Homosexual couples should have the right to adopt children': strongly agree / somewhat agree / somewhat disagree / strongly disagree / no answer, do not know.
- 'the VAT should be increased (to finance social protection)': from 0 to 6 and no answer / do not know

18 clusters

Group	Weight	Policy preferences	Characteristics
1	10.3%	Pro-European integration; hostile to neoliberal reforms	Young; high income; high education level; public sector
2	9.1%	Not pro-European integration, hostile to some neoliberal reforms	Middle-aged; low income and education level; clerks, workers, artisans, women
3	8.8%	Not pro-European integration; hostile to some neoliberal reforms	Middle-aged; low or middle income; technical education
4	7.9%	Anti-European integration; favourable to some neoliberal reforms; anti-immigration and homosexuals' rights	Low income and education level; old
5	6.7%	Anti-European integration; hostile to some neoliberal reforms	Young, high education level; public sector
6	6.5%	Pro-European integration; ambiguous on neoliberal reforms; pro-competitiveness and VAT increase	High income, wealth and education level; upward social mobility
7	6.4%	Undecided on European integration, undecided on neoliberal reforms except pro-privatisations	High income; higher technical education; upward social mobility, women
8	6.1%	Anti-European integration; pro-CTU; pro-redistribution, against nuclear energy, against immigration	Women, young, middle income
9	5.4%	Divided on European integration; hostile to immigration and homosexuals' rights; favourable to some neoliberal reforms	Men, old; high income; self-employed

Group	Weight	Policy preferences	Characteristics
10	5.4%	Pro-European integration; pro-neoliberal reforms; anti-immigration	Men, old; high income & education level
11	4.7%	Not pro-European integration; pro-redistribution; in favour of some neoliberal reforms; not favourable to immigration	Old
12	4.7%	Not pro-European integration; pro-redistribution; not favourable to immigration	Young; middle income
13	4.3%	Express no opinions on many issues	Women; low income and education level
14	4.3%	Against neoliberal reforms; pro-immigration	Young; low income
15	3.9%	Divided on European integration; favourable to neoliberal reforms; against immigration	Old; high income
16	2.1%	Pro-European integration; favourable to neoliberal reforms	Young, high or middle income
17	2.1%	Divided on European integration; favourable to some neoliberal reforms; against immigration	Old, middle income
18	1.5%	Pro-European integration; favourable to neoliberal reforms; against immigration	High income

From the bloc bourgeois to a streamlined right bloc

		Social expectations	Characteristics	Political leaning
Core Groups	C1	European integration ; Pension reform ; Privatisations ; Firms' competitiveness	Well-off, Educated	Centre-left
	C2	Pension reform ; Privatisations ; Firms' competitiveness	Well-off, Educated	Centre/centre-right
Peripheral Groups	P1	Pension reform ; less civil servants ; Privatisations ; Firms' competitiveness; hostile to immigration	Well-off, senior	right
	P2	European integration ; labour market liberalisation ; privatisations ; Firms' competitiveness; hostile to immigration	Well-off, educated, senior	right
	P3	labour market liberalisation ; privatisations ; Firms' competitiveness; hostile to immigration	Well-off, senior	right
	P4	European integration ; labour market liberalisation ; Firms' competitiveness; in favour of immigration	Young, middle to high income	diverse
	P5	Pension reform ; hostile to immigration; privatisations	senior, middle income	right

Macron

- Macron 2017 = electoral success of the bourgeois bloc strategy
- For a long time made difficult to emerge by the institutions of the Fifth Republic, but these same institutions allowed its overwhelming victory despite a narrow social base
- Macron succeeded where Delors and Bayrou failed; part luck; “oligarchic” support
- Chemically pure neoliberal; unconsciously (or not) Lippmannian
- Political strategy: facing the FN;
- Economic policy: Hayek and Keynes *en même temps* (Pisani-Ferry as economic advisor)

Macron's fragile power

- Macron's 2017 victory: 18% of the electorate (only half of which voted out of 'conviction')
- Legislative elections: LREM 15% of the electorate, 54% of deputies
 - Left: 5,7%, PS: 5,3%
- Narrowness of the core bloc bourgeois: between 6 and 12% of the electorate (Amable 2018)

Economic policy

- Macro policy at the service of the structural transformation programme
- Fiscal policy at the service of the 'attractiveness' of the territory
 - Biden and the 21% (Le Maire and Scholz: 12.5%)
 - Lowering the ISF justified by dividends (cf. Aghion) leads in fact to an increase in dividend payments;
 - lowering the IS does not stimulate investment but tax competition
- Suppression of social contributions: “starve the beast” strategy + management taken from social partners
- Programmed austerity for 2022-2027
- Constitutionalisation of the multi-annual rule of public spending and LFSS; parliamentary control by social partners

Social resistance

- Segmentation, inequalities...: not unfortunate side-effects but structural requisites of the new regime
 - But potential fragility of the bloc bourgeois
- Inherent weakness of the economic project: can finance and “start-ups” make up for deindustrialisation?
- The neoliberal reforms have two opposite effects
 - Long run: they alter the social structure and produce their own social base
 - Short to long run: the increase in inequality weakens the bourgeois content (middle class) of the bloc bourgeois

The political crisis in France

- Bourgeois bloc, not 'centrist' or 'central'
 - Radical transformation of the socio-economic model
- Neoliberalism, a dominant but declining ideology
 - The end of 'progressivism'
 - Less consent, more coercion
- Public institutions serving neoliberal transformation... and those who implement it
- Significant institutional transformations, past and future
- Political breakdowns/recompositions

Stylised models and Macronist reforms

Catégorie	Modèle Néolibéral	Modèle Libéral-identitaire	Réformes macronistes
Employment relation	Subordination of labour to the interests of capital. Little or no employment protection; individualisation, no recognition of the collective interests of employees.	No real consideration of the collective interests of employees. Search for an unlikely middle ground between unprotected individualisation and collective protections.	Macron ordinances (2017) weakening the collective representation of employees and increasing employment flexibility.
Social protection	Minimal (safety net) and individual private insurance.	Protection differentiated by nationality/identity: minimal for non-nationals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pension reform • Reform(s) of unemployment insurance • National preference for certain social benefits (housing benefit, family allowances); struck down by the Constitutional Council.
Production	Privatisation of public services. Pro-competition ideology, but practice and policies favouring large firms.	"Free competition" claimed within the national framework. Protection of small producers and national producers.	Privatisations (Française des jeux...)
Finance	Expansion of the financial sector. Financial logic applied to all economic policy decisions.	Protection against internationalised finance, at least rhetorically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abolition of the wealth tax (ISF) and replacement by the tax on real estate wealth (IFI) • Single flat-rate tax (PFU) on investment income • Reduction of "production" taxes
Education	Privatised, competitive and elitist system.	Tolerance of a private/faith-based system. No egalitarian ambition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blanquer reforms ("à la carte" baccalauréat, Parcoursup, school evaluation...) introducing methods inspired by private management, increasing social selection and ultimately favouring the development of private education. • "Experimentation" with school uniforms.

The transition of the French socio-economic model towards a hybrid neoliberal-authoritarian model

Category	Neoliberal	Liberal-identitarian	Macronist reforms
Environment	Leave market mechanisms and private initiative, possibly state-aided, to address the issue.	Active disinterest or even denial of the existence of a problem.	Ambitious commitments to reduce carbon emissions proclaimed then systematically postponed.
European integration	Central project, instrument for implementing the neoliberal model.	Considered a problem although certain economic policy orientations are compatible with the EU.	Display of ambitious objectives (eurozone budget and finance ministry...)
Migrations	Strictly conditional admission based on the needs expressed by capital.	Reduced to a minimum or even opposed.	Immigration law "the toughest in thirty years" (G. Darmanin) passed with RN support. Largely struck down by the Constitutional Council.
Democracy / civil liberties	Distrust of democratic processes; constitutionalisation of economic policy; use of brute force if necessary.	Delegation of decision-making to the leader; frequent use of brutal repression.	Brutal repression of protests (Yellow Vests, pension reforms, Sainte-Soline, etc.). Collusion between those in power and oligarchs, who also own the media. Criminalisation of social protest (environmental defence, trade unionism...)
Social bloc	Bourgeois bloc centred on the upper classes (capital) and educated upper-middle classes.	Recomposition/extension of the right-wing bloc centred on its popular fraction (self-employed).	Extension of the bourgeois bloc to groups from the right-wing bloc; defections of social groups from the left-wing bloc appear negligible.

Amable & Güney (2025). Data from post-electoral study 2024

Cluster	Political Expectations	Socio-economic Characteristics	Associated Social Bloc
National sovereignty and purchasing power (20.5%)	Partly in favour of neoliberalism; against immigration and globalisation; pro-ecology (except for taxes on fossil fuels).	Low levels of income and education, or self-employed.	Liberal-identitarian
Ecological left (16.4%)	Strongly against neoliberalism; against immigration and globalisation; strongly ecological.	Low or middle income level; high education level; intermediate professions or public sector employees.	Radical-ecologist left
Moderate left (13.2%)	Rather anti-neoliberal, but not anti-tax and anti-growth; not against immigration; undecided on globalisation.	Intermediate professions and employees with low to middle income and education levels.	On the margins of the radical-ecologist left bloc
Nationalist neoliberals (12.5%)	In favour of neoliberalism; against immigration and globalisation; anti-ecology and anti-tax.	Farmers, shopkeepers, technicians and company managers with low to middle income and education levels; retirees.	Liberal-identitarian
Centrist neoliberals (11.2%)	In favour of neoliberalism; not anti-immigration nor anti-globalisation; ambiguous about ecology.	Company executives with high income and education levels.	Neoliberal
Conservative neoliberals (11.1%)	In favour of neoliberalism; pro-globalisation but anti-immigration; anti-ecology.	Company executives with high income and education levels; retirees.	Neoliberal
Anti-globalisation left (7.1%)	Against neoliberalism; anti-immigration and anti-globalisation; pro-ecology except for taxes.	Intermediate professions and private-sector employees; low income and education levels.	Radical-ecologist left
Moderate neoliberals (4.3%)	In favour of neoliberalism; not anti-immigration nor anti-globalisation; anti-ecology except for taxes.	Company executives and public-sector professionals with high income and education levels.	Neoliberal
Undecided left (1.7%)	Rather anti-neoliberal; undecided on globalisation and not anti-immigration; undecided on ecology.	Intermediate professions with low income and education levels.	Radical-ecologist left
Nationalist neoliberals (1.4%)	In favour of neoliberalism; against immigration and globalisation; rather anti-ecology.	Senior executives and higher intellectual professions; intermediate professions (technicians) with low income and education levels.	Liberal-identitarian
No opinion (0.6%)	No opinion.	Low income and education levels.	—