



**Directorate of
Intelligence**

~~Confidential~~



25X1

France: The Role and Influence of the Media

25X1

A Research Paper

~~Confidential~~

*EUR 86-10035
September 1986*

Copy **333**

Page Denied



**Directorate of
Intelligence**

Confidential



25X1

France: The Role and Influence of the Media



25X1

A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of
European Analysis, with contributions from [redacted]
[redacted] EURA, and [redacted]
Office of Leadership Analysis. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Comments and queries are welcome and may be
addressed to the Chief, European Issues Division,
EURA, [redacted]

25X1

Reverse Blank

Confidential

*EUR 86-10035
September 1986*

Confidential

25X1

**France:
The Role and Influence
of the Media** [redacted]

25X1

Summary

*Information available
as of 20 August 1986
was used in this report.*

Economic and political pressures in the last decade have precipitated changes in both the structure of the French media and the role of the media in the political system. The evolution toward more independence and activism is slowly transforming the press into a significant political actor in its own right. Legal and cultural constraints ensure that this change will be slow and uneven, but the direction of change is probably irreversible. [redacted]

25X1

Until very recently, the press was so closely affiliated with political parties that it had only a limited role in setting the country's political agenda. Now that voters are beginning to loosen their ties to political parties, newspapers are being forced to redefine their role. Political parties are finding it difficult to attract and hold voters, and newspapers of both the left and the right are losing readers at a rapid rate. In an effort to survive, many papers are asserting their independence and experimenting with investigative journalism, which increasingly is helping to define the critical policy questions. [redacted]

25X1

The broadcast media, formerly monopolized by the state, have also been transformed in the last five years. The Socialists' audiovisual law of 1982 legalized private radio and television and created an independent regulatory authority to insulate broadcasting from direct government intervention. Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's government's own audiovisual law continues the process of deregulation, denationalizing one of the three state television networks and establishing a new regulatory council with broader technical powers and greater autonomy from political intervention. The controversial divestiture of the first state channel—and the possibility of a second divestiture by the end of the year—and the resale of two existing private channels will inject a formidable degree of private enterprise into broadcasting. [redacted]

25X1

The political consequences of structural changes in the media have become increasingly obvious. In the last decade there has been an accelerating tendency for French politics to import some of the factors that have transformed US politics—media consultants, public opinion polls, presidential press conferences, and preelection debates. Media consultants are now standard features of every campaign team, and the ability to play media politics effectively is becoming a key to political power. Effective exploitation of these resources has become crucial to any political campaign and increasingly may spell the difference between success and

Confidential

25X1

failure. The simultaneous decline in ideologies has magnified the impact of these developments as politics increasingly revolves around personalities, rather than issues and ideologies. [redacted]

25X1

At the same time that the political role of the media—in particular television—has grown exponentially, the control of the state over broadcasting has steadily declined, largely as a result of public pressure. If formal control of the media is no longer politically viable, however, the techniques of government influence must become more subtle. Since 1982 formally autonomous regulatory agencies insulate the media from direct government intervention, but the advent of private television, far from emasculating the government, may create a new method of partisan intervention. Thus far, decisions on state contracts for private TV stations have been based as much on political criteria as on economic criteria. Moreover, Chirac has pledged to annul those contracts granted by the Socialists. We therefore believe that a new pattern in media policy may be emerging: just as in the past newly elected governments purged the management teams of state TV networks in order to appoint their own people, governments may now void the old contracts and sell new ones to ensure an acceptable political coloration. The form of government interference may change, but its substance will probably remain. [redacted]

25X1

Media policy in France is controversial in the best of times, and the debate over Chirac's audiovisual law has exacerbated underlying divisions within the government coalition and seriously damaged its public image. The conservative majority failed to rally behind the government's bill in parliament—in part because the bill was poorly constructed, but also because it touched on basic ideological disputes over the role of the state—and free market liberalism surfaced. This most public airing of disputes within the razor-thin majority has raised new doubts about the cohesion and durability of the coalition. [redacted]

25X1

Regardless of changes in the media, and with the obvious exception of the Communist organs, the press and broadcasting media will remain critical of the Soviet Union and fair, though not uncritical, toward the United States. The media will continue to reflect the nation's overall foreign policy consensus: a firm commitment to the Atlantic Alliance but reserving the right to differ on specifics. [redacted]

25X1

Confidential

iv

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Summary	iii
Introduction	1
The Print Media	1
Changing Structure of the Press	3
Political Orientation of the Press	3
The Press and Foreign Policy	6
The Press and the State	9
Journalism and Politics	10
The Broadcast Media	11
The Evolution of Broadcast Policy	12
Effects of the 1982 Law	13
Radio	13
Television	13
The Continuing Government Role	14
The Broadcast Media Since the Election	14
Changes in Political Style	16
Outlook	17
Implications for the United States	19

Confidential
[Redacted]

25X1

**France:
The Role and Influence
of the Media** [Redacted]

25X1

Introduction

Print and broadcast media have very different histories in France, but in the past they have shared one trait: inhibited by a variety of formal and informal restrictions, they have shown limited independence at best and have enjoyed only limited political influence. They are now in a period of rapid and fundamental change, and the question of independence has become a critical issue for the media themselves and for the French Government and society:

- The print media have an illustrious past but have been declining in circulation and prestige through most of this century. Although they are almost all privately owned, they have long been constrained by the laws and conventions buttressing the authority of the French state. They now face challenges and opportunities that may encourage a more independent, more investigative approach to journalism.
- The broadcast media did not come to prominence until World War II. Always closely controlled by the government, they were often used by President de Gaulle and his successors for blatantly partisan political purposes. As a result of a controversial law passed by the left in 1982, they now are expanding rapidly; and like the print media, they may be allowed—or may be able to assume—greater independence than in the past. [Redacted]

Media policy is a major political issue in France, but there is surprisingly little real difference in principle on the independence issue among the major contenders for power. The debate generally centers on the broadcast media, and the most noticeable fissure has usually been between the “ins” and the “outs.” Those out of power call for wholesale reorganization and liberalization, but change their minds when they take office: the Jacobin notion of central influence, if not control, remains strong in the political elite. [Redacted]

This resistance notwithstanding, we believe a trend toward greater independence has been established in both the print and the broadcast media. This paper, using circulation and viewer data as well as evidence gleaned from the media themselves, will examine the trend and explore its implications for the workings of the French political process — including the formulation of foreign policy. [Redacted]

25X1

The Print Media

The French press peaked early, and its 20th-century experience has been almost unremittingly downhill. In 1789 France became the first nation in the world to codify freedom of the press, and for over a century France dominated European journalism. The golden age of the press, between 1881 and 1914, produced a dazzling array of newspapers, with as many as 80 dailies in Paris alone, including the largest newspaper in the world. Censorship during World War I destroyed its credibility, however, and during the inter-war period, newspapers sacrificed any sense of professional objectivity, becoming sounding boards for their publishers, most often from the extreme right. During World War II the mainstream papers were propaganda organs for the occupation forces, and the French public began to turn to the relatively new medium of radio for uncensored news. [Redacted]

25X1
25X1

Immediately following liberation, print journalism enjoyed a short-lived renaissance, with newspaper readership reaching an alltime high of 15.1 million in 1945, but by 1952 newspaper circulation had fallen back to 1914 levels. From 1953 to 1968 readership again increased dramatically, reaching another peak during the student revolt in May 1968 and subsequent events. Since then, circulation has again dropped, with no end to the decline in sight. [Redacted]

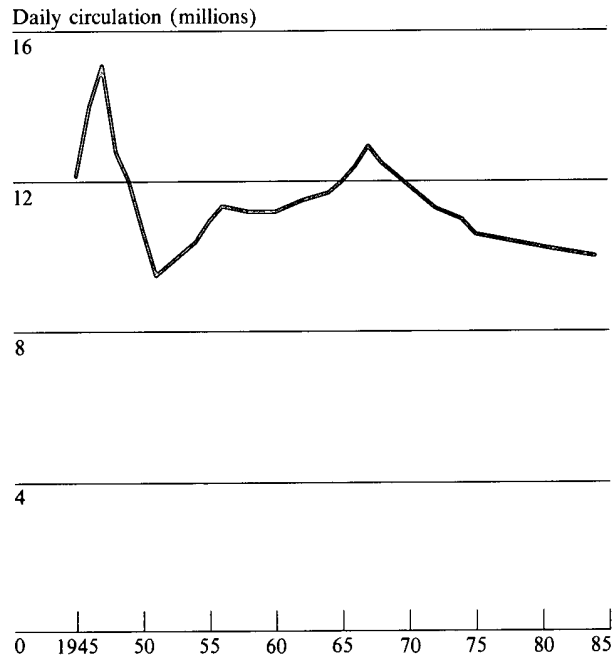
25X1
25X1

Confidential

The most likely explanation for the downward trend, in our view, lies in the relationship of the press to political parties. Readership of the press seems to be directly correlated with the strength of party affiliation: when the parties flourish, so do newspapers; when party affiliation falters, so does readership. This correlation reflects the unique political role of the French press. Since the beginning of mass politics in the mid-nineteenth century, national and regional newspapers not only were virtually the only sources of political information but were also important agents of political mobilization as well. French political parties were weak, and the political scene was dominated by a succession of broad ideological camps with flagship parties. Lacking the usual mechanisms for recruiting and socializing members, or for carrying out an electoral campaign, the camps created newspapers to carry out these functions. Thus, unlike newspapers in the United States, the French press made no pretense to objectivity and called itself a *presse d'opinion*. A symbiotic relationship developed between political movements and the press: to a large extent the success of an ideological grouping was dependent on its ability to develop a popular newspaper, and the fate of the newspapers themselves was inextricably tied to the health and popularity of their associated ideologies. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the *presse d'opinion* has historically played only a minor role in setting the policy agenda on specific issues: it has served more as an ideological sounding-board than as a goad to the government.

The circulation trends shown in figure 1 suggest three phases since World War II that roughly correlate with phases in the degree of party affiliation among the electorate. A period of recognized growth in party affiliation (1952-68) corresponds to a rise in circulation, bracketed by two periods of downturn in both (1945-52 and 1968-present). The steady decline in press circulation since 1968 can be directly correlated with "dealignment"—the decline of traditional political parties and ideologies. Poll results indicate that between one-third and one-half of the electorate believes that ideological distinctions are no longer relevant. Just as the political parties are finding it difficult to attract and hold voters, newspapers aligned with those parties—on both the left and the right—are losing readers at a rapid rate.

Figure 1
Forty Years of the French Daily Press,
1945-85



Source: Adapted from Claude Bellanger, Jacques Godechot, Pierre Gural, and Fernand Terrou, eds., *Histoire generale de la presse française, Tome V*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), p. 208 and other sources.

310332 9-86

This relationship suggests that newspaper circulation may be a useful indicator of the condition of the party system in France. Furthermore, television—which many observers consider the major cause of falling readership—may actually have little impact on press circulation. Indeed, there is some evidence that television may even have a positive impact on newspaper reading, possibly by whetting the public's appetite for more information.¹ Television's sharpest growth period—from about 1957 through about 1970—coincided with a period of growth in newspaper circulation.

¹ In a press conference in December 1985, President Mitterrand used this argument to defend the licensing of the first private television channel. For instance, newspaper circulation in Italy has increased in recent years precisely during a time of tremendous expansion of television.

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

Changing Structure of the Press

The circulation decline and its financial ramifications have produced a movement toward concentration of ownership — of the provincial press in particular. A recent attempt by the new government to legalize concentration by abrogating a 1944 statute that prohibits an individual from owning more than one daily was judged unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council. Nevertheless, the law has never been an impediment to concentration. Indeed, the only attempt to implement the law was the Socialist government's effort in 1983 to break up Robert Hersant's publishing empire, which is the largest in the country and accounts for more than 20 percent of total newspaper circulation, including over 30 percent of the readership of the national dailies (see inset). The government's zeal was roundly criticized as politically motivated, and the effort was ultimately overturned by the courts in a major embarrassment for the government. The following year Hersant parlayed his newfound image as a martyr for press freedom into a seat in the European Parliament, which carries with it immunity from prosecution. Early this year, flaunting that immunity and perhaps believing that the government elected in March would take a more benign view of his activities, he bought yet another regional group.

[redacted]

Ten large chains now dominate most of the newspaper industry; the provinces are controlled by so-called *ducs de la presse*, a small group of magnates, almost all of them politically conservative. The local papers that formed the original basis for the chains have largely ceased to exist except as inserts in the provincial dailies. Independent papers are becoming rare as the number of papers decreases and the press becomes increasingly homogenized within regions and across the country (see figure 2).

Thanks to economies of scale, the provincial newspapers have been able to take advantage of the latest technologies to produce attractive copy using photos and graphics. As result, although overall newspaper circulation continues to fall, that of the provincial papers has stabilized since the mid-1970s (see figure 2). The Paris papers, on the other hand, have seen a precipitous decline in circulation. The drop has long been particularly noticeable with the popular press,

such as *L'Aurore*, *France-Soir*, and *Le Parisien Libere*, but, beginning in the late 1970s, it hit even quality newspapers like *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* (see figure 3).

25X1

The drop in newspaper circulation has been partially offset since the 1960s by a dramatic increase in readership of weekly news magazines modeled after *Time* and *Newsweek*. These magazines stress their objectivity, considering themselves clearly distinct from the *presse d'opinion*. Their coverage does tend to include more factual information than is common in newspapers, but each magazine nevertheless has a political perspective that is more or less overt (see table).

25X1

After a somewhat shaky start, the weeklies have become a major presence in the press world. Indeed, the newspapers are beginning to adopt some of their stylistic features. A weekly magazine supplement to *Le Figaro* helped boost that daily's sales in the late 1970s, and other papers have also adopted photos, graphics, and a punchier writing style. Even *Le Monde*, the last bastion of Gallic puritanism, has made a concession to changing norms by using the occasional graph, but its editors remain steadfastly opposed to photos (see inset).

25X1

25X1

Political Orientation of the Press

Given the inherently partisan nature of the press in France, newspapers and magazines tend to be fairly obvious in their political biases. Mirroring the de-alignment of the party system, however, a number of independent national newspapers have emerged in the last decade that tend to be more "objective" and less obviously biased, although there is a clear sympathy for a leftist agenda. These papers—such as *Liberation* and *L'Evenement du Jeudi*—are leading the way in the evolution toward investigative reporting and increasingly seem to be helping to define the crucial issues.

25X1

25X1

The Paris-based national press is diverse in its political orientation, whereas the provincial press—significantly larger in circulation—is overwhelmingly conservative (see table). On the right, the most striking

Confidential

Confidential

Hersant: Spokesman for the Right

Robert Hersant, 66, popularly known as "Citizen Hersant" after Citizen Kane, has aroused controversy over the extent of his newspaper and magazine holdings and the suspicion that he uses his journalistic soapbox to meddle openly in partisan politics on an unprecedented scale. It is widely believed that he exploits his close ties to the conservative leadership for business purposes and that his empire will grow at an accelerated pace following the conservative victory in the March 1986 legislative election. According to the US Embassy in Paris, it is widely rumored that Prime Minister Chirac has promised him a privatized television channel, probably Antenne 2. [redacted]

[redacted] Hersant has switched allegiances back and forth across the political spectrum and is said to have friends in most political parties. In his present incarnation, he is ardently right wing, but he has scrupulously avoided committing himself to a specific political leader, apparently enjoying equally close ties to the three major figures on the right: Chirac, Valery Giscard d'Estaing and Raymond Barre. In a revealing statement in 1984 Hersant boasted, "I offer the Elysee to [whoever] will offer me [private] French television," and it is widely rumored that before the election he cut a deal with the unified opposition for one of the newly privatized television stations. He harbors political ambitions of his own, despite his assurances that he seeks office only out of a sense of civic duty, considering journalism more "noble and serious" than politics. Hersant successfully ran for a parliamentary seat in the March election on Giscard's (UDE) Union for French Democracy ticket, and between eight and 11 deputies are associated with him. He is clearly interested in forming his own parliamentary group, but has thus far failed to attract the minimum of 30 deputies. Nevertheless, his faction may be able to wield disproportionate influence within the splintered conservative majority. While the government may be impressed by his political skill, however, the voters clearly are not. In a 1978 press evaluation of the 228 members of the European Parliament, Hersant rated dead last in effectiveness. [redacted]

The prospect of Hersant assuming a direct political role compounds growing uneasiness about his dominance of the media. In just 25 years Hersant has built a vast newspaper empire from scratch—although it is widely suspected that his ties to leading politicians helped him get crucial bank loans at highly favorable rates. He is generally acknowledged as a managerial genius, buying a number of failing newspapers in one region, merging them under one title with several editions, and reducing the staff, facilities, and sales departments to cut overhead and advertising rates. In 1975 he bought his first national paper, the insolvent and fading but still influential Le Figaro. He rapidly followed up that purchase with two more large national dailies, France-Soir (1976) and L'Aurore (1978). [redacted]

Critics—who are legion—come from across the political spectrum. Those on the left are perhaps more vociferous, claiming that Hersant's papers are merely a soapbox for his peculiar rightwing perspective and provide him with enormous political influence. With every purchase Hersant faced bitter resistance, including strikes and mass resignations, from his future employees, many of whom belonged to Socialist and Communist unions. Even his ideological brethren are concerned that Hersant's appetite may threaten the principle of ideological pluralism in the media. But the most general criticism is that his papers tend to become "hollow shells," tabloids devoid of serious journalism and catering to the baser interests of the public. [redacted]

We believe that the most extreme charges from the left of Hersant's day-to-day editorial manipulation are exaggerated; he does not need to interfere on a regular basis. Most of the writers who disagreed with his politics left the papers when he took over, and he

25X1

25X6

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

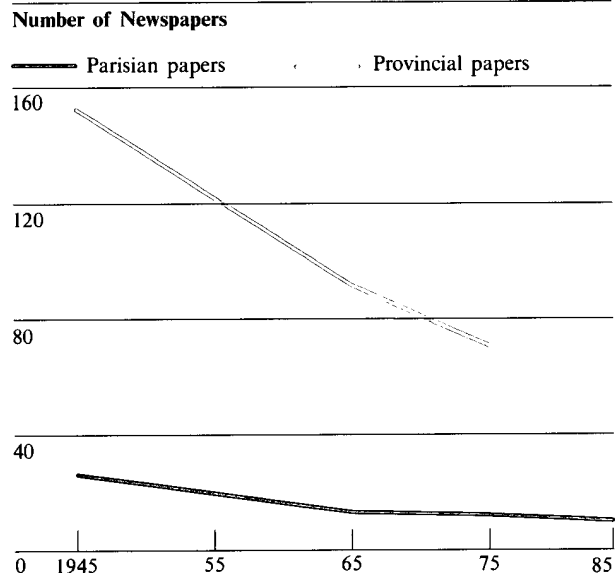
Confidential

has installed numerous former and current conservative politicians in top posts, leaving the day-to-day guidance to them. Thus, while some disgruntled former employees have seen his hand behind obviously slanted articles, he has only rarely been involved in determining the coverage or content of editorials,

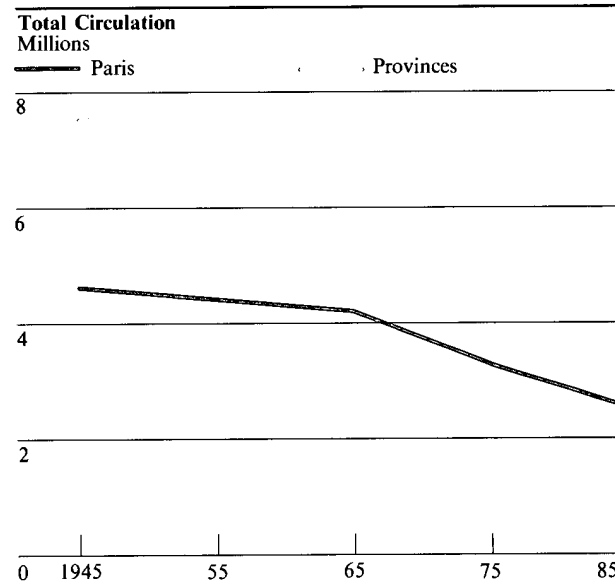
In any case, the papers accurately reflect Hersant's views, including a generally favorable view of the United States and NATO as well as a visceral hatred of the Communist Party, the one constant throughout his checkered career. From the 1950s through 1968 Hersant was a Socialist, but since 1981 he has relentlessly lambasted his former colleagues and accused President Mitterrand of presiding over France's political and economic ruin. The government responded by enforcing antitrust laws that had lain dormant for almost 40 years in an effort to break up his media empire. Paradoxically, the action not only failed to accomplish its purpose but had the unintended effect of transforming Hersant into a popular martyr for freedom of the press.

His relations with the new government will almost certainly be more cordial—and more profitable. There is a potential for tension, however, if Hersant allows his unabashed ambition to get out of hand. Hersant will be hard pressed to remain an independent force within the right as the factions jockey for position in anticipation of the presidential election. Chirac in particular will be sensitive to shifts in Hersant's leanings. Moreover, while the right's courting of him has given Hersant a certain leverage over the three conservative rivals for the past four years, the new Prime Minister will be able to take advantage of his position to redress the balance. Chirac could deny Hersant the television station that he clearly hungers after and in the extreme could—in the ultimate irony—take legal action to restrain the further growth of his press empire.

Figure 2
Newspapers: Paris vs. Provinces, 1945-85



25X1



25X1

Source: Adapted from *Expansion*, special edition, "Medias: Tous Contre Tous," Oct-Nov 1985.

25X1

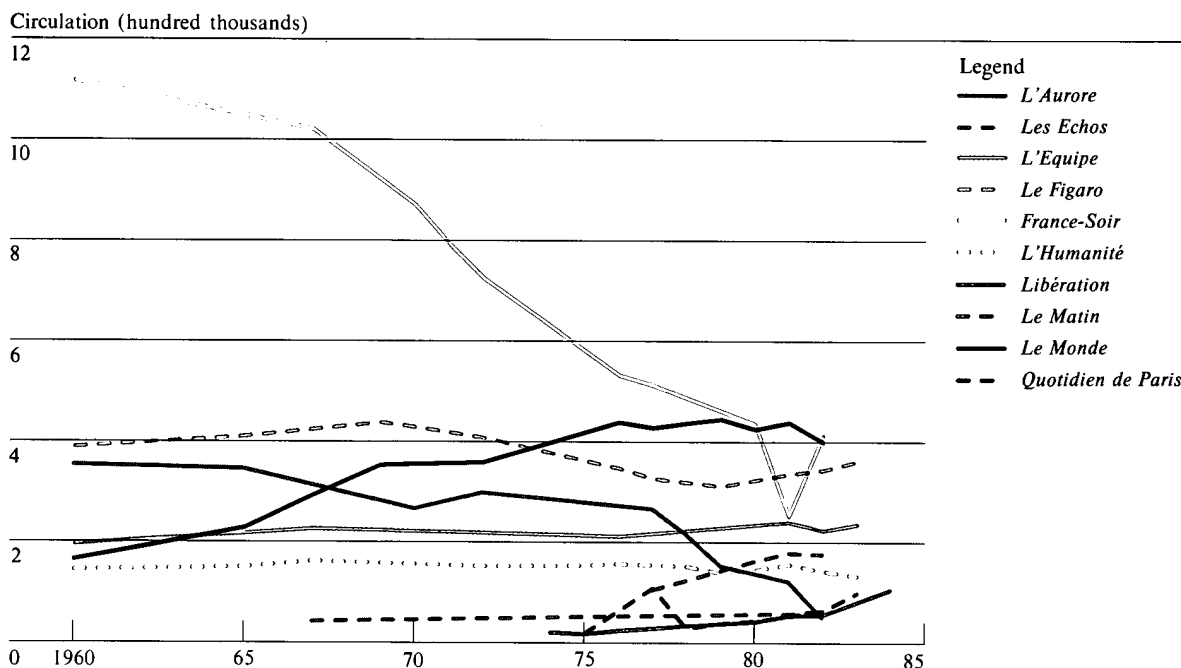
310333 9-86

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

Figure 3
Circulation of Paris Newspapers, 1960-85



Source: Dominique and Michel Fremy, *Tout Pour Tous: Quid*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985), p. 976.

310334 9-86

phenomenon is Hersant's growing empire; on the left, it is the decline of the Communist press, paralleling the precipitate fall in support for the Communist party. Circulation for the official Communist organ, *L'Humanité*, has remained fairly stable, but many of the party's more than 400 other publications—including magazines and regional papers—have foundered because of falling readership and resultant financial problems. In addition, splits within the party over policy and strategy have caused considerable friction between editors and journalists. The deepening crisis of conscience within the party has spawned an effort by members of the dissident "renovator" faction to launch an independent magazine, "*M*," dedicated to promoting open discussion of party strategy and leadership.

In contrast, since the mid-1970s the rest of the leftist press has flourished, as has the Socialist Party, now the largest party in France. Curiously, the more independent papers on the left—most notably *Libération*—seem to be reaping the benefits; the circulation of *Le Matin*, considered to be an unofficial organ of the Socialist Party, has grown, but not at the same rate as the party's electoral support.

The Press and Foreign Policy

Coverage of foreign affairs—especially in former colonies—is frequently excellent, particularly in *Le Monde*. Despite differences over domestic politics, the press—with the obvious exception of the Communist

Confidential

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

The Major National Press: Political Orientation and Attitudes Toward the United States and the USSR

	Average Daily Circulation ^a	Political Orientation	Attitude Toward US and USSR
Dailies			
<i>Le Parisien Libere</i>	335,259	Extremely conservative	A "popular" paper with little coverage of foreign affairs. Highly critical of USSR; generally favorable to US.
<i>L'Aurore</i> ^b	35,000	Extremely conservative	Highly critical of USSR. Strong supporter of NATO, generally favorable to US.
<i>France-Soir</i> ^b	569,268 (1981)		
<i>Le Figaro</i> ^b	361,206		
<i>Quotidien de Paris</i>	80,000	Conservative	Generally favorable to US.
<i>Le Monde</i>	385,084	Center-left	Very reliable, extensive, and critical coverage of USSR; supporter of NATO, on occasion critical of US but generally favorable.
<i>Le Matin</i>	170,094	Affiliated with the Mauroy wing of the Socialist Party	Critical of USSR; mildly critical of US.
<i>Liberation</i>	105,000 (1984)	Independent left	Critical of USSR; critical of US.
<i>L'Humanite</i>	118,710	Communist Party organ	Extremely critical of US.
News Weeklies			
<i>L'Express</i>	513,041	Conservative	Highly critical of USSR. Strong supporter of US, NATO.
<i>Le Point</i>	328,859	Center-right	Generally favorable to US, though sometimes critical.
<i>L'Evenement du Jeudi</i>	100,000 (1985)	Independent	Little coverage of foreign affairs but generally sympathetic to US.
<i>Le Nouvel Observateur</i>	368,672	Independent left, but highly sympathetic to Socialist Party	Critical of US, but highly critical of USSR. Only limited coverage of foreign affairs.

^a 1983 figures unless otherwise noted.

^b Part of Hersant chain.

organs—tends to fall in line with the consensus that has emerged in the last five years: a firm commitment to the Atlantic Alliance and the European Community and a tough stance toward the Soviet Union. Attitudes toward the United States and US foreign policy tend to be generally favorable, but not uncritical. Predictably, the leftist press is often more vocal in its criticism—especially regarding US policies toward the Third World—but the press across the board reflects the French insistence on foreign policy independence.

Coverage of the Soviet Bloc, in our estimation, is both objective and often sharply critical. The major national papers, especially *Le Monde*, often provide detailed and sophisticated commentary that is almost unremittingly critical. French papers have been in the forefront in covering the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and have been vehemently critical of the Polish Government and its policies. More recently, the press has given extensive coverage to revelations of KGB

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

Le Monde: Decline or Renewal?

In recent years, the institution that decisively shaped French intellectual and political life since the end of World War II has fallen on hard times, both financially and editorially. Since 1980 Le Monde has been rocked by internal problems, strikes, and three disruptive turnovers in its editorial staff. The immediate causes of the crisis are mounting economic problems and huge debts—\$9.6 million by 1985—caused by topheavy management and declining sales. Its daily circulation, which hovered around 450,000 during its heyday a decade ago, has dropped in five years to below 350,000 and continues to fall. Stringent austerity measures were tried, but the paper's journalists, who own a major interest, refused to accept them. Consequently, the paper shut down for two days in 1984 and the editor was forced to resign. [redacted]

Le Monde has always been associated with the traditional left and strongly supported the successful Socialist Party campaign in 1981. Paradoxically, however, the left's triumph proved disastrous for the paper. Reluctant to criticize the new government with the same vigor that it had used to attack conservative governments, Le Monde lost some of its credibility as an independent force. At the same time, its position as spokesman for the "thinking" left was challenged by Liberation, founded in 1973. [redacted]

Many observers believe that the paper's economic problems stem from a more profound crisis of political and journalistic identity. Ponderous, opinionated, and authoritative, Le Monde is still identified with the generation that came to power and influence after World War II. Liberation is the product of the cultural and political upheavals of 1968 and has captured the younger generation of the left. Le Monde's new chief editor, Andre Fontaine, acknowledges: "Before, when you became 18 it was automatic that you began to subscribe. . . . No longer. We have a definite problem with the youth." [redacted]

Fontaine is a highly respected commentator on international affairs, with 36 years experience on the paper. Since his election in early 1985 as a compromise candidate in a stormy contest, he has developed a radical rescue plan to rejuvenate the paper both financially and spiritually. He convinced the staff that drastic measures were necessary, including the sale of Le Monde's building; 10-percent salary cuts; elimination of 250 jobs; and an injection of \$3.7 million of outside capital for the first time from readers, investment institutions, and "disinterested" friends of the paper. To calm journalists' fears, he pledged that although their stake in the paper would be reduced from 40 to 30 percent, they would retain a right of veto and that the paper would remain independent. [redacted]

Perhaps the most important aspect of the plan, however, is editorial. Fontaine envisages dropping the old polemic style in favor of a more balanced, objective stance. He believes that the days when Frenchmen fought battles over ideology are finished. "We cannot change too quickly, too abruptly, as to lose our identity . . . but we must modernize. Our reporting must become less partisan and subjective and our style clearer, simpler, and easier to read." These changes will not be easy, however. Much of Le Monde's influence derived from its emphasis on commentary, often by some of the most eminent academics, which frequently defined the terms of public debate. Sacrificing this kind of in-depth reportage may well alienate Le Monde's remaining audience. [redacted]

It is too early to tell how far this tinkering will go or whether it will be enough to save Le Monde, but the return of the right after the March election may help the paper redefine its editorial stance, reinvigorating both the staff and the readership. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1
25X1**Confidential**

Confidential

activities in France. Ironically, only the Hersant group of papers—normally considered to be the most conservative—has remained silent. An editor of a respected independent paper suggested to US Embassy officials that Hersant, despite his vaunted anti-Communist credentials, may be hesitant to criticize the Soviets because in 1954 a loan from a Soviet bank bailed him out of a particularly difficult financial crisis. Thus, to some extent the leftist press is more consistently anti-Soviet than the right is. [redacted]

The Press and the State

The state has substantial leverage over the press through both regulatory agencies and the judicial system. On the regulatory side, it provides eligible newspapers with substantial subsidies, which according to some scholars exceed 2 billion francs annually (approximately \$300 million) in direct and indirect aid, or about 12 percent of total print media revenues. The aid is designed to compensate for regulations that restrict the amount of advertising to no more than one-third of the paper's surface in order to limit the influence of advertisers. Registration with the joint state-industry commission for these subsidies is totally voluntary, but the financial benefits ensure participation by most newspapers, many of which now depend on them for survival. Some observers—particularly those on the left—have noted with growing alarm the increased importance of these revenues and the implicit danger of censorship. The guidelines to determine eligibility for the awards are sufficiently vague that the government can interpret them at will, and potentially can cut off papers that are uncooperative. [redacted]

Similarly, although individual journalists are not required by law to register for the state-issued professional identification card, registration has become a practical necessity for employment with an established newspaper. The registration commission, composed of working journalists and government officials, certifies journalists for a 30-percent tax reduction and for protection against summary firing under the generous state labor code. This "conscience clause" is commonly invoked to dispute dismissal for political reasons. These regulatory functions imply potential influence of the state over journalists, and press and scholarly sources note that there have in fact been

isolated cases in which individuals and papers were denied certification in order to pressure them to conform. [redacted]

The juridical relationship between the press and the French state has been a considerably more complex compromise between the principles of press freedom and political expediency. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens, which established freedom of the press, also established the state's right to limit that freedom:

The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of mankind. Each citizen may therefore speak, write, print in liberty, *except in abusing this freedom in cases set forth by the law.* (Emphasis added.) [redacted]

Accordingly, current law—actually a complex of laws scattered throughout the civil and military legal system—provides an unusually wide definition of press offenses punishable by civil and criminal procedures. Moreover, the burden of proof in libel cases rests with the accused (the publisher, the journalist, even the street vendor) rather than the aggrieved party, and the tests of good faith are stringent indeed. [redacted]

Perhaps most startling is the "no-fault" libel, in which publications may be fined or their personnel imprisoned, for publishing information—even if true—that is judged by the courts to be in any of the following categories:

- Anything potentially damaging to a person's honor that is printed without permission. This stricture has been broadened to include any "word or image" published from a private place without consent, such as classified documents.
- Facts more than 10 years old, if they may damage a person's reputation.
- Reference to crimes that were specifically pardoned or occurred during a period that is officially amnesied or off limits. This seals off an enormous range of cases because wholesale pardons are a common aftermath of elections. But, most important, the

Confidential

Confidential

most politically charged periods, such as World War II and the Algerian war, have been sealed off and can be discussed only at risk of civil or criminal prosecution or both.

- Incitement to commit crimes. This ambiguous provision allows the prosecution of journalists as accomplices in any crime for which they provided direct or indirect "provocation," including presenting the crime in a "praiseworthy, meritorious, or legitimate light."
- Offenses against public authorities, official bodies, and "protected persons." At the highest level, the definition does not require a precise libel, but only an assault on the dignity or authority of the President or members of a foreign government. Furthermore, the prosecutor's office may pursue the case even without the participation of the aggrieved party. The law also grants special protection to "institutions playing an important role in public life," including the prestigious elite schools, academic councils, chambers of commerce, and the Legion of Honor, as well as the courts and the armed forces. In addition, the deceased of France are fully protected against defamation, while political officials on both the national and local levels receive partial immunity.
- "Any scornful expression that diminishes respect for the moral authority of a public function, or the purpose for which it is exercised." The broadest and most ambiguous of the categories, journalists consider it the most serious because it draws the harshest penalties. This is the real minefield for journalists especially for those who cover the courts. Intent is irrelevant; the courts will punish any action that results in the discrediting of a judicial act or decision. This category was used in 1980 by President Giscard to punish *Le Monde* for its persistent investigation of the scandal in which Giscard was alleged to have received diamonds from Central African "Emperor" Bokassa. Even though Giscard's highhanded tactics in this case helped to sour his public image and contributed to his defeat in 1981, the case is a potent example of the government's power to control the press.

- Exempted subjects, such as anything that might damage the "effectiveness or morale" of the military; anything that might "attack the credit of the nation, whether undermining confidence in its currency or the value of public funds"; anything relating to parliamentary investigations or commissions; or anything that might "outrage public morals."

Punishments for these offenses range from fines to imprisonment. Seizure of the contested publication is an extreme measure that has been invoked in the past, especially against the Communist press and during the Algerian war, but has been used infrequently in recent years. A more common judgment is the forced insertion of retractions and "corrections," even when the original material was factually accurate.

Censorship is formally prohibited in peacetime but has been imposed during crises, as in the Algerian war and in 1958 during the military rebellion. Far more effective, however, is self-censorship. Given the formidable potential for prosecution and the lever of state funding, newspapers and journalists often engage in what one leading journalist called "prudent conformism . . . the silence of complicity." The state's leverage over the press is thus most effective when it remains a potential threat rather than an actual retaliation.

Journalism and Politics

Given these constraints, it is not surprising that the French press has little history of investigative reporting. The power of the American press shown in Watergate impressed journalists but thus far has had only a minor impact on the French press. Over the years, the only consistently iconoclastic papers have been the satirical biweekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* on the left, and the weeklies *Le Crapouillot* and *Minute* on the extreme right.

French news coverage of the "Greenpeace affair" in the summer of 1985 prompted many foreign observers to draw parallels with Watergate and to predict that the French press was at last embracing investigative reporting. Two small leftist weeklies broke the story of

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

the security service's responsibility for the sinking of Rainbow Warrior, the flagship of the Greenpeace environmental group that was interfering with French nuclear testing in the Pacific. In an unusual move, *Le Monde*—experimenting with a new style to boost falling readership (see inset)—picked up the story, which quickly blossomed into a full-blown crisis. Ultimately, Minister of Defense Hernu accepted responsibility for the episode and resigned his post, the first time since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958 that press disclosures had forced the resignation of a Cabinet minister. [redacted]

American commentary at the time tended to exaggerate the role of the press, in our view. Press reports make it clear that the investigations were paradoxically pushed by the government itself, out of either political miscalculation or its own desire to get to the bottom of the affair. *Le Monde* refused to admit that it had a government source, but the rest of the press speculated that the source was in fact the Minister of the Interior, Pierre Joxe. A prominent Parisian political journalist insists that, without government instigation, the crisis probably would never have happened: "The big mistake of the government was to have said it would reveal the full truth in the first place. . . . Nobody was asking for the truth. The French support the testing program and accept that something was done to prevent Greenpeace from interfering with it." By October, anxious to limit further political damage, the government turned off the leaks and the crisis quickly dissipated. [redacted]

Nevertheless, in the French context, the pursuit of the scandal was unusually persistent and suggests the gradual evolution of new norms of journalism. In the last decade the independent papers—most of them left of center, edited by and for members of the sixties generation—have become more openly critical of the government, whether left or right, and have engaged in limited investigations. By US standards, papers like *Liberation* are quite tame, but we think their marked success in drawing away readers from the more mainstream papers like *Le Monde* is slowly pushing French journalism toward a more active role in seeking out and publishing news. Just as the increased competition within the print media for an audience and advertising revenues has promoted changes in the

editorial styles of newspapers, we expect the emergence of private television as another competitor to further hasten the trend toward more independent journalism. [redacted]

The shift signals a change in the role played by the press, in our view. Historically, newspapers were so closely tied to ideological camps that their main function was to convey information and opinion from the top down. As those ideologies lose their power, newspapers gain the freedom to develop independent editorial positions and gradually to take on a more active agenda-setting function. The constraints on this movement are formidable, ranging from the qualms of journalists themselves to the political elite's willingness to use state sanctions against the press, but we believe that the change toward more activism is probably irreversible. [redacted]

Currently, the press exerts its greatest independent political influence through the growing use of political polls. Public opinion surveys have a long history in France, going back to the 1950s, but, as in the United States, their political salience has increased dramatically in the last decade. No poll can produce absolutely accurate predictions of electoral results, and the reliability of French polls is complicated by the peculiarities of the French electoral system since the institution of proportional representation in 1985. Nevertheless, the pollsters' creditable performance in predicting the March election points up their increasingly sophisticated methods, including computer simulations. Reporting from the US Embassy in Paris confirms that the monthly polls published by the major national newspapers (*Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*) and the newsweeklies (*Le Point* and *L'Express*) have become a critical factor in determining electoral strategies. [redacted]

The Broadcast Media

The audiovisual law enacted in 1982 by the Socialist government opened broadcasting to private initiative and diluted centralized control. A proliferation of private radio stations and regional state television

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

companies sprang up immediately after the law was promulgated, but the first private television station was licensed only in 1986 amid substantial controversy. Following historical precedent, the Chirac government has proposed its own reorganization of broadcasting, including the denationalization of at least one state television station and the establishment of a new regulatory authority with expanded powers. [redacted]

The Evolution of Broadcast Policy

Broadcast media policy has been a major focus of attention in France since at least World War II. The remarkably effective use by the extreme right of radio and cinema for propaganda during the war demonstrated the new technologies' power to shape the political environment. At Liberation, the Provisional Government by consensus retained the the Vichy government's monopoly over broadcasting, not only to deny extremists a potent weapon, but also, the founders of the Fourth Republic hoped, to give the new regime a method of cultural and ideological socialization that could overcome the nation's historical fragmentation. [redacted]

It was left to President de Gaulle, however, to use the media to their fullest potential; in the words of one scholar, turning the monopoly into "the absolute weapon of the regime." In the de Gaulle era, radio and television news content was directly controlled by the government, and reportage on election and referendum campaigns was blatantly biased. A 1964 reform created a board of governors, the Office de Radiodiffusion Television Francaise (ORTF), that was supposed to act as a buffer between politicians and broadcasters; but in practice the board, whose members were appointed by the government, continued to follow the directives of the Minister of Information. Four years later, one of the most dramatic episodes of the May student and worker revolt was the strike by broadcast journalists and production staff against continued government manipulation of the media. The strikers' demands for greater autonomy, freedom from government pressure, and impartial news services still define the issues in state media policy. [redacted]

Following de Gaulle's resignation in 1969, a short-lived reorganization of the media promised a real loosening of government control, but by 1972 President Pompidou had reaffirmed the ORTF as the

official mouthpiece of the French state. Another reorganization was introduced in 1974 in the early months of Giscard's presidency; as had happened previously, however, the very practical political advantages inherent in government control of the media overcame any lingering reformism in Giscard. Within two years he reverted to media manipulation that would have made de Gaulle proud. A telephone with direct access to the newsrooms of the three state television stations was installed and, according to press reports, was used often and to great effect. [redacted]

The blatancy of Giscard's interventions, however, helped to undercut the legitimacy of the monopoly at the same time that technological advances—for instance, the expansion of FM radio that permitted significantly smaller, cheaper transmitting facilities as well as the more recent advances in satellite technology—made its defense increasingly difficult. The first effective challenge to the monopoly was the creation of pirate radio stations all over the country in the late 1970s. When Giscard prosecuted a number of their owners, "free radios" (*radios libres*) became a rallying cry and a major issue in the 1981 presidential election. [redacted]

Sensing the growing unpopularity of the broadcast media monopoly, Mitterrand made reform of broadcasting a major plank in his platform and pledged that it would be a priority of the new government. Once in power, he faced a familiar dilemma: fulfilling his campaign promises would deny the new government a proven means of mobilizing support; in addition, it would break with the Socialists' longstanding ideological commitment to state broadcasting as a means of cultural and social education. Nevertheless, popular pressure and the increasing difficulty of enforcing the monopoly in the face of technological change finally convinced Mitterrand to sign the July 1982 audiovisual law, which for the first time effectively dismantled the state monopoly and opened the way for private initiative in broadcasting. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1
25X1**Confidential**

Confidential

Effects of the 1982 Law

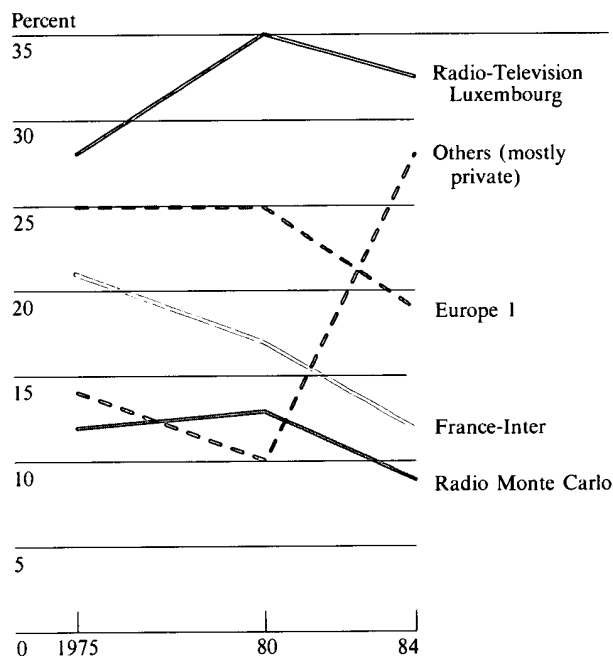
Radio. Radio before 1982 had been the exclusive domain of the "big four" national stations: Radio France, wholly owned by the state, and three peripheral stations—Europe 1, Radio-Television Luxembourg, and Radio Monte Carlo—all partly owned by the state. The 1982 law legalized private local stations, and almost immediately hundreds of them sprang up, catering not only to a wide variety of musical tastes but also to groups previously ignored by the state broadcasting services: ecologists, feminists, immigrants, Boy Scouts, community associations, and marginal political parties. Many of the largest newspaper and magazine publishers—led, not surprisingly, by Robert Hersant—have also gotten into the act; these include the publishers of *L'Humanite*, *Le Matin*, and *L'Express*. Although municipal radio stations are prohibited under the law, many cities—especially Paris—have also established quasi-official stations that are increasingly used as mouthpieces for local politicians. []

Although the media explosion has slowed recently, the government estimates that there are now 1,400 private stations with a steadily growing audience. They have lured well over 1 million listeners away from the national stations (see figure 4). Surveys show that private stations consistently outdraw the national stations with their musical programming, but attract less than 40 percent of the audience for national news, suggesting that the government still retains a dominant influence over electronically transmitted news. []

Television. The 1982 law took longer to have an impact on television, but the effect has been more dramatic and politically significant. By early 1986 the number of channels had increased from three to six, including a cable network and two private networks; with a seventh channel, owned and operated by the state and dedicated to cultural and educational programming, in the works. []

Mitterrand managed to antagonize almost everybody with his decision to sell the first private channel to a French-Italian consortium that included the controversial Italian television magnate, Silvio Berlusconi, who has a 40-percent interest in the project. Announcement of the decision immediately provoked an

Figure 4
Radio Audience Market Share, 1975-84



Source: Adapted from *Expansion*, special edition, "Medias: Tous Contre Tous," Oct-Nov 1985.

310335 9-86

outrage across the political spectrum. Even members of the Socialist Party criticized the choice of Berlusconi—nicknamed Mr. Tele Coca-Cola in Italy—as a major participant, fearing that he would bring to France the same mixture of old American soap operas, game shows, and movies interrupted by commercials that characterizes his three Italian networks. []

Equally controversial was the deal itself. The contract stipulated that any changes in ownership, broadcasting mode, geographic coverage, or level of advertising revenue would constitute damage to the franchise, entitling it to compensation from the state. Thus, the Socialist government gave the station ironclad insurance against risk and placed any future applicants at a serious disadvantage. []

Confidential

Confidential

According to the US Embassy in Paris and to press reports, political considerations prompted Mitterrand's precipitate action. As signs mounted of a conservative victory in the March elections, Mitterrand wanted to ensure at least one station that would be free of government influence and, given the Socialist sympathies of the consortium's principals, friendly to his party. The opposition went further, charging that Mitterrand granted the license only after receiving assurances that his party would be allowed access if the right won the election. It immediately contested the contract and won a quick victory when the Council of State voided the new station's right to show movies. The Chirac government's first attempt to abrogate both this contract and that of the sixth station, the music channel, was excised from the audiovisual law by the Senate. But the government has pledged to introduce new legislation in the near future. [redacted]

The Continuing Government Role

The 1982 law by no means removed the broadcast media from government influence. Television remained wholly in the hands of the three state stations until February 1986, when the first private station was licensed. The law did end the state's control over programming, but it continued to treat broadcasting as a public service and therefore reserved for the state the right to establish "operating conditions," including public service requirements, frequency assignments, and technical oversight. [redacted]

Moreover, the body created to guarantee media independence bore a striking resemblance to the ORTF, created in the 1964 reform. The High Authority for Audiovisual Communication was designed to be a buffer between the government and the state broadcasting companies, and it took over responsibility for appointments to the top managerial posts of the state stations, for granting licenses, and for ensuring compliance by all stations with their operating conditions. Mitterrand overturned the recommendation of his own committee by insisting that the source of appointments to the Authority be political: three members each are appointed by the President, the President of the National Assembly, and the President of the Senate. Furthermore, upon taking office, Mitterrand, following a time-honored practice, replaced the heads

of the state television channels, and Socialist ministers seemed never to be off the screen in the first months of the new government. To underscore the importance the government placed on television, Prime Minister Fabius was given a weekly 15-minute slot to explain government policy. [redacted]

Under the Socialists the High Authority did prove somewhat more effective than earlier experiments in depoliticizing the media. Leaders of the conservative opposition had marginally more access to the airwaves before the election in March 1986, and news stories were rarely as blatantly biased as had sometimes happened in the past; indeed, in some cases there was criticism of the government. More often, however, the Socialist government took full advantage of its privileged access to state radio and television stations to promote its policies and rein in journalists who took too seriously the government's claims of media depoliticization. The most dramatic indication of government interference was the resignation in 1985 from Antenne 2 of its news director and its anchorwoman—by far the most popular and respected newscaster—who charged that the government was trying to curb the station's independence and enforce party discipline. The halfheartedness of Mitterrand's steps to liberalize broadcasting and introduce private competition demonstrate how ingrained the notion of government control of the media is among the political elite. [redacted]

The Broadcast Media Since the Election

Following the conservative victory in March, many French observers expected the broadcast media would be high on the new government's agenda, but formulating a policy proved unexpectedly difficult. The conservative platform had glossed over basic ideological differences between free market liberals and traditional statist, and negotiations within the coalition were heated and bitter, according to the press. Francois Leotard, the Minister of Culture and Communication and spokesman for the liberals, initially proposed that two of the three state-owned television channels—TF1, the most popular, and the regional channel FR3—be privatized, but strong opposition arose both among his colleagues and in the populace

25X1

25X1

25X1
25X1**Confidential**

Confidential

as a whole. After a test of wills, in which Leotard reportedly offered to resign, Chirac forced a scaling back of the proposal. [redacted]

Even after this Cabinet compromise, the bill continued to be plagued by mishandling and divisions within the coalition. Despite a governmental majority in the Senate, deliberation of the proposal took 23 days, the longest debate in the history of the Fifth Republic, and produced 1,800 amendments, over 1,000 pages in the *Journal Officiel*. Key elements of the government's bill were rewritten, the most notable casualties being the provisions canceling the contracts for the two private channels granted by the Socialists and the state monopoly in telecommunications which was sold off. In addition, the membership of the new audiovisual authority was expanded, adding four more members and doubling the number of political appointees. According to the press, the revised bill authorizes the sale of TF1, the allocation of five satellite channels, and the establishment of a new audiovisual authority with expanded powers to supplant the Authority set up in 1982. [redacted]

Reaction to the government's privatization proposals was swift and largely hostile. Workers at all three state television stations went out on a one-day strike and vowed to pursue a vigorous campaign to rouse public opinion against the government action. The public expressed its own displeasure: over 100,000 people responded to a petition to "Save the Public Service," much to the surprise of the two weekly magazines that launched it. Two polls conducted after the announcement indicate that over half (55 percent) of those polled opposed privatization, with only 30 percent in favor. Recent polls indicate a drop in popularity for both Chirac and Leotard. Moreover, press reaction seems to be almost uniformly critical except, not surprisingly, the papers of the Hersant empire. [redacted]

Opposition to the shrinking of state television contrasts with widespread support for private television; the public seems to prefer that new channels augment, rather than replace, state television. Sentiment within both the general populace and the political elite continues to favor a strong state role in broadcasting to guarantee quality programing—generally defined

as including programs to suit all age groups and tastes, from the most popular to the most intellectual; fidelity to French culture; and equal access for competing political views. [redacted]

25X1
25X1

Chirac has pledged that a decision on privatizing FR3 will be made by the end of 1987. Only Antenne 2, the most prestigious channel, remains securely in the public sector. Its official status as the "channel of reference," however, is still unclear: the government may intend for it to establish norms of quality programing or to serve as the mouthpiece for the government, the "voice of France." The leading candidates to purchase TF1, according to the French press, are the media conglomerate Havas, which already is the principal shareholder in the first French cable channel; and Robert Hersant. Other contenders include British and Luxembourg companies and the Hachette-Mattera publishing group, as well as Silvio Berlusconi. [redacted]

25X1

What the new law portends for government relations with the media is still unclear. The new National Commission for Communication and Liberties (CNCL), which is to replace the High Authority, will have significantly greater authority in such technical fields as frequency allocation for radio and television channels, and for cable networks as well. Like its predecessor, it will appoint the chairmen of the state radio and television stations, with the exception of Radio France Internationale, whose head will be appointed by the Cabinet. There will be 13 members of the commission, each serving for nine years. One each is to be elected by the Council of State, the Supreme Court of Appeal (*Cour de cassation*) and the Audit Office (*Cour des comptes*); two each are to be appointed by the President, the Speaker of the National Assembly, and the Speaker of the Senate; three are to be chosen—preferably from within the ranks of the broadcasting bureaucracy—by the six already appointed; and the last is to be from the ranks of the *Academie Francaise*. In addition, the commission is charged with overseeing the deregulation of the telecommunications industry, although the Senate bill mandates that the state retain a majority interest in the two enterprises. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

The appointment procedures outlined for the CNCL, which emphasize technical rather than political qualifications, were applauded by many as a positive step toward media autonomy, but the law's limits on political interference in the media are, in our view, only as strong as the government wants them to be. Recent actions suggest that the Chirac government may try to engage in open interference. Within days of announcing the bill, Chirac criticized the "excesses and deformations" of journalists. Not to be outdone, Leotard attacked the editorial policy of the FR3 station in Corsica. Similarly, according to the press, Minister of the Interior Charles Pasqua threatened legal action against Radio France and Europe 1 if they broadcast a report on Socialist reaction to his outburst in Parliament about Socialist conduct during World War II.² The story allegedly was held for more than three hours until a compromise was reached allowing Pasqua the right of rebuttal. The High Audiovisual Authority thereafter issued a resolution expressing the members' "anxiety" over "the campaign to put in question the impartiality of information" and stated that the Authority would remain active as the guardian of "the honesty, pluralism, and balance" of the media until it is officially disbanded.

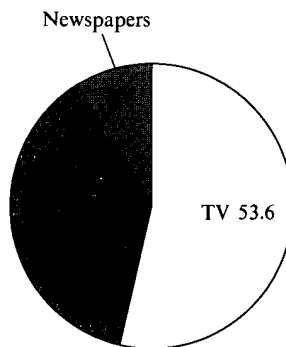
Changes in Political Style

Politicians of all stripes recognize the increasing impact of television on politics and political careers in France, particularly in light of the substantial proportion of time the average citizen spends watching television compared with reading newspapers or listening to the radio (see figure 5). There has been an accelerating tendency in the last decade for French politics to import some of the factors that have transformed US politics—media consultants, presidential press conferences, preelection debates, and, above all, public opinion polls. As a result, French

² The government's offensive has not been confined to the broadcast media. In April, as part of the government's antiterrorist campaign, Pasqua ordered the offices of *Liberation* and another leftist daily, *VSD*, to be searched and several journalists held as witnesses in ongoing investigations. One prominent Socialist commented, "The Interior Minister has said he was going to terrorize the terrorists. He is beginning with the journalists."

Figure 5
Average Time Devoted to the Media

Percent



Note: Based on 112 waking hours per week. The average respondent over 15 devotes more than 25% of his time to the media, not including magazines, movies, and books.

Source: Adapted from *Expansion*, special edition, "Medias: Tous Contre Tous," Oct-Nov 1985.

310336 9-86

politics increasingly revolve around personalities as much as issues and ideologies—the *redetisation de la politique*. Further, the immediacy of television is palpably speeding up the pace of politics.

Perhaps the most eloquent example of these changes was the preelection debate between Chirac and then Prime Minister Fabius. Before the debate Fabius had seemed invulnerable while Chirac's campaign effort seemed to be stagnating, but Fabius's belligerent rhetoric during the debate turned things around. In polls taken immediately after the telecast, Chirac gained 7 percentage points and Fabius lost 5, a tailspin from which he never recovered. In the 1974 and 1981 presidential elections the "winner" of the debates later won the election, lending a predictive aura to debates. According to the US Embassy in Paris, the debate was thus seen as a psychological turning point in the runup to the legislative election.

Confidential

Confidential

The increasing salience of public image is forcing politicians to revamp their styles. Media consultants have become standard features of every campaign team. Jack Lang, Mitterrand's consultant in 1981 (and later Culture Minister), was even credited with winning the presidential election by changing Mitterrand's dour image with stylish clothes and more "human" speeches. Before the election in March, in response to falling approval ratings, Mitterrand launched a media offensive, installing a television studio in the presidential palace and initiating a series of press conferences and human-interest interviews to counteract his remote image. In the same vein, many politicians vie for the privilege of being interviewed on a weekly program, *Questions a Domicile*, reminiscent of the popular "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," in which prominent personalities are interviewed in their homes surrounded by family, pets, and hobbies. Several regular interview programs similar to Face the Nation—most notably *L'Heure de Verite*—regularly receive substantial press coverage, often triggering heated public debate and, according to Embassy reporting, playing an important role in shaping public opinion. [redacted]

Outlook

The historical pattern throughout the Fifth Republic has been for new governments to initiate changes in media policy within the first months of coming to power. Thus far, despite policy divisions within the ruling coalition, the new government appears to be working true to form. The new audiovisual law proposed in May will undoubtedly be passed, but the government's mishandling of the issue has exposed it to criticism. The coalition has been seen airing its disputes, and to some extent relations have soured between Chirac's traditional Gaullist contingent and the new breed of young liberals who constitute an important minority in the government. [redacted]

Minister of Culture and Communication Leotard has been particularly hurt by the controversy. An ambitious man with aspirations to replace Giscard as the leader of the center right, Leotard needed Cabinet experience to demonstrate his capacity to govern effectively and consolidate his claim to leadership. His

decisive, and very public, defeat in his conflict with Chirac followed by the embarrassing debate in the Senate tarnished his rising star. His bill was widely criticized, even by his allies, as poorly written and badly mishandled in committee. These criticisms were echoed several days later in the Constitutional Council's decision declaring the government's press law unconstitutional. These setbacks have cost Leotard dearly in the eyes of both his political colleagues and the public. He may yet recover if programing of the newly privatized TF1 wins public approval, but Leotard's appeal has unquestionably diminished. [redacted]

Despite the heated controversy surrounding the government's media policy, now that the bill has become law we expect the issue to fade from public consciousness. It may resurface if the government tries again to annul the contracts for the private television stations or to denationalize FR3, but, ultimately, media policy is unlikely to last as a major political factor. More troubling has been the failure of the majority to rally behind the government's bill. Much of the friction evident in the Senate can be attributed to Leotard's clumsiness, but this experience has pointed up divisions within the coalition not only over this particular policy but also over more fundamental ideological orientations toward the role of the state and free market liberalism. Chirac has distanced himself from Leotard and will probably escape with little damage to his personal standing. The cohesion and durability of the coalition, however, are now openly debated in the press. [redacted]

Recent statements by Chirac and other members of his Cabinet suggest that this government, like its predecessors, may attempt to reimpose some form of government intervention in the media. Since 1981 there has been some progress toward autonomy of the broadcasting media, and the new audiovisual law appears to incorporate, if not advance, the notion of media independence. This law, like its predecessor, has been hailed by many analysts as an important step toward media autonomy—institutionalizing an autonomous regulatory agency as a buffer between the state and the media that insulates them from political interference. However, this analysis may be mistaken.

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

It assumes that the political elite would go against historical precedent as well as self-interest by willingly divesting itself of a political resource whose importance is obviously growing. We believe that it is more likely that once again the form of government control has changed but the substance remains. If formal control of the media is no longer politically viable, the techniques of government influence must become more subtle. [redacted]

The advent of private television—almost simultaneous with the diminution of the state role—gives the government a new avenue for political influence. Contracts for stations are allocated by the government, and, in the short history of private television in France, those decisions have been based as much on political criteria as on economic considerations. When the first private station was licensed, Mitterrand was widely accused of cutting a political deal with the Berlusconi group in order to ensure Socialist access to television. Chirac has promised to void that contract and resell the station to someone of his choosing. If he is legally empowered to do that, a new pattern of intervention may be shaping up. Just as in the past newly elected governments purged the management teams of state television networks in order to appoint their own people, governments may now be able to void old contracts and sell new ones to ensure an acceptable political coloration. [redacted]

Even if the courts rule against him, Chirac is assured of deciding on at least one privatized station. An alternative scenario might then be that television stations will be gradually parceled out to the various political camps, and *la television d'opinion* similar to that of the newspapers may develop. In either case, we believe it is premature to conclude that the liberal rhetoric surrounding the media policy debate portends the depoliticization of television. If historical precedent holds, once again the form of government interference in the media will change, but its substance will remain. [redacted]

We do not expect, however, that influence will equate with control. For one thing, today's French leaders are too much at the mercy of the media, particularly in the current era of "cohabitation" between a Socialist president and a conservative government. The media

will provide a highly visible forum for the competition between the President and the Prime Minister for the mantle of authority, especially in foreign policy. To an unusual degree, editorial choices of the press will determine who succeeds. Recently, for instance, reportage of the Tokyo economic summit clearly focused on Mitterrand, treating Chirac as a hanger-on [redacted] Thus, regardless of the reality of their positions, public perceptions as shaped by the media are a reality that must be reckoned with at the polls. [redacted]

Such calculations will dominate politics for the duration of cohabitation, the end point of which is entirely in the hands of the President. Mitterrand's term ends in 1988, but he can resign any time before then to take advantage of particularly advantageous conditions. Public perceptions will be a primary consideration in policymaking. Honing their images will be a principal goal—if not *the* principal goal—of both Mitterrand and Chirac, the most likely candidates in the next presidential election. The absence of critical differences in substance between the two—with the exception of denationalization of some industries—will place a premium on the politics of theater. Mitterrand and Chirac will therefore engage in a constant competition for media attention. [redacted]

Mitterrand can rely on the prestige of the office to ensure significant media attention, but Chirac might decide he can more directly influence coverage by reverting to old patterns and openly intervening. On the basis of past experience as well as the recent statements by Chirac and other members of the government, we might expect the right to be more activist than the Socialists in applying the state's residual powers to prohibit or punish the publication of unwanted information, undoubtedly inhibiting media independence to some degree. Nonetheless, we believe the government's capacity for intervention will be limited by public attitudes toward the state's role in the media, by the evolution of the media themselves, and by changes in the political system as a whole. However much government intervention retains legitimacy among the political elite, recent polls

25X6

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

suggest partisan intervention has been largely discredited with the public. Thus, Chirac would be playing a dangerous game that might produce short-term gains in muting press criticism, but could easily backfire with the electorate. As a general rule, in our view, media policy can easily lose votes, but seldom win them for a government.

At the same time, the media themselves—both print and broadcast—are undergoing a slow evolution toward more aggressive and independent journalism. Investigative reporting has intrigued French journalism since Watergate and in recent years has begun to creep into the newer, more independent newspapers. More important, structural changes in both the print and broadcast media, combined with the expansion of market forces, is likely to increase competition between the two for an audience and for advertising revenues, pushing them into experimentation with new styles and techniques, especially investigative journalism. Although we expect that the evolution in this direction will be prolonged and gradual, Chirac may find that the free play of market forces in the media makes him a prime target.

In a larger sense, we believe the media's movement toward a more potent political role is linked to broader institutional changes that have been noted by scholars in the last decade: the resurgence of Parliament as a policymaking institution; the politicization of the administration; the evolution of broad-based political parties in place of the personalized or ideological parties of the past; and, most obviously, the end of one-party dominance. Since at least 1978 the "imperial presidency" has been under siege, and election results are no longer a foregone conclusion. As a result, party (or coalition) leadership is increasingly tied to general popularity—electability—rather than simply intraparty power.

Although the trends toward increased salience of public opinion and media politics has been apparent for some time, in our view it is greatly accelerated during campaign periods. Since cohabitation will be in effect a prolonged campaign, we expect that these trends will increasingly be seen as the critical factors in determining electoral platforms and party leadership. The effects are already visible in the challenges

to the incumbent leadership of all parties from a younger generation that has come of age during this period of transition. Rising stars—for instance, Laurent Fabius on the left, and Francois Leotard on the right—as well as the veteran Michel Rocard, the most popular politician in the country, appear more sensitive to public opinion and willing to tailor policy pronouncements to the latest poll data. Similarly, they more readily accept the growing impact of television and are willing to cater to the needs of a television strategy.

Equally important to this process is the politicization of the civil service, historically the most important barrier to the intrusion of purely political calculations into the policymaking process. Heretofore, in our view, technocratic logic guided governmental decisionmaking to a greater degree in France than in most countries, and public opinion was rarely taken into consideration. As the new political generation—many of its members technocrats turned politicians—comes to power, however, we believe that concern for public image will impinge on the policy process. This transformation will no doubt be self-limiting to some degree, but we believe the media will play an increasingly central role in the movement toward democratization of the policymaking process in France.

Implications for the United States

The growing impact and independence of the French media may complicate bilateral relations between the United States and France, even as it increases the influence of American popular culture. The ability of television in particular to arouse emotions about foreign policy is a cliché since the Vietnam experience, but it may be increasingly applicable to France. Historically, foreign policy—with the exception of the colonial wars—has been a minor issue for most French citizens according to various public opinion surveys. In the past few years, however, television footage from Central America, Beirut, Poland, and Afghanistan has humanized the distant conflicts and created broader interest.

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

It is unlikely that this factor will provoke any dramatic shift in the French approach to foreign policy, given the general consensus favoring NATO and the United States and the hostility toward the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, a residual resentment against the United States that persists just below the surface may be manipulable, especially by increased television coverage of foreign affairs and by the more sensational newspapers. Both the left and the right have used this tactic to different ends in the past, the left focusing on US policy toward the Third World and the right on East-West issues, especially on perceived slights to France's status as a major power. Future coverage will depend to some extent on decisions made about the status of the state television channels and appointments to their management, but the difficulties inherent in cohabitation may make the United States an easy target as the left and right try to score points off each other.

25X1

Moreover, foreign policy will be given increased salience simply as a result of the competition between the President and the Prime Minister for control of policymaking. Television and the media in general may provide the most visible field of competition between the President and the Prime Minister, both of whom will no doubt want to uphold the tradition that France acts independently of the United States in world affairs.

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

Confidential