Introduction

From 1845 until the end of 1851 France experienced a prolonged and intense crisis. It began with poor harvests in 1845 and 1846 which brought on a collapse in consumer and investor confidence. Economic difficulties were intensified by an international financial crisis and industrial overproduction. Misery, insecurity, and widespread disorder brought into question the legitimacy of the July Monarchy, created by revolution in 1830. In February 1848 the Government was overwhelmed suddenly by the development of a revolutionary situation in its capital city. Ineffective crisis management resulted in the establishment of a republican Provisional Government, which in the absence of alternative centres of resistance was able to impose its authority on the country. Popular sovereignty was recognised through the introduction of 'universal' male suffrage, enlarging the electorate from the 250,000 previously enfranchised by a tax qualification to over 9 million. This created an immense sense of expectancy amongst the supporters of political and social change and equally intense social fear amongst conservatives.

In the months that followed, those politicians who had unexpectedly gained power struggled to impose their authority on a country beset by a renewed crisis of confidence and mass unemployment. Disagreeing on objectives themselves, they sought to restore order amongst competing socio-economic interest groups, communities, and political groups determined to affirm the primacy of their particular interests. The population rapidly underwent an 'apprenticeship in politics' as newspapers, political clubs, and mass meetings flourished in the new era of 'liberty'. The first elections in April returned a Constituent Assembly dominated by socially conservative republicans. Instead of the social reform expected by the Parisian *classes populaires* most of the newly elected deputies demanded financial retrenchment and social order. The decision in June to close the National Workshops which had provided work relief to the unemployed, and which many had taken to be the first step in the creation of a new society founded

on co-operative association and freedom from capitalist exploitation, provoked a renewal of conflict in the capital – the June insurrection, a struggle, on the one hand for 'social justice' and on the other for 'social order'. The rising was crushed brutally by the well-prepared military forces mobilised by the republican government.

In December 1848 the second manifestation of 'universal suffrage' resulted in the election, with a massive majority, of a Prince-President. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of the great Emperor, secured substantial support from every social group, due to the potency of a Napoleonic myth which promised 'all things to all men'. Subsequently the Bonapartist pretender used his executive authority to challenge the power of the Legislative Assembly elected in May 1849 and gradually to secure the appointment of men dependent on himself to key positions in government, the bureaucracy, and the army. At the same time, and in spite of the intensification of police and judicial repression, left-wing agitation continued through the *démocrate-socialiste* movement. On the basis of 'socialist' electoral successes and exaggerated reports of secret society organisation, the government and the conservative press were able to arouse an often hysterical fear of social revolution within the social elites, the Catholic clergy, and the much wider groups with negative memories of revolution and its aftermath in 1789 and 1848. In order, he claimed, to restore political stability and spread reassurance, Bonaparte launched a campaign for constitutional revision, which would have allowed him to seek election to the presidency for a second term. When this was blocked by the *démocrate-socialiste* minority in the Assembly he launched a carefully prepared *coup d'état* on 2 December 1851. Although directed against both his republican and monarchist opponents, the fact that serious resistance came only from the left ensured that republicans bore the brunt of police and military repression. The short-lived risings in Paris and rural areas of south-east and central France were used to justify both the Prince-President's actions and a reign of terror involving over 26,000 arrests, as part of a 'final' settling of accounts with the left. The *coup* was legitimised by a popular plebiscite. A year later another well-prepared and brilliantly successful plebiscite sanctioned the restoration of the hereditary empire.

The Bonapartist regime would be characterised by repression – aimed especially at an irreconcilable republican opposition, by a system of directed democracy, and by social engineering, involving both the construction of a clerical educational system and efforts to enhance national prosperity through economic modernisation. The regime's claim to legitimacy was based on the popular vote and it could hardly afford to risk electoral defeat.

Every election turned into a plebiscite on its future. Unlike its predecessors, however, and in contrast with twentieth-century regimes similarly based on systems of controlled democracy, this would be a regime which sought to make the hazardous transition from its authoritarian origins towards liberal democracy. The re-establishment of social order and the prosperity for which it claimed credit and actively stimulated by means of massive infrastructure investment, urban renewal, and trade treaties, together with political liberalisation, provided the means by which it aspired to widen, deepen, and ensure the permanence of mass support. Liberalisation was bound to be difficult. It made it possible for those with grievances and with visions of alternative political and social systems to express their demands with increasing facility. Previous allies were turned into critics by a foreign policy which appeared to challenge the interests of the Papacy and Universal Church, and by a commitment to 'free-trade' which threatened the security and prosperity of important vested interests. It would take the renewal of 'social fear' to secure the re-establishment of an alliance committed to preserving social order and to supporting a 'liberal' empire which would be legitimised by a massive vote of approval in the plebiscite of May 1870.

Rather than taking an institutional or party political approach to political history, this book will consider how people experienced a quarter of a century of political change. In these complex circumstances, what motivated individual behaviour? How did people perceive politics? To what extent was protest institutionalised? Although denied the vote, what role did women play? Why were people sympathetic to one political option rather than another? What was the significance of tradition and 'myth', of the individual and collective 'memory', of the relationship between past and present? To what extent did political loyalties change? What were the means by which political ideas were spread and how were they received? What forms of political organisation, both formal and informal, can be identified? To what extent did the members of various communities and social groups participate in political activity? To what extent did voting represent the free expression of opinion or social and administrative pressure? What did participants hope to gain from voting or from the greater degree of engagement implied by militancy? Or, conversely, what were the reasons for apathy and indifference? These are questions about the relationships between local issues and personalities and the national political culture which increasingly impinged on communities as a result of substantial political and administrative and also socio-economic change. They are questions about the possession and use of power, and the means by which

Table 1. *Electoral participation*

Date of election	Turnout (% of registered voters)
April 1848	84.0
10 December 1848	75.1
29 February 1852	63.3
21 June 1857	64.5
31 May 1863	72.9
23 May 1869	78.1

Source: A. Lancelot, *L'Abstentionnisme électoral en France* (Paris 1968), p. 15; M. Crook, 'Electoral participation in France, 1789–1851' in M. Cornick and C. Crossley (eds.), *Problems in French History* (London 2000), pp. 55–6.

those with limited political power adapted to their situation and sought to gain access to influence.

The institutional structure of the political system itself helped determine the repertoire of possible action. The repression, which had commenced in 1848 during the conservative Republic, promoted a widespread de-mobilisation. Paradoxically, however, the retention of manhood suffrage allowed the political apprenticeship of the masses to continue. Moreover, the context would change dramatically again in the 1860s when, in spite of continued constraints, it became clear that political activity was less hazardous. It was possible to start re-constructing the political structures destroyed after 1848.

High participation rates, at least in general elections, throughout both the Second Republic and the Empire (see table 1) suggest that the electorate took politics seriously and, as Maurice Agulhon has pointed out, 'C'est en votant qu'on apprend à voter, c'est en campagnes (électorales) qu'on apprend *la politique*' although, he added, this was only a stage in a process of politicisation.[1]

Thus, a political imperative developed, characterised by a growing sense of citizenship, an acceptance of the duty to vote, and an appreciation of the potential benefits which might ensue. Engagement in politics, whether to assert claims or make judgements and to confirm or challenge authority, served to enhance personal status. Involvement in contention with fellow citizens and agents of the state established and gradually extended the repertoire of political action. Habitual, even if intermittent, participation in political processes built up confidence and commitment, contributed to

[1] M. Agulhon, 'Présentation' to M. Agulhon, *et al., La politisation des campagnes au 19e siècle* (Rome 2000), pp. 5, 7.

a democratic socialisation, altered perceptions of the state, and stimulated the development of a mass political culture, characterised by its 'richness' and 'complexity' and by contributions from a range of political traditions – Bonapartist, Legitimist, Catholic, and Liberal, as well as Republican.[2]

Recently, historians have been undergoing a crisis of causality, as the state-centred and structural Marxist approaches dominant until the 1980s have been discredited. Analysis has adopted a 'cultural turn', based on the assumption that 'cultural systems define the goals of action, the expectations about other actors, and even what it means to be an 'actor' (i.e. whether the relevant actors in a system are individuals, groups, families, and so on) . . .'.[3] The obvious objection is expressed by Charles Tilly – 'culture and identity, . . . language and consciousness, as changing phenomena [themselves need] to be explained' rather than offering the 'ultimate explanation of all other social phenomena'.[4]

The essential problem, then, is where to start? Prioritising particular elements within an explanatory framework immediately suggests that they have greater weight. As a result, in the past, when explaining political behaviour, social historians have accorded too much importance to the explanatory significance of socio-economic structures. More recently, cultural historians have over-reacted by according some sort of autonomous power to ideas. Any attempt to reconcile these two approaches, furthermore, carries with it the danger of circularity, evident in the aspiration that, whilst accepting the importance of 'discourse and rhetoric in moulding class identity' the historian should not be led to ignore 'material interests'.[5] Nevertheless, whilst carefully considering the intellectual debates of the moment, the historian certainly should not be swayed too easily by fashion. Nothing will be gained from replacing a socio-economic reductionism with an intellectual one. It might also be hoped that historians will resist the populist temptation of returning to the 'old' political history with its exclusive focus on institutions, 'events', and 'great' men.

The problem remains that of identifying viable analytical categories and developing forms of discourse which do justice to the complexity of life and allow meaningful explanation. Considering the articulation of political

[2] S. Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen. The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, N.J. 1998), p. 11.
[3] G. Steinmetz,'Introduction: culture and the state' to G. Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture. State Formation after the Cultural Turn* (London 1999), p. 27.
[4] 'Epilogue: now where?', in Steinmetz, *State/Culture*, p. 411.
[5] R. Magraw review of Aminzade in *Social History* 1995, p. 383.

ideas is just the beginning. More important still is the analysis of their diffusion and reception. Thus establishing the *context* for the development of political behaviour is of crucial importance. Certainly, the study of politics as a self-contained activity, ignoring its social, cultural, and historical context, has a very limited explanatory value. Explanation depends on relating political interests to other aspects of life, in a manner which avoids reductionism and which fully appreciates the complexity of human existence, the potential for individual self-contradiction, and the tensions which exist within any group of human beings. It needs to be borne in mind that 'the mental images of society that people carry around in their heads need have little connection to their day-to-day interactions'.[6] Although the primary focus of this book will be on politics, if this is viewed as a form of social activity its manifestations will need to be set within social and institutional contexts characterised by rapid change and shifting expectations, by both expanding opportunities and heightened insecurity and a widespread search for alternative life strategies.

The question of relationships between local communities and the central state as well as those between one social group and another will also need to be addressed. Inevitably political roles developed in response to the constraints and possibilities of time and place. They also emerged from an existing political culture which was both traditional in that it was the product of history and social myth, and ever changing, in response to shifting socio-economic and political structures and perceptions. Individual predispositions also have to be taken into account and an effort made to keep in mind the simple fact that for most of the population, and for most of the time, politics is only one and generally not the most important determinant of behaviour. Social identities are formed by a 'multiplicity of systems of representation', in private as well as public contexts.[7]

This then will be a book about 'people' and 'politics' within varied and changing socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. Political roles were partly the product of socialisation processes within discrete families and communities identified by their particular cultures – the customs, language, and belief systems which gave their inhabitants a sense of identity – and also by their location within the broader structures of the nation. A sense of place is surely vital given that 'individuals are embedded within a given context that structures their social interactions, constrains information

[6] D. Knoke, *Political Networks. The Structural Perspective* (London 1990), p. 16.
[7] A. Corbin, 'Du Limousin aux cultures sensibles' in J.-P. Rioux and F. Sirinelli (eds.), *Pour une histoire culturelle* (Paris 1998), p. 107.

exchanges and determines their political responses'.[8] Yet extrapolations based on micro-studies are best avoided. The structure and dynamics of social systems differ between places and over time. A sense of the shifting balance between continuity and change is essential. In the light of this, one question historians constantly need to ask themselves is what is an acceptable level of generalisation?

The essential methodological problem involves identification of the basis for political choice. To what extent do autonomous individuals take decisions concerning politics, and to what extent are these subject to collective influences? Methodological individualism, based on the assumption of rational-critical decision-making by self-conscious individuals, offers little help in explaining social interaction, or, indeed, individual behaviour within a social context. Theories of 'rational choice', focusing on the 'rational subject', offer little guidance to the real world. Furthermore, the context for individual decision-making is determined, largely, although not exclusively, by socialisation. Understanding political behaviour requires identification of groups of people whose action/inaction and patterns of behaviour can be subjected to analysis and explanation.

People are 'formed' by their association with others and through processes of social interaction, which produce shared and competing understandings and representations defined, self-evidently, through discourse. Identity takes shape and is internalised as part of the experience of a particular *espace vécu*, within a family and community and a daily, lived, social hierarchy.[9] Cutting across this vertical articulation there were undoubtedly horizontal divisions based, for example, on membership of voluntary associations and neighbourhood social networks. That the boundaries between groups were often fluid underlines the crucial importance of cultural intermediaries, frequently coming from outside the particular group they sought to influence. Thus association with members of other social groups, as well as the tensions between groups, contributed to the definition of identity. So too did the language of political debate and the experience of contacts with government officials and those representing other social institutions, and most notably religious associations. Both habitual social intercourse and interventionist institutions acted to encourage and sometimes restrain commitment to political activity.

It follows that, in everyday life, each individual habitually performed a variety of roles establishing 'multiple dimensions of identity' and complex

[8] Knoke, *Political Networks*, p. 46
[9] See e.g. W. Kashuba, 'Culture populaire et culture ouvrière, catégories symboliques' in A. Lüdtke (ed.), *Histoire du quotidien* (Paris 1994), p. 177.

patterns of motivation,[10] with individuals tending to accord precedence sometimes to one role, sometimes to another. Their identities were defined by upbringing within the family, within peer groups defined by age and gender, by association with neighbourhood, socio-professional, confessional, leisure, and 'party' political groups within the community, and also by their place within a wider social system made up of identifiable and distinctive social networks, including those associated with that problematic entity 'class'.

Whilst appreciating the complex nature of human society and of individual identity, just like the contemporary observer, the historian is forced to categorise in order to identify the historical actors and achieve some understanding of how they perceived the world in which they lived. This book is envisaged as a contribution to the 'new' political history by a social historian interested in employing the analysis of political culture(s) to bridge the gap between political and social history by means of the consideration of 'mentalities and collective attitudes', but without ignoring the broader context of work and community within which attitudes are formulated.[11] Although imposed from the present onto the past, the analytical framework employed would probably have been intelligible to people in the past. It should not simply be an abstract, an artificial construction, but should relate closely to the language and content of the sources. The historian must make every effort to avoid both anachronism and over-simplification. The dangers of 'reification' and of 'reductionism' need to be borne in mind. The process of establishing categories can easily result in over-simplification, in the prioritisation of particular social relationships, and in the tendency to concentrate either on inequality and conflict or else solidarity and alliance as the characteristic social relationships.

Any form of social classification does less than justice to the complexities of human existence. Clearly, every individual has a multifaceted identity – as member of a family, gender, and age group, of a community, professional or confessional association and, potentially at least, of a 'class'. For this reason alone, taken in isolation, 'class' fails to offer an explanation of political choice. It will be argued, however, that the category which does the least damage to our understanding of human relationships in France, in the period with which we are concerned, is *class*. Would the employment of such alternatives as 'community, culture, and tradition' result in

[10] R. Gould, *Insurgent Identities. Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (London 1995), p. 26.
[11] See also A. Prost, 'What happened to French social history?', *Historical Journal* 1992, p. 677.

a more revealing analysis?[12] Would their use be any less likely to provoke accusations of 'reductionism'? The concept of class has meaning, even if disputed, for historians, and would have been comprehensible to many of the historical actors. Contemporaries thought in terms of and were in part motivated by concepts of class. Both political sloganising and the discourse of learned journals and pamphlets or mass circulation newspapers revealed a commitment to the language of class as a means of thinking about society. Historical concepts of class, those possessed by the historical actors, were closely related to everyday social interaction and representation and frequently emerged from social or political conflict. The social enquiries so common in the 1840s further contributed to making 'classes' more 'visible'.[13]

However, if it is accepted that c*lass* retains considerable value as an explanatory concept, this can be the case only if it is used flexibly. It has to be recognised that class membership is only one of the factors influencing behaviour and that individuals have diverse, often shifting, and frequently conflicting objectives and loyalties. Class then becomes 'a process and a performance' rather than a pre-determined category.[14] A class-based sense of identity is created 'only through the articulation of experience by means of discourse'.[15] 'Class' is thus a social construct and culture, in the widest sense, and including politics, creates 'webs of significance', integrating visions of the past and the future, and mediating between the individual and his/her experience.[16]

In the light of what has been said above, the chapters which follow will consider the political experience of the Second Empire in relation to 'class', on the grounds that this is likely to be the least 'deforming' approach to take and providing that it is borne in mind constantly that the initial identification of social 'groups' on the basis of profession and income only has limited explanatory value, as part of a multi-causal model of social change. It might be helpful to quote E. P. Thompson's definition of 'class' as

[12] A. Hemingway, 'Marxism and art history after the fall of communism' in A. Hemingway and W. Vaughan (eds.), *Art in Bourgeois Society 1790–1850* (Cambridge 1998), p. 12.
[13] See e.g. A. Desrosières, 'Comment faire des choses qui tiennent. Histoire sociale et statistiques' in C. Charle (ed.), *Histoire sociale, Histoire globale?* (Paris 1993), p. 34.
[14] C. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in 19th Century France. Gender, Sociability and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford 1999), p. 8.
[15] M. Cabrera, 'Linguistic approach or return to subjectivism? In search of an alternative to social history', *Social History* 1999, p. 86.
[16] See G. Stedman-Jones, *Languages of Class* (London 1983), pp. 7–8; E. Accampo, 'Class and gender' in M. Crook (ed.), *Revolutionary France* (Oxford 2002), p. 95.

a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationships with other classes; and ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of *time* – i.e. action and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of *a* class we are thus thinking of a very loosely-defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions, and value-systems, and who have at least a *disposition* to *behave* as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways.[17]

This is at least an approach which avoids the reductionism of some forms of Marxist class analysis whilst preserving something of value. One might go further and affirm that class membership is only one of a number of factors influencing behaviour and not always the most significant. Rather than employing *class* as a privileged explanatory factor it is reduced to a convenient but also meaningful means of entry into an historical society.

Membership of a particular social class can be related to such factors as wealth, income, education, access to information, lifestyle, religion, mutual recognition, and integration into particular social networks, and to such polarities as security/insecurity and power/dependence – a complex of material and non-material factors, all contributing to the production of 'systems of representation' and to the formation of social consciousness.[18] As will become evident rapidly, class identity was far from uniform. Social status, especially for non-elites, was largely defined in relation to local socio-economic structures and traditions, and face-to-face relationships. Internal differences reflected individual personality, community structures, and the particular interests of discrete sub-groups, as well as differing regional, generational, and gender experiences. Although gendered behaviour tended to be overwhelmingly class specific, the role played by women in the formation of social identity and thus, indirectly, in the development of political discourse should not be underestimated.

The possession of wealth and ability to control access to scarce resources largely determined the share of social and, indirectly, of political power an individual might expect. The question of who possesses power and how it might be exercised is thus central to our concerns. It requires consideration of the unequal distribution of resources and its effects on relationships between the dominant (the State and social elites) and the dominated (middle classes, peasants, and workers). Additional requirements

[17] 'The peculiarities of the English', *Social Register* 1965, p. 357.
[18] See e.g. A. Prost, 'Sociale et culturelle indissociablement' in Rioux and Sirinelli, *Pour une histoire culturelle*, p. 141; M. Savage, 'Space, networks and class formation' in N. Kirk (ed.), *Social Class and Marxism* (London 1996), p. 68.