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THE POLITICS OF MOTHERS' EMPLOYMENT
France in Comparative Perspective

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ONE surprise, and curious puzzle, about France is that it is one of the leaders among advanced industrialized states in the availability of publicly run or publicly financed child care services—programs that play a crucial role in promoting women's participation in the labor force.[1] One might not readily envision France as a country dedicated to progressive policy on gender roles in the workplace and home; it was, after all, the birthplace of the patriarchal Napoleonic code, the lingering vestiges of which were removed only in the 1970s.[2] Moreover, France has had the lowest proportion of women representatives in Parliament among European Union countries,[3] and the French feminist movement has generally been weak and divided, exerting little influence over government day care policies.[4]

The political landscape in France also would not create an expectation that France would develop a day care system that would be a boon to women's employment. The countries that have done the most to help mothers work—Denmark, Sweden, and, to a lesser extent, Norway—have been governed by social democratic parties working in tandem with centralized and powerful trade unions.[5] Trade unions in

*The author would like to thank Andrei S. Markovits, Jonah Levy, and Martin Schain for their incisive comments and criticisms on an earlier version of this paper, as well as Nancy Bermeo, Ezra Suleiman, Erik Voeten, and two anonymous reviewers. This research was made possible by a Chateaubriand fellowship from the French government along with the generous support of the École Normale Supérieure.

[1] Janet C. Gornick, Marcia K. Meyers, and Katherin E. Ross, "Supporting the Employment of Mothers: Policy Variation across Fourteen Welfare States," *Journal of European Social Policy* 7, no. 1 (1997).

[2] As late as 1985, the husband held the right to manage the couple's property. Mary Ann Glendon, *The Transformation of Family Law: State, Law, and Family in the United States and Western Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 89–91.

[3] "*Liberté*, but not *Égalité*," *The Economist* 350, February 27, 1999, 48. The statistics on women's political representation proved so damning that a recent law requires that parties put forth equal numbers of female and male candidates in elections.

[4] Jane Jenson, "*Ce n'est pas un hasard*: The Varieties of French Feminism," in Jolyon Holworth and George Ross, eds., *Contemporary France*, vol. 3 (London: Pinter Publishers, 1989), 114–143.

[5] Walter Korpi, "Power, Politics, and State Autonomy in the Development of Social Citizenship," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 3 (June 1989).

World Politics 55 (January 2003), 259–89

France, by contrast, wield little political power, and unionization rates there are the lowest of any OECD country.[6] Furthermore, the construction and expansion of the French welfare state occurred under *conservative* parties whose German, Italian, and Dutch counterparts crafted public policy to support women who stay home with their children.[7] The leadership of these parties has never displayed progressive attitudes toward women; for example, when Charles de Gaulle was asked whether he should appoint a woman to a government ministry, he responded, "What, appoint an under-secretary of knitting?"[8] Even when the Socialist Party finally came to power in 1981, it failed to deliver on many of the promises it made to women's groups during its many years in opposition, leading some feminist analysts to pronounce the Mitterrand years a *rendez-vous manqué* (a missed date).[9]

Given this unfavorable political climate, how can we account for the extensive French day care system and, more generally, the supportive stance of public policy toward mothers in paid work? This article will explain the French model of public child care provision and support for mothers' employment by examining how historic conflicts over religion shaped the nature of the party system, the structure of the welfare state, and consequently, the ways in which political elites have responded to the issue of working mothers. Intense clashes between clerical and anticlerical forces, culminating in the political triumph of secular republicanism in the late nineteenth century, reduced Catholic political power and obstructed the reconciliation of religious and democratic forces. As a result, Christian democratic movements have been weak in France, which has been reflected in the administration of the welfare state. A confessionally based voluntary sector, unlike in much of continental Europe, has played only a minimal role in running and shaping education and social services policy. Furthermore, while Christian democratic parties in the rest of Europe have favored moral traditionalism in public policy, these parties have been feeble in France, especially since the advent of the Fifth Republic. Instead, Gaullist and other center-right parties have championed statism over subsidiarity and promoted modernization over traditionalism. Consequently, the goals of state planning have taken precedence over societal interests in French social policy.

[6] Bruce Western, "Postwar Unionization in Eighteen Advanced Capitalist Countries," *American Sociological Review* 58 (April 1993), 267.

[7] David Cameron, "Continuity and Change in French Social Policy: The Welfare State under Gaullism, Liberalism, and Socialism," in John S. Ambler, ed., *The French Welfare State: Surviving Social and Ideological Change* (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

[8] Claire Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France, 1944–1968* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[9] Jenson and Mariette Sineau, *Mitterrand et les Françaises: Un rendez-vous manqué* (Mitterrand and French women: A missed date) (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1995).

Accordingly, the creation of an early childhood care and education system that aids women's employment has been an indirect consequence of the achievement of other governmental objectives. The National Education Ministry runs much of the French day care system through free, full-day preschools attended by all three-to-six-year-old children. This extensive set of public services was born out of the victory of secular republicanism over the Catholic church in disputes over education in the late nineteenth century that raised the stakes in education and drove the decision to incorporate all forms of education—including schools for very young children—into the national education system. A powerful national bureaucracy assumed responsibility for preschool education, facilitating the rapid expansion of these programs in the 1960s and 1970s.

For children below the "educable" age of three, responsibility for child care falls under the rubric of family policy, an area of public administration entirely separate from that of education. The development of the public day care system as part of the family policy domain arose, in part, from the way in which religion was incorporated into French politics and replaced by other forces on the political right. The subordination of religious forces to secular authority in France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ultimately weakened the political position of conservative ideologies concerning the family. Accordingly, the secularization of politics in France has been a crucial precondition for the adoption of policies that challenge the traditional family model. The effects of secularization have been demonstrated through the weakness of Christian democratic parties and the diminished role of a religiously based voluntary sector in managing social services; the political right has been dominated by Gaullist forces committed to state-led modernization. These governing elites have often adopted a pragmatic approach to the issue of mothers' employment and have been willing to use public resources to promote women's labor force participation, particularly when economic or demographic circumstances could justify such policies.

French pragmatism, however, has at times been a double-edged sword for maternal employment. In recent years, economic circumstances have been considerably less conducive to the maintenance of public policies designed to encourage women's labor force participation. Faced with stubborn, high unemployment and the perceived need for fiscal austerity, pragmatic political elites have crafted new policies and programs that subsidize parents—namely, mothers, who lack influential advocates committed to their employment for its own sake—for

leaving the labor force to care for their own children. Nonetheless, policymakers eschew language criticizing working mothers, and the model of support for mothers' employment remains basically intact. The institutionalization of day care and preschool programs under center-right governments in the 1960s and 1970s laid the foundations for a system that has continued to expand. While social services programs for children under the age of three have been more vulnerable to budgetary rigor, both public pressure and a family policy-making infrastructure favor continued development of the public day care system, albeit at a slower pace than in the past.[10]

The examination of the forces that have driven the creation of the French public child care system facilitates our understanding of child care policy across Western Europe. The establishment of the French system in the absence of strong Christian democratic parties reaffirms the finding that such parties have been the driving force behind traditionalist policies in other countries. The French example also helps us better interpret the strength of the Scandinavian commitment to public day care and the full mobilization of women's employment. A crucial precondition for such policies has been the secularization of political life, something that has occurred more in some Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Sweden) than in others (Norway). What France, Denmark, and Sweden share is not a hegemonic social democratic party but rather a secularized politics that has enabled departures from traditional family policy.

This article will describe French public policies for working parents, examine in detail the creation of French programs for early childhood education and care in the periods of expansion (the late nineteenth century and the post–World War II period through the 1970s), and conclude with a discussion of how economic slowdown has affected the French approach to women's employment. The final section will also treat the implications of these findings for comparative research on child care and the welfare state.

The French Child Care System in Comparative Perspective

The French welfare state is an imperfect fit with the category to which it is often assigned—the "conservative-corporatist" or "Christian democratic" cluster that includes the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Aus-

[10] In the 2001 Paris municipal elections, for example, both the Socialist and Gaullist candidates for mayor declared their strong support for public day care and asserted that their own program would do more to increase access to day care.

tria, Italy, and possibly Spain and Portugal. Authors often describe social policy in these countries as being the product of "conservative clericalism,"[11] corporatist guild traditions, and/or the machinations of bureaucrats or dictators.[12] According to this view, nineteenth-century authoritarian regimes and/or Christian democratic parties laid the foundation of the welfare state; since both were minimally concerned with either market efficiency or leveling social divisions, continental welfare states offered generous resources to alleviate human suffering. They did so, however, in a way that reproduced existing hierarchies and social stratification, including gender hierarchies, because Catholic social thought endorsed the traditional division of labor in the workplace and home. While social benefits for workers are generous, there are few public services that can offer employment to women and socialize care work. In accordance with the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, the lowest possible level of society—a family, church, or voluntary association—should bear responsibility for tending to human welfare needs. While some of these states have departed from this basic model of welfare provision, considerable continuities with the past still remain.[13]

In many respects, the French welfare state is consistent with this description. Social spending is quite high and, as in other conservative welfare states, this produces only a moderate level of "decommodification." Social benefits are differentiated by status-reproducing occupational schemes, and France has huge public employee pension programs.[14] In addition, the French response to unemployment in recent decades has been to promote "labor shedding," including that of female workers. This resembles the labor market policies of many other continental European states, and contrasts with the way in which many Scandinavian countries use active labor market policies and public employment against excess labor supply.[15]

When family policy is taken into consideration, however, France begins to diverge from the conservative model. Unlike most Christian democratic welfare states, the primary aim of French public policy has

[11] Jonah Levy, "Vice into Virtue? Progressive Politics and Welfare Reform in Continental Europe," *Politics and Society* 27 (June 1999), 245; and Kees van Kersbergen, *Social Capitalism: A Study of Christian Democracy and the Welfare State* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[12] Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[13] Jet Bussemaker and van Kersbergen, "Contemporary Social-Capitalist Welfare States and Gender Inequality," in Diane Sainsbury, ed., *Gender and Welfare State Regimes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[14] Esping-Andersen (fn. 12), 50, 70.

[15] Esping-Andersen, "Welfare States without Work: The Impasse of Labour Shedding and Familialism in Continental European Social Policy," in Esping-Andersen, ed., *Welfare States in Transition: National Adaptations in Global Economies* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

not been to promote the male breadwinner/female caregiver model of social relations.[16] The generous family benefits system established in the 1930s and expanded after World War II was driven by pronatalist aims, but it also enabled male workers to support their dependents on one income. The value of these benefits, however, declined during the 1960s, and by the 1970s, governments began using some of the family benefits fund to create public day care and subsidize parents using non-public child care. France now has a reasonably good system of day care for children under the age of three, especially when viewed in comparative perspective (see Tables 1–2). France ranks near to or above the Scandinavian states in the provision of public child care. Over 30 percent of French children under the age of three are in either publicly run or publicly subsidized early childhood education or day care services (see Tables 3–4). In the late 1990s, 9 percent of children under the age of three were enrolled in public day care centers (*crèches*), and about 13 percent of children were in government-subsidized and regulated family day care. The family benefits fund covers the social security charges to parents who use this system of registered family day care workers, and they receive both a benefit to cover some of the monthly costs and a tax break,[17] which also helps them pay social security taxes on home care services, including nannies.[18]

In addition, France is an international leader in the provision of public, full-day preschools, exceeding even the Scandinavian states in this regard (see Table 2). These programs are universally available for children starting at the age of three, and 35 percent of two year olds (or about 12 percent of children under the age of three) also participate in the preschool system. Since such programs are part of education policy—in France, Belgium, and Italy—they are often neglected by scholars of the welfare state, or are otherwise assumed, incorrectly, to offer little support to mothers' employment.[19] In France, these programs are free of charge, open for the entire school day (8:30 to 4:30, except for Wednesday afternoons), and often provide afterschool programs that

[16] Jenson, "Between Friend and Foe: Women and State Welfare," in Renate Bridenthal et al., eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987); and Jane Lewis, "Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes," *Journal of European Social Policy* 2, 3 (1992).

[17] The tax deduction is worth 25 percent of spending on day care, up to a ceiling of €2300 per child. All parents with out-of-home child care costs are eligible, as long as they use registered family day care or other officially recognized forms of care. The benefit amount currently ranges from about €65 a month to €200 a month, depending on family income, the number of children, and their age.

[18] This tax break covers 50 percent of the cost of home care, up to a €6900 ceiling.

[19] Esping-Andersen, *The Social Foundations of Post-Industrial Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 55; and Korpi, "Faces of Inequality: Gender, Class, and Patterns of Inequalities in Different Types of Welfare States, *Social Politics* 7 (Summer 2000).

Table 1
Percentage of Children under Age Three in Publicly Sponsored/Funded Child Care (mid- to late 1990s)

Conservative/Christian Democratic (%)		*Social Democratic (%)*	
Austria	6	Denmark	48
Belgium	30	Norway	23
France	34	Sweden	40
Germany[a]	2		
Italy	6		
Netherlands	10		
Spain	2		
Portugal	12		
Liberal (%)			
Ireland	2		
United Kingdom	2		

Sources: European Commission Network on Childcare, *A Review of Services for Young Children in the European Union, 1990–1995* (Brussels: EU, January 1996) 148; Austria: *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1998; Scandinavia: NOSOSCO (Copenhagen); France: Ministère de l'Education Nationale, CNAF. Data for the U.K. is only for children aged three and four, as age five is the mandatory school age.

[a]West German *länder* only.

Table 2
Percentage of Three-to-Six-Year-Old Children in Publicly Sponsored/Funded Child Care (mid- to late 1990s)

Conservative/Christian Democratic (%)		*Social Democratic (%)*	
Austria	80 (part time)	Denmark	83
Belgium	95	Norway	61
France	99	Sweden	83
Germany[a]	78 (part time)		
Italy	91		
Netherlands	71 (part time)		
Spain	84 (part time)		
Portugal	48		
Liberal (%)			
Ireland	55 (part time)		
United Kingdom	60 (part time)		

Sources: European Commission Network on Childcare, *A Review of Services for Young Children in the European Union, 1990–1995* (Brussels: EU, January 1996) 148; Austria: *Statistisches Jahrbuch* (1998); Scandinavia: NOSOSCO (Copenhagen); France: Ministère de l'Education Nationale, CNAF. Data for the U.K. is only for children aged three and four, as age five is the mandatory school age.

[a]West German *länder* only.

TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE OF FRENCH CHILDREN UNDER THREE IN CHILD CARE[a]

Crèches	9
Licensed family day care	13
Subsidized nannies	2
Preschool	12

SOURCES: CNAF (1997); Ministère de l'Education Nationale (1997).
[a] There is overlap among these categories, that is, some children will be in preschool and be cared for in licensed family day care after school.

TABLE 4
PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN FRANCE

Age	*Percentage Enrolled*
2	35
3	99
4	100
5	100

SOURCE: Ministère de l'Education Nationale (1997).

are compatible with parents' working schedules—all features that make them an important contribution to the ability of mothers to work outside the home.[20] In many other countries, preschool education tends to be part time (see Table 2).

As a result of the availability of this wide range of public services, the labor force participation of French women is generally higher than that of women in other conservative welfare states (see Table 5).[21] In the 1990s, 68 percent of mothers in France were in the labor force—compared to 41 percent in Germany, 52 percent in the Netherlands, and 46 percent in Austria—and as the table shows, the gap between these countries in rates of labor force participation of single mothers is even larger. French women also continue to have more children even though they are in paid employment at higher percentages than women in other European countries. In 2000, the fertility rate was 1.89 in France, compared with 1.25 in Italy, 1.34 in Germany, and an average of 1.53 in the EU (but 1.76 in Denmark).[22] In many ways, French women behave more like women in Scandinavian countries, with higher fertility

[20] In Italy, programs must be open eight hours a day; in Belgium, they are open from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (and closed one afternoon per week).

[21] Maria J. Hanratty, "Social Welfare Programs for Women and Children: The United States versus France," in Rebecca M. Blank, ed., *Social Protection versus Economic Flexibility: Is There a Trade-Off?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[22] European Commission, *Living Conditions in Europe: Statistical Pocketbook* (Brussels: European Commission, 2001).

TABLE 5
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF MOTHERS IN WESTERN EUROPE (1990S)

	Married/Cohabiting (%)	*Lone Mothers* (%)
Austria	46	58
Belgium	61	68
Denmark	84	69
Finland	70	65
France	68	82
Germany	41	40
Ireland	32	23
Italy	41	69
Netherlands	52	40
Norway	77	61
Portugal	55	50
Spain (Madrid)	38	68
Sweden	80	70
U.K.	62	41

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Family, Market, and Community: Equity and Efficiency in Social Policy* (Paris: OECD, 1997).

and higher rates of paid employment than other women on the European continent.[23]

Despite the provision of services and subsidies that promote mothers' employment, there is, nonetheless, a more traditional side to French family policy. A three-year care allowance—the *allocation parentale d'éducation* (APE)—is available for parents of two or more children who leave the labor force to care for children under the age of three. While this program technically is open to both men and women, 99 percent of beneficiaries are women. Initially, the benefit was available only to parents with at least three children, but in the mid-1990s, eligibility was extended to those with only two children, resulting in a substantial expansion in its use—the labor force participation of women with two children, with the younger child being under the age of three, dropped from 69 percent in 1994 to 53 percent in 1997.[24] Since the amount of the benefit is low (€485, or about $480, per month), it is usually taken by lower-income, less-skilled women, some of whom have difficulties reentering the labor market later on.[25]

[23] Esping-Andersen (fn. 19).

[24] Cédric Afsa, "L'allocation parentale d'éducation: entre politique familiale et politique de l'emploi" (Benefits for child-rearing: Between family policy and employment policy), *Insee Première* 569 (February 1998), 37–40.

[25] Marie-Odile Simon, "L'allocation parentale d'éducation: une parenthèse de trois ans . . . ou plus" (Benefits for child-rearing: A break of three years . . . or more), *Crédoc consommation et modes de vie* 136 (June 30, 1999).

Given these two dimensions to contemporary family policy, the French approach to women's employment is distinct from the Swedish or Danish models—which fully promote the insertion of women in the labor force—yet differs from the conservative welfare states that have been more reluctant to support mothers' employment. How can we account for this hybrid system, seemingly friendly to maternal employment, yet giving some support to traditional family policies as well?

First, many have argued that institutional features of different political systems best explain variations in welfare states.[26] For example, states characterized by greater political centralization lack veto points at which opponents can block new initiatives. France is often labeled a strong state with a weak and fragmented civil society; the capacity of centralized political authority to impose its will in the face of societal opposition might explain France's ability to establish an extensive public day care system. Since the Scandinavian countries also are characterized by political centralization, this may account for their large and generous welfare states and extensive public day care systems.[27]

The limitation of a solely state-centered approach, however, is that while it may explain the ability of some states to legislate public policy effectively, it cannot adequately account for the content of the policies that are adopted. States may use their administrative power to impose public child care over cries of opposition, or they may use this power to ignore demands for such services and reinforce private responsibility for the care of young children. Limiting the analysis to institutional arrangements alone would overlook the myriad political forces and ideological perspectives that shape the actual policies adopted.

The nature of state-society relations may also need to be explained. In both France and the Scandinavian countries, the voluntary sector has traditionally played a marginal role in the management of social services policy.[28] By contrast, the Christian democratic welfare state model

[26] Theda Skocpol and Edwin Amenta, "States and Social Policies," *Annual Review of Sociology* 12 (1986); and Ellen M. Immergut, "The Rules of the Game: The Logic of Health Policy-Making in France, Switzerland, and Sweden," in Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth, eds., *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[27] Margaret Weir and Skocpol, "State Structures and the Possibilities for 'Keynesian' Responses to the Great Depression in Sweden, Britain, and the United States," in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Evelyne Huber, Charles Ragin, and John D. Stephens, "Social Democracy, Christian Democracy, Constitutional Structure, and the Welfare State," *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (November 1993), 728.

[28] Benjamin Gidron, Ralph M. Kramer, and Lester M. Salamon, "Government and the Third Sector in Comparative Perspective: Allies or Adversaries?" in Gidron, Kramer, and Salamon, eds., *Government and the Third Sector: Emerging Relationships in Welfare States* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992).

privileges the principle of subsidiarity, which assigns substantial responsibility to voluntary associations in the administration of social services. As will be discussed further, these associations have had considerable influence in crafting social services policy and often have been a conservative force on issues affecting women's employment. While institutionalized relationships between states and social forces may partially account for differences in public child care policy, this factor itself merits more explanation, particularly, as to why the voluntary sector has played a more substantial role in some countries than in others.

Given the existence of extensive public child care systems in some of the Scandinavian countries, another possible explanation for the French approach is that social democratic parties, working in tandem with centralized, powerful trade unions, are responsible for public policies that integrate women into labor markets.[29] Social democratic parties tend to promote women's employment and public child care, whereas conservative or Christian democratic parties advocate policies that support the traditional division of labor in the workplace and the home.[30] These kinds of arguments might better account for both the ideological flavor of different public policies and the institutional arrangements of welfare states. Social democratic parties have pushed for centralized welfare state institutions, whereas Christian democratic forces have structured welfare states to devolve many responsibilities to nonprofit associations. Thus, while the construction of welfare states reflects the relative strength of competing political and social forces, the outcomes of these struggles have produced lasting institutional arrangements, including particular forms of state-society relationships.[31] The power relations embodied in governing institutions have had a lasting influence on the politics of the welfare state, reinforcing the ability of political parties to achieve their aims.

Focusing narrowly on party labels, however, cannot account for crossnational variations in public child care provision. In France, neither social democratic parties (and centralized trade unions) nor Christian democratic parties have been the dominant actors shaping the welfare state. The exact nature of the political forces driving the creation and expansion of the French welfare state eludes the commonly employed categories of liberal, Christian democratic, and social demo-

[29] Korpi (fn. 5); Esping-Andersen (fn. 12); Esping-Andersen and van Kersbergen, "Contemporary Research on Social Democracy," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1986).

[30] Huber and Stephens, "Partisan Governance, Women's Employment, and the Social Democratic Service State," *American Sociological Review* 65 (June 2000); van Kersbergen (fn. 11).

[31] Esping-Andersen (fn. 19).

cratic parties.[32] The party power explanation also fails in Scandinavia, since Denmark, the country with the most extensive public child care provision, is also the country in that region with the weakest social democratic party (see Tables 1–2).[33]

Yet another way to approach the French case is to examine the impact of a commonality with the Scandinavian countries—the secularization of political life—that distinguishes France from its continental neighbors. Secularization refers to the weakness or absence of Christian democratic parties in the political system and the small role accorded to a religiously based voluntary sector in managing social services, but it is also reflected in comparatively low rates of religious practice and belief. Secularization dampens the influence of ideologies that oppose mothers' employment and the nonmaternal care of young children. The voluntary sector, in particular, has worked in many countries on the Continent to preserve its power over early childhood care and education and to shape these services into part-day programs that do not facilitate mothers' participation in the labor force. Christian democratic parties and related associations have also opposed full-day child care as an affront to the traditional family.

As the following section reveals, the French trajectory has been markedly different and is attributable to the weakness of Christian democracy as a political force and the subordination of the voluntary sector to the state. These developments opened the door to pragmatic policy decisions, whereby state goals of economic growth and modernization took precedence over concern for preserving the traditional male-breadwinner family. As the following sections illustrate, it was nineteenth-century clashes between religious and secular authorities that shaped the earliest policies for the education of young children and have had long-term consequences for the relationship between religion and politics in France.

The Origins of the French Child Care System

The Politics of Education

To uncover the origins of the French child care system, it is necessary to distinguish between the educational programs that serve children aged

[32] Levy, "France: Directing Adjustment?" in Fritz W. Scharpf and Vivien A. Schmidt, eds., *Welfare and Work in the Open Economy: Diverse Responses to Common Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 310–11.

[33] On the varying fates of social democracy in Scandinavia, see Esping-Andersen, *Politics Against Markets* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

three to five and social services that target children under the age of three. As was noted earlier, one frequently overlooked yet vital aspect of the French day care system is that preschool education is universally available for all three-to-five-year-old children. The administration of these programs is separate from that of the social services, reflecting a distinctive history of development that dates back to the nineteenth century. This section will trace the origins of the preschool system back to the clerical-anticlerical conflicts and the competition over education that fueled the expansion of these programs and their incorporation into the national education ministry in the 1880s. This foray into the cleavages of the Third Republic will shed light not only on the French preschool system but also on the wider relationship between religion and politics that would later affect a host of child and family policies.

Nineteenth-century disputes over the power of religious and secular forces to shape the education of the nation's children have strongly influenced the development of the modern preprimary education system.[34] The roots of French anticlericalism date back as far as the Enlightenment, but it was the French Revolution that truly brought clerical-anticlerical conflicts to the fore. In their attack on all entrenched centers of privilege and power, the revolutionaries strove to divest the Catholic church of its influence over political, social, and economic life. As the descendants of these two forces jockeyed for political control throughout the nineteenth century, religion became a central dividing line in French politics.[35] Control of education was one of the main points of contention, since both sides regarded schools as key sites of influence over French society and politics. Once anticlerical republicans gained and consolidated their political power during the latter third of the nineteenth century, they enacted a series of sweeping education laws designed both to eliminate the influence of the Catholic orders over education and to forge a new, secular basis for national identity.

These quarrels grew to include the sphere of early childhood education, bringing it to the attention of republicans eager to secure influence over all forms of mass education.[36] Throughout much of the nineteenth

[34] Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l'Enseignement en France 1800–1967* (History of education in France) (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968); Mona Ozouf, *L'École, l'Église et la République: 1871–1914* (The school, the church, and the republic) (Paris: Éditions Cana/Jean Offredo, 1982).

[35] Suzanne Berger, "Religious Transformation and the Future of Politics," in Charles S. Maier, ed., *Changing Boundaries of the Political* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 114; Theodore R. Zeldin, *Conflicts in French Society: Anticlericalism, Education and Morals in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970).

[36] For a detailed account of the origins of early childhood education, see Kimberly J. Morgan, "Forging the Frontiers between State, Church, and Family: Religious Cleavages and the Origins of Early

century, charities and Catholic orders ran programs that served as the antecedents of the modern preschool—the *salles d'asile*.[37] Starting about midcentury, secularists and Catholics began competing for power over the education of young children, spurring a rapid expansion in the development of preschool and other educational services, which became part of larger disputes over who would shape the socialization of the nation's youth.[38] During the Second Empire (1851–70), the collaborative relationship between the regime and the Catholic church led to the channeling of public resources to these religiously run programs. Congregations acted as a partner of the state in expanding access to primary and preprimary education in France.

This collaborative relationship ended when republicans came to power and incorporated all forms of mass education, including services aimed at children below the mandatory school age of six, into the national, secular system. The *salles d'asile* were rebaptized *écoles maternelles* to emphasize their place in this system and to distinguish them from what were seen as degrading forms of charity run by the Catholic orders.[39] Subsequent legislation eliminated the congregations from the *école maternelle*, replacing nuns with state-employed, secular teachers, and established a national ministry responsible for the education of children aged three years and older. These programs were oriented around the working class—as was the rest of the mass education system that was founded in the 1880s—and because many working-class mothers participated in the labor force, preschools were open for a full school day to match the schedule of the public education system and thereby fuse educational and custodial needs.[40]

The schedule did not change even in the 1960s and 1970s, when growing middle-class interest in the merits of early childhood education led to a rapid expansion of the public preschool system. The numbers of preschools grew rapidly during this time, and by 1970, France had one of the most extensive systems in the world. In the late 1960s, for example, 79 percent of four year olds and 89 percent of five year olds

Childhood Care and Education Policies in France, Sweden, and Germany," *Politics and Society* 30 (March 2002).

[37] Jean-Noël Luc, *L'Invention du Jeune Enfant au XIXe siècle: de la salle d'asile à l'école maternelle* (Invention of the young child in the nineteenth century: From the day nursery to the nursery school) (Paris: Editions Belin, 1997).

[38] Raymond Grew and Patrick J. Harrigan, "The Catholic Contribution to Universal Schooling in France, 1850–1906," *Journal of Modern History* 57 (June 1985), 219, 224; and Frédéric Dajez, *Les origines de l'école maternelle* (Origins of the nursery school) (Paris: PUF, 1994), 142–51.

[39] Dajez (fn. 38), 161.

[40] This contrasts with the Froebelian kindergartens and similarly inspired preschool programs in other countries, which tended to be privately operated, oriented around the bourgeoisie, and available for a few hours a day.

were in *écoles maternelles*, along with 51 percent of three year olds; in Sweden, only 2 percent of four year olds and 11 percent of five year olds were in preschool programs.[41] The reasons behind the expansion of the preschool system will be discussed later in detail, but it is worth noting here that the early incorporation of these programs into the ambit of state responsibility facilitated their expansion. Because the Ministry of National Education is one of the most powerful bureaucracies in France, placing preschool programs under its control early in their history gave these programs a secure institutional home, with the result that preschool education quickly became a right of citizenship for all French children.

Clerical-anticlerical conflicts and the resulting suppression of religious forces not only shaped the founding of the modern education system but also affected the long-term relationship between religion and politics in France. In most continental European countries, clashes over education policy produced both a flowering of voluntary associations dedicated to preserving religious influence over society and, ultimately, the establishment of Christian democratic parties. In France, by contrast, the restrictive environment for civil society, the comparatively greater zeal and intensity of the anticlerical attack, and the antidemocratic orientation of many Catholics impeded such developments. State suppression of voluntary associations dates back to the revolutionary-era decrees and the Loi le Chapelier, which banned corporations and professional associations. Successive regimes maintained restrictive policies toward associations, stymieing the development of civil society.[42] In the Third Republic, the state's conflicts with religious forces over education and welfare only reinforced its suspicion of the voluntary sector. France was one of the last European countries to pass a law granting a right to the freedom of association—in 1901—yet even this more liberal law restricted the activities of religious congregations.[43] In short, France has long had a strained relationship with the voluntary sector, in contrast to the more collaborative relations between the state and civil society in other continental European countries.[44] As a result,

[41] Tessa Blackstone, "Some Aspects of the Structure and Extent of Nursery Education in Five European Countries," *Comparative Education* 7 (December 1971), 92, 96. In addition, the mandatory school age in Sweden was seven, but only 43 percent of Swedish six year olds were in preschool education in the late 1960s.

[42] Claire F. Ullman, *The Welfare State's Other Crisis: Explaining the New Partnership between Nonprofit Organizations and the State in France* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998), 46–47.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Wolfgang Seibel, "Government/Third-Sector Relationship in a Comparative Perspective: The Cases of France and West Germany," *Voluntas* 1, 1 (1990), 47–48; and Edith Archambault, "Le secteur associatif en France et dans le monde" (The voluntary sector in France and in the world), in François

religious organizations did not become the "birthing" grounds for Christian political movements, as occurred elsewhere in Europe.[45]

The intensity of the clerical-anticlerical cleavage in France also impeded the formation of Christian democratic parties.[46] The republican attack on clerical institutions was considerably more successful than similar efforts elsewhere on the Continent, where nationalist liberal movements ultimately folded in the face of sustained counterattacks.[47] Accordingly, while efforts to fully secularize education and other spheres of public life in these countries failed, French republicans maintained their grip on power and continued to mobilize political resources against Catholic institutions. Many in the French Catholic hierarchy became fearful of involvement in politics and opposed efforts to advance a Catholic political movement.[48] The cause of political Catholicism was further undermined by the implacable hostility of Catholics toward the regime itself and their disdain for democratic institutions. Opting to wait instead for the republican regime to collapse and the monarchy to be restored, many Catholics rejected involvement in democratic politics.[49] Elsewhere in continental Europe, religious forces were reconciled to democratic institutions earlier on and embraced political organization to further their cause. Christian democracy was born and would grow to be the dominant force in every continental European country—except France.

Familialism in the Fourth Republic

These developments would have significant consequences for the nature of the welfare state, and especially for child- and family-related public policies—an area of great concern to religious organizations and Christian democratic parties. In much of Europe, powerful Christian democratic parties designed welfare states predicated on the principle of subsidiarity and with the aim of preserving the patriarchal family—one of the most basic aims of social policy was to reinforce the capacity of male earners to support their dependents. In France, similar public policy objectives were clearly present following the Second World War,

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Bloch-Lainé, ed., *Faire société: les associations au coeur du social* (Making society: Associations in the heart of social life) (Paris: Syros, 1999), 29.

[45] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 72–75.

[46] Berger (fn. 35), 112–13; R. E. M. Irving, *The Christian Democratic Parties of Western Europe* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), 19.

[47] Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 76–78, 91–97; and E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780–1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 242, 315.

[48] Adrien Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France,* vol. 2 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961).

[49] Kalyvas (fn. 45), 138–41.

but waned with the demise of the only successful Christian democratic party—the Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP)—which enabled the adoption of more pragmatic public policies affecting mothers' employment. Gaullist and other center-right parties led the way, overseeing the rapid expansion of the public preschool system and laying the institutional foundations for public day care and other services and policies that have supported mothers' employment.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, France appeared to be headed toward the adoption of the Christian democratic welfare state model that was either being forged or reinforced elsewhere on the Continent. The first and only Christian democratic party to achieve political prominence in France was the MRP, one of the three principal parties of the postwar period. Throughout the Fourth Republic (1946–58), the MRP was a pivotal coalition-making party in Parliament, and its views often held sway over family policy.[50] Reflecting the influence of the church hierarchy, the MRP called for state assistance to families and championed the ideal of the *femme au foyer*.[51] The generous family benefits system established after the war included special benefits for housewives; the tax code, too, gave fiscal advantages to mothers at home. The 1950s became what historian Antoine Prost has called the "golden age of familialism."[52]

The MRP also exerted influence over the governance of the family benefits system, as it lobbied successfully for an independent family fund administered by representatives of labor unions and employers, as well as the sector of family associations.[53] These associations grew out of the aforementioned conflicts over religion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but experienced their greatest period of development during the interwar years, when there were intense concerns about depopulation.[54] While some of the earliest family associations focused entirely on the education question, most have championed the spiritual and material well-being of large families.[55] Family movement lobbying helped to bring about both the generalization of the system of family allowances in the 1930s and the creation of a national family

[50] Herrick Chapman, "French Democracy and the Welfare State," in George Reid Andrews and Chapman, eds., *The Social Construction of Democracy, 1870–1990* (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 308.

[51] Rémi Lenoir, "Family Policy in France since 1938," in Ambler (fn. 7), 153.

[52] Prost, "L'évolution de la politique familiale en France de 1938 à 1981," *Le mouvement social* 129 (October-December 1984), 9–10; Pierre Laroque, *La politique familiale en France depuis 1945* (Family policy in France since 1945) (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1985), 199; and Duchen (fn. 8), 108.

[53] Prost (fn. 52), 10–11.

[54] Robert Talmy, *Histoire du mouvement familial en France 1896–1939* (History of the family movement in France), vol. 1 (Paris: Union Nationale des Caisses d'Allocations Familiales, 1962).

[55] Ibid., 152–57.

benefits system after World War II that enabled men to support their families on one income.[56] Since 1945, the family movement has had a permanent foothold in family policy-making institutions through the Union Nationale des Associations Familiales (UNAF), an umbrella organization that includes most of the major family associations and offers them state recognition and funds. Representatives of UNAF hold seats on nearly every state council or commission that deals with questions pertaining to the family, including the national family benefits fund.[57]

The MRP and conservative family associations did not, however, become the hegemonic force in constructing family policy in the Fourth Republic. While the incorporation of the family movement into state policy making gave them a voice in matters of public affairs, it also contained their influence. It has been general practice, for example, that even if UNAF opposes a particular policy, once state officials make a decision, UNAF accepts the decision.[58] By the 1950s, a number of important political figures, such as Pierre Mendes-France, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, and Edgar Faure, began to resist the lobbying of the family movement and oppose housewife allowances and other benefits that encouraged women—at a time of labor shortages—to exit the labor market.[59] Furthermore, a government planning commission contested the housewife allowances on similar grounds and called for more public child care.[60] Postwar planners concerned about France's demographic balance also viewed publicly run day care as a weapon with which to combat infant mortality and thereby promote the well-being of the population. Pronatalist zeal helped bring about the creation, in 1945, of the Protection Maternelle et Infantile (PMI), a public health agency within the national health ministry whose stated objective was to combat the nation's demographic decline. The *crèches* were brought under the purview of the PMI, and government officials began to envi-

[56] Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chap. 5.

[57] Virginie Bussat and Michel Chauvière, *Les intérêts familiaux à l'épreuve d'une comparaison France-Angleterre* (Family interests as seen through a French-British comparison) (Report for the CNAF, Paris, January 1997).

[58] One of the more conservative associations, Familles de France, does sometimes separate itself from UNAF when strongly opposed to a particular government policy, so as to speak with its own voice. See Claude Martin and Patrick Hassenteufel, *La représentation des intérêts familiaux en Europe: Allemagne, Belgique, Grande-Bretagne, France, Portugal* (Representation of family interests in Europe: Germany, Belgium, Great Britain, France, Portugal) (Report for the European Commission, General Division Five, September 1997), 84.

[59] Duchen (fn. 8), 105; Lenoir (fn. 51), 160–62.

[60] Commissariat Général du Plan de Modernisation et d'équipement, *Troisième plan de developpement économique et social: Rapport général de la Commission de la main d'oeuvre* (Third economic and social development plan: General report of the labor force commission) (Paris: 1958), 182–86.

sion the creation of a vast system of public child care.[61] These ambitions—while not met in the 1950s—nonetheless helped cement the central government's involvement in protecting the health and well-being of the youngest members of French society, violating the principle of subsidiarity that would have barred such an intervention.

With the demise of the MRP, the "golden age of familialism" came to a close. The weakness of the MRP was in part due to failures earlier in the century to form a successful Christian democratic movement. While Christian democratic parties in neighboring countries had become entrenched in the political system and built up a national political base, the MRP was unable to become a nationally viable party, only showing strength in some predominantly Catholic regions. In addition, the MRP continued to be plagued by the polarization of the electorate, as many Catholics were too conservative to vote for the party, while the left was too anticlerical to support it either.[62] Thus, in contrast to their Western European counterparts, Christian democrats in France repeatedly failed to widen their base on either the left or right.[63] Plagued by inadequate support from the Catholic church and its own hesitancy to embrace the church as an ally in a climate of hostile anticlericalism, the MRP failed to extend its base across the conservative electorate.[64] The MRP's share of the electoral vote declined from 26 percent in 1946 to a mere 11 percent by 1956, and the electoral institutions of the Fifth Republic finished the party off.[65] Mirroring the decline in the MRP's vote share, the value of family allowances reached its highest level in 1955 and declined thereafter, and the benefit for housewives was only weakly revalued and became more of a symbol than an effective policy tool for keeping mothers out of paid employment.[66]

[61] "Rapport du Ministre de la Santé Publique et de la Population sur la Protection Maternelle et Infantile au cours de la période comprise entre le 1er Janvier 1946 et le 31 Décembre 1951" (Report of the minister of public health and population on maternal and infant health in the period from January 1, 1946 to December 31, 1951), *Journal Officiel: Annexe Administratif* (July 16, 1956); and Alain Norvez, *De la naissance à l'école: Santé, modes de garde et préscolarité dans la France contemporaine* (From birth to school: Health care, day care and preschool in contemporary France) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 372–73.

[62] Irving, *Christian Democracy in France* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), 36–45.

[63] Ibid., 14, 65; and Berger (fn. 35), 120–21. For a discussion of how Christian democratic parties in different countries reached out to either the left or the right to widen their political base, see van Kersbergen (fn. 11).

[64] Carolyn M. Warner, *Confessions of an Interest Group: The Catholic Church and Political Parties in Europe* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 87–92, 114.

[65] The direct election of the president (starting in 1962) and the use of the *scrutin d'arrondissement à deux tours* produced a bipolarization of the electorate, which, in turn, put pressure on centrist parties such as the MRP.

[66] Jacqueline Martin, "Politique familiale et travail des femmes mariées en France: Perspective historique, 1942–1982" (Family policy and married women's employment in France: A historical perspective, 1942–82), *Population* 53 (November-December 1998): 1137–38.

Gaullist Pragmatism in the Fifth Republic

French politics and public policy thus came to be dominated by forces other than Christian democracy—namely, Gaullist and related center-right parties during the 1960s and 1970s, and both Gaullist and socialist parties during the 1980s and 1990s. While Christian democratic parties continued to govern throughout the rest of continental Europe, their French counterparts failed to make headway in the electoral arena (see Figure 1). The argument could be made that the replacement of the MRP by other forces on the center and right of the political spectrum is irrelevant; the strong performance of these parties among Catholics is more important than particular party appellations. Kalyvas, however, has argued convincingly that party organizations do matter because they mediate between individual characteristics of the population and the political system, thereby shaping the issues and cleavages that will be politicized.[67] Rather than conflating voter base and party platform, we need to examine the nature of the parties that came to dominate French politics, with a focus on their attitudes toward family policy and mothers' employment. Even if one believes that the Gaullists' voter base should have been determinative in shaping a Catholic approach to public policy, that base had shrunk dramatically by the time the Fifth Republic came to power. While practicing Catholics made up 40 percent of the population at Liberation, that figure dropped to less than 20 percent by the 1970s.[68] A Eurobarometer study during the early 1980s showed that rates of religious practice were lower in France than anywhere else on the Continent, matching the very low rates found in the highly secularized Scandinavian states (see Table 6).[69]

Accordingly, Christianity played little or no role in the discourse of Gaullist and other center-right parties, and de Gaulle himself faced opposition from both the moderate Catholics of the MRP and the more right-wing Catholics and others nostalgic for the proclerical Vichy regime.[70] These aspects of the Gaullist movement were also reflected in de Gaulle's view that political leaders should rise above ideological factions and currents and embrace whatever programs and policies best meet the interests of the nation. For de Gaulle and his governing partners, social and economic modernization were a preeminent objective

[67] Kalyvas (fn. 45), 115.

[68] Andrew Knapp, *Gaullism since de Gaulle* (Aldershot, England: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1994), 143.

[69] See also Loek Halman, Thorleif Pettersson, and Johan Verweij, "The Religious Factor in Contemporary Society," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 40, no. 1 (1999).

[70] Knapp (fn. 68), 398–99; and René Rémond, *La droite en France: De la première restauration à la cinquième République* (The right in France: From the first restoration to the Fifth Republic), vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier, 1968).

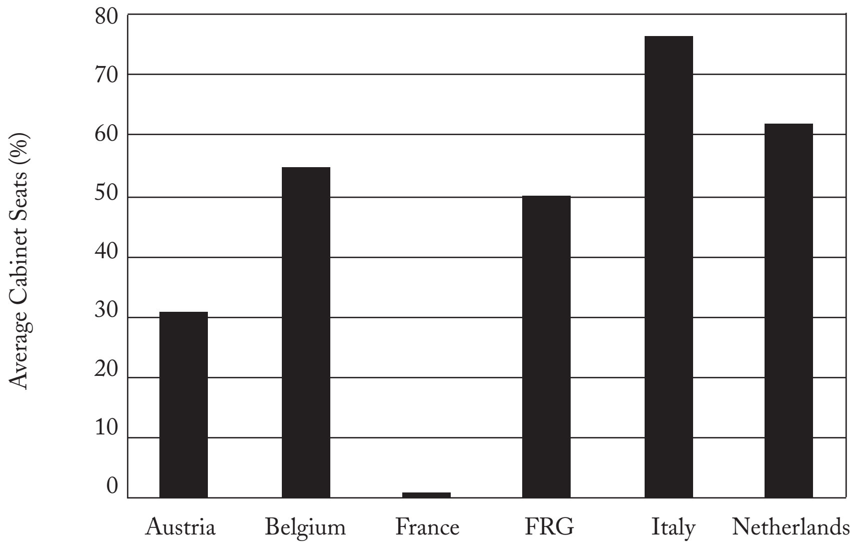

FIGURE 1
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF CABINET SEATS HELD BY
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTIES
(1960–94)

SOURCE: Evelyne Huber, Charles Ragin, and John D. Stephens, *Comparative Welfare States Data Set* (Northwestern University and University of North Carolina, 1997).

of state policy, designed to ensure France's continued greatness in the world.[71] This commitment to modernization, therefore, justified pragmatism in public policy, leading de Gaulle and his successors to adopt public policies that often defied traditional definitions of left and right.[72] Furthermore, Gaullist dirigisme repeatedly violated the Christian democratic tenet of subsidiarity; with the "the state in their blood," these modern-day Jacobins maintained both a strong commitment to government intervention and a belief that intermediary organizations must yield to the greater authority of the state.[73]

[71] Michalina Vaughan, "Gaullism," in Martin Kolinsky and William E. Paterson, eds., *Social and Political Movements in Western Europe* (London: Croom Held Ltd., 1976), 109, 113; and Philip Cerny, "Modernization and the Fifth Republic," in John Gaffney, ed., *France and Modernization* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988), 21.

[72] Jean Charlot, *L'U.N.R. Etude du pouvoir au sein d'un parti politique* (The UNR: A study of power within a political party) (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), 283–86; and Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 274.

[73] Knapp (fn. 68), 368; Rémond (fn. 70), 296–97; and Pierre Birnbaum, *Les Sommets de l'Etat: Essai sur l'élite du pouvoir en France* (Heights of power: An essay on the power elite in France) (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977).

TABLE 6
RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN EUROPE: EARLY 1981

	Church Attendance (%)	*Self-Assessed Religiosity (%)*
Ireland	82	66
Spain	41	65
Italy	36	86
Belgium	30	81
Holland	27	70
Germany	22	69
France	12	56
Denmark	3	74

SOURCE: Liana Giorgi, "Religious Involvement in a Secularized Society: An Empirical Confirmation of Martin's General Theory of Secularization," *British Journal of Sociology* 43 (December 1992). These measures are from the 1981 World Values Survey, and they measure the percentage attending church regularly, and the respondents' self-assessed sense of religiosity.

Gaullist and related parties oversaw and encouraged the rapid expansion and universalization of the preschool education system in the 1960s and 1970s. The willingness of governments in France to promote the public preschool system is particularly notable when viewed from a comparative perspective, as Christian democratic governments in many other Western European countries were slow to support early childhood education. In Germany, for example, highly negative views about early childhood education prevailed until the 1970s, as preschools were seen as an undue interference in the family sphere.[74] As a result, these programs were left in the hands of voluntary associations, many of whom opposed full-day preschools as an inducement to mothers' employment.[75] In France, by contrast, the expansion occurred as central state planners realized that the demand for preschool far exceeded supply, and they scrambled to respond,[76] showing little concern for the potential consequences for mothers' employment and the mother-child bond. Instead, the Gaullist education minister in the late 1960s, Oliver Guichard, viewed the increased demand for nursery school education as a social fact based on urbanization and increasing participation by

[74] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), 314.

[75] Birgit Fix, *The Institutionalization of Family Welfare: Division of Labour in the Field of Child Care in Austria and Germany* (Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, Arbeitsberech I, No. 24, 1998); Wolfgang Tietze, Hans-Gunther Rossbach, and Karin Ufermann, "Child Care and Early Education in the Federal Republic of Germany," in Patricia P. Olmsted and David P. Weikart, eds., *How Nations Serve Young Children* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Press, 1989), 64.

[76] Centre des Archives Contemporaines, No. 870176, Art. 15, "Documents de synthèse Education Nationale sur le Cinquième Plan, Note pour M. Delors de M. Lasry," Dec. 14, 1964; Jean-Marie Poirier, report for the Commission of Cultural, Family and Social Affairs, Ministry of National Education, *Journal Officiel* (1965): 3792.

women in the labor force that needed to be recognized and satisfied by expanded services.[77]

Gaullist governing elites were also highly pragmatic about the issue of day care and other measures to promote mothers' employment. In the 1960s, many Gaullist officials opposed the housewife allowance—in direct confrontation with conservative family associations and the Catholic press—because it encouraged mothers to leave the labor force during a time of labor shortages and was otherwise regarded as a waste of government resources.[78] Many of these officials also viewed day care and women's employment as essential to help slacken tight labor markets.[79] However, their pragmatism also dictated that their commitment to day care could be abandoned once labor market problems were solved. Indeed, the influx of refugees and immigrants from North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s did much to redress France's labor market shortages and consequently diminished the interest of government officials in building day care centers to help working mothers.[80]

This trend changed in the 1970s as popular demand for public day care grew. As the problem of labor shortages arose again—accompanied by an increasing awareness of the problems of immigration—many saw the solution in a new generation of women.[81] Accordingly, the participation of women—including mothers with young children—in the labor force grew rapidly, concomitant with an increase in interest among parents and experts in early care and education as a way to foster child development. One impetus came from the student and worker revolts of May 1968, when twenty-four-hour *crèches* were established in the Sorbonne.[82] At a number of Paris universities, students founded *crèches sauvages* that were outside of official government control and sought to break free of the older, "medicalized" model of child care.[83] These new ideas about child care produced major changes in the op-

[77] Olivier Guichard, speech to the French Parliament, *Journal Officiel*, November 12, 1969, 3581.

[78] Lenoir (fn. 51), 165–66.

[79] Ibid., 166.

[80] Commissariat Général du Plan, *Quatrième plan de developpement économique et social (1962–1965): Rapport général de la Commission de la main d'oeuvre* (Fourth economic and social development plan: General report of the labor force commission) (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1961), 19.

[81] Commissariat Général du Plan, *Sixième plan de developpement économique et social* (Sixth economic and social development plan) (Paris: Documentation Française, 1971), 24, 216.

[82] Author interview with Jacqueline Ancelin, Paris, March 9, 1998; author interview with Evelyne Sullerot, Paris, April 22, 1998; author interview with Jacqueline Farrache, Paris, April 22, 1998; and Duchen (fn. 8), 194.

[83] See, for example, Jacqueline de Linares, "Le droit d'avoir des enfants" (The right to have children), *L'Express*, November 6, 1972, 102; "Enfance telle que je la rêve" (Childhood as I dream of it), *Réforme*, February 24, 1973; and Christiane Sacase, "Des crèches sauvages pour les enfants de Mai" (Unauthorized child care for the children of May), *L'Express*, December 8, 1969, 99.

eration of the public *crèches* that turned them from sterile, hospital-like environments into colorful centers that have fostered child creativity and development,[84] and have improved their image among many middle- and upper-income parents.[85]

In response to these new demands, Gaullist and other center-right governments in the 1970s increased spending on the public day care system at a time when conservative welfare regimes elsewhere on the Continent maintained policies to shore up the traditional family.[86] The first major injection of government funding into the day care system came in 1970 under a Gaullist prime minister, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, who was eager to address some of the demands arising from the 1968 movements. Support for women's employment became part of his broader agenda to tackle antedated economic and social structures and promote a "New Society" in France.[87] Government analysts at the time also argued that the trend toward greater women's participation in the labor force was irreversible and that the government needed to adapt policy to this new reality.[88] Chaban-Delmas' government directed 100 million francs from the family benefits fund to subsidize the creation of public day care centers and created a new system of public financing to help cover their operating costs.[89] Most importantly, perhaps, the regulations governing the *crèches* were changed to extend these services to less impoverished families, thereby shedding their image as programs for the poor and fostering a constituency of parents who began to regard the provision of public day care as an entitlement.

Faced with intensifying political pressure from the left after the Socialist and Communist Parties reached an electoral pact in 1972, conservative and centrist politicians voiced their support for public child

[84] Liane Mozère, *Le printemps des crèches: Histoire et analyse d'un mouvement* (Springtime for the crèches: History and analysis of a movement) (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1992).

[85] Sullerot and Michèle Saltiel, *Les crèches et les équipements d'accueil pour la petite enfance* (Crèches and day care services for young children) (Paris: Hachette, 1974).

[86] On Germany, see Wiebke Kolbe, "Gender and Parenthood in West German Family Politics from the 1960s to the 1980s," in Rolf Torstendahl, ed., *State Policy and Gender System in the Two German States and Sweden: 1945–1989* (Uppsala, Sweden: Department of History, 1999); on The Netherlands, see Bussemaker, "Rationales of Care in Contemporary Welfare States: The Case of Childcare in the Netherlands," *Social Politics* 5 (Spring 1998), 76–77.

[87] Jacques Chaban-Delmas, *Mémoires pour demain* (Memoirs for tomorrow) (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 435–37.

[88] Centre des Archives Contemporaines, No. 760166, Art. 6, "Fiche de programme finalisé" (Sheet of the finalized program). As economic planners argued: ". . . it would be in vain today, and moreover contrary to the exigencies of economic development as well as to the aspirations of those concerned, to try to confine woman in the role of mother. To the contrary, we must allow her to assume, at the same time, in all cases when she would like it, her role within the family and the professional activity that she has chosen." Commissariat général du plan, *Sixième plan,* 76.

[89] Ancelin, *L'Action sociale familiale et les Caisses d'allocations Familiales* (Social services for families and the family benefits funds) (Paris: Documentation Française, 1997), 244–48.

care. The left's common program promised to create one thousand more *crèches* if elected, and the Communist Party, in particular, was a strong advocate for improved access to day care and preschools.[90] Many on the right responded by avowing their support for day care. During the 1973 legislative elections, Prime Minister Pierre Messmer promised to create two thousand *crèches*, or one hundred thousand more places, between 1973 and 1978. It was later revealed that he had accidentally added a zero, and that the real plan was to create two hundred more *crèches*. Messmer continued to maintain that he intended to build two thousand new centers, although such a massive investment was never implemented.[91] Nonetheless, the episode is revealing of how politicians across the political spectrum hastened to voice their support for child care and women's employment.

Governments under President Giscard d'Estaing (1974–81) also devoted more resources to public day care. Again, Giscard's larger social policy vision was to promote societal modernization. Thus, unlike Christian democratic parties in other European countries at the time, Giscard d'Estaing embraced a program of social reforms, including expanded access to contraception, liberalization of abortion and divorce laws, greater assistance to single mothers, and support for mothers' employment.[92] He appointed Françoise Giroud to be Secrétaire d'Etat à la condition feminine to advocate women's work outside the home and the construction of more day care centers.[93] Minister of Health Simone Veil, who penned the abortion liberalization law, also was committed to expanding the supply of day care; as a result, substantially more resources were devoted to *crèches*. In 1974, the government made a second major investment of 100 million francs to build more public day care centers, and the number of places in these centers increased by 72 percent between 1974 and 1980.

During the early 1970s the role of the family benefits system in funding and developing public day care was established—a move that perhaps represented the most important development for the future of

[90] See, for example, "Les maires communists réclament une participation des enterprises au financement des crèches" (Communist mayors call for employer participation in financing child care centers), *Le Monde*, April 2, 1974; "Crèches: Le gouvernment refuse de faire payer les patrons" (Child care: The government refuses to make employers pay), *L'Humanité*, October 13, 1972; Françoise Lazard, "Petite enfance et émancipation de la femme" (Early childhood and the emancipation of women), *L'Humanité*, December 11, 1970; and Eric Eauvives, "La bataille des crèches" (Battle for child care), *Rouge*, June 9, 1977.

[91] "Deux milles crèches: Nous tiendrons le défi" (Two thousand child care centers: We will meet the challenge), *Le Monde*, February 2, 1974; and Francois Depuis, "Le désarroi des meres" (The distress of mothers), *Le Nouvel Observateur*, May 13, 1974.

[92] Xavier Gardette, "The Social Policies of Giscard d'Estaing," in Vincent Wright, ed., *Continuity and Change in France* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

[93] Françoise Giroud, "Des bons enfants" (Good children), *Le Monde*, April 25, 1975.

child care. While a small portion of this fund had always been used to finance social services of interest to families—such as *crèches*, drop-in centers, vacation centers, and other social services—starting in the 1970s, the family benefits fund (CNAF) became the major source of financial support to public day care through a new financing mechanism. One analyst has described this as a "silent revolution" for child care and other family services in France, as it created a new and stable source of funding that local governments and other administrators of day care programs could rely upon in their planning.[94] With the victory of the Socialist Party in 1981, the CNAF's role in child care was strongly reaffirmed, and the Mitterrand governments directed greater resources to these services.[95] Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, access to public day care continued to expand, supported by both conservative and socialist administrations.

At the same time, however, administrative decentralization and deteriorating economic conditions strained the ability of the French day care system to meet the demand for child care. As fighting unemployment became the primary objective of domestic policy in the 1980s and 1990s, commitment waned on both the left and the right to advancing women's participation in the labor force. While this new orientation has not undermined the public day care system, it reveals once again the downside of French government pragmatism toward women's employment. The system of public *crèches* has not faced funding cutbacks, but the pace of expansion slowed, especially in the 1990s. Government policy has encouraged the development of family day care, which involves no government investment in the creation of day care facilities because services are run out of individuals' homes.[96] With fewer francs funding more of these cheaper services, the government creates both new day care places and, potentially, new jobs for low-income workers.[97]

The creation of a small benefit for parents who leave the labor force to care for their own—the *allocation parentale d'éducation*—represents a more significant policy change. French parental leave has long been in the middle range of generosity: current policy guarantees sixteen weeks

[94] Ancelin (fn. 89), 294.

[95] CNAF, *L'Action sociale et familiale des caisses d'allocations familiales: Orientations générales, 1981–1985*, Circulaire, 1315 (March 2, 1981).

[96] Jenson and Sineau, "Quand 'liberté de choix' ne rime pas avec égalite républicaine" (When 'free choice' does not rhyme with republican equality), in Jenson and Sineau, eds., *Qui doit garder le jeune enfant? Modes d'accueil et travail des mères dans l'Europe en crise* (Who should take care of the young child? Day care and mothers' employment in a Europe in crisis) (Paris: LGDJ, 1998), 152–53.

[97] Antoine Math and Evelyne Renaudat, "Développer l'accueil des enfants ou créer l'emploi? Une lecture de l'évolution des politiques en matière de modes de garde" (Create child care or create employment? A reading of the evolution of child care policies), *Recherches et Prévisions* 49 (September 1997).

of leave paid as a percentage of one's salary, twelve of which may be taken after the birth of the child. The new policy, enacted first under a socialist government in the mid-1980s, created a separate flat-rate benefit that parents can receive for three years if they leave the labor force to care for their children. While open to both men and women, 99 percent of the beneficiaries are women, prompting critics to claim it is a reactionary policy reminiscent of the 1950s allowances for housewives. This policy is more accurately viewed as another manifestation of long-standing French government pragmatism with regard to women's employment. The care leave and benefit have been supported by both socialist and conservative governments, and is more of a variant of antiunemployment policy than an ideological attack on mothers in the workforce.[98] Most politicians eschew language that would criticize working mothers and claim their only goal is to facilitate parents' free choice in matters of work and family. The development of the paid leave, however, is evidence of how the French approach to women's employment can be a double-edged sword. While French policymakers across the political spectrum have long avoided leveling moralizing criticism of working mothers, they are prone to turn against women's employment in times of economic stagnation and high unemployment.

As this article has shown, however, many of the services that promote women's employment are strongly institutionalized, such as the universal preschool system that is run by the national education bureaucracy. The national family benefits fund (CNAF) continues to promote the expansion of public day care and deploys resources to support this aim. In addition, the parameters of contemporary political debate about families and gender roles reflect the long-term effects of the early subordination of religious forces to secular authority, which has produced a more favorable political climate for mothers' employment. All of these factors continue to favor public policies that support the employment of mothers with young children. The French political system, however, continues to lack a voice for public policies that support women's employment for its own sake, and not for the purpose of supporting other economic objectives.

Comparative Implications

In comparative perspective, these findings yield insights about the politics of women's employment in Scandinavia and continental Europe. The French case reaffirms the conclusion that, in most continental Eu-

[98] Jenson and Sineau (fn. 96), 154.

ropean countries, Christian democratic political parties and related voluntary organizations have promoted policies that reinforce the traditional gender division of labor in the workplace and the home.[99] Faced with labor shortages in the 1960s, these states opened their doors to immigration rather than encourage mothers' employment, and they rejected both the development of public day care and the modification of school schedules to aid working mothers. Even during the 1970s—a time of growing feminist mobilization and challenges to the male breadwinner model—these states increased *part-day* preschool programs, reflecting the influence of confessional voluntary organizations on social services policy.[100] Since that time, unemployment and economic stagnation in continental European countries have led these states to adopt measures that pay women to leave the labor force, reinforcing traditionalist policy approaches. Only in the Netherlands, where Christian democratic political power was sharply reduced in the 1990s during a time of labor shortages, has there been recent expansion in the availability of public day care.[101]

The role of the education system in France as a form of public day care also helps us understand the surprisingly high public provision of child care for preschool children in Italy and Belgium. In both these countries, Christian democratic parties were politically dominant until recent years and resisted public policies that would encourage mothers' employment. Nonetheless, in both countries, there is universal access to preschools that closely resemble French programs in that they offer both educational and care-taking services—as opposed to being part-time, purely pedagogically oriented services—and because conflicts between secular republicans and Catholics over control of education shaped their development. In Belgium, for example, state responsibility for early childhood education was established at the height of clerical-anticlerical conflict in the 1880s, and continued competition between Catholic and secular forces over control of education promoted the expansion and universalization of these programs.[102]

Political secularization in France also is a key commonality with some of the Scandinavian states and points to the importance of secu-

[99] van Kersbergen (fn. 11); and Esping-Andersen, (fn. 19).

[100] Fix (fn. 75).

[101] Bussemaker, "Recent Changes in European Welfare State Services: A Comparison of Child Care Politics in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands," Working Paper 7.6, Center for European Studies, Harvard University, January 1997.

[102] For details, see Morgan, "Whose Hand Rocks the Cradle? The Politics of Child Care Policy in Advanced Industrialized States" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2001).

larism as a precondition for public policies that challenge traditional gender norms. The effects of secularism are not only evident in the low religiosity of the population and the weakness of Christian democratic parties, but also in the "reverse principle of subsidiarity" that has governed state-society relations in forging and administering social policy.[103] The secularization of the voluntary sector, and the relatively minor role it has played in both Scandinavia and France in the administration and shaping of social welfare policies, has opened the door to more pragmatic responses to the issue of women's employment. In Sweden and Denmark, accordingly, parties on both the left and the right responded to labor shortages in the 1960s and 1970s by endorsing women's full insertion into the paid labor force.[104] Both labor unions and employers viewed such policies as important for promoting economic growth, a position that helped build a consensus across the political spectrum. While conservatives were not always terribly supportive, their opposition was muted and the issue of women's participation in the workforce became fairly depoliticized.[105] Public day care was incorporated into the heart of the welfare state.

Not all the Scandinavian states, however, have responded to the issue of women's employment in the same way, and it is the exception—Norway—that helps prove the rule. Norway has the largest and most successful Christian democratic political party in Scandinavia, reflecting the lasting effects of historic conflicts between fundamentalist Protestants and the established Lutheran church.[106] As a result, the Christian People's Party has been a significant political force, and the welfare state was designed to provide a considerably greater role for voluntary sector actors in the management of social services.[107] While this party was not the dominant political party on the right, it gained influence in the 1970s and 1980s as a coalition partner of other conservative parties,

[103] The term is from Archambault (fn. 44). See Filip Wijkstrom, "Changing Focus or Changing Role? The Swedish Nonprofit Sector in the 1990s," *German Policy Studies* 1 (May 2000). Wijkstrom points out that, contrary to the commonly held view, the nonprofit sector is well developed in Sweden, but that its role in welfare and social services is substantially smaller there than in many continental European countries.

[104] Some accounts of the development of public day care in Sweden and Denmark are Mary Ruggie, *The State and Working Women: A Comparative Study of Britain and Sweden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Arnlaug Leira, *Welfare States and Working Mothers: The Scandinavian Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[105] Jonas Hinnfors, "Stability through Change: The Pervasiveness of Political Ideas," *Journal of Public Policy* 19, 3 (1999).

[106] Stephens, "Religion and Politics in Three Northwest European Democracies," *Comparative Social Research* 2 (1979), 136–37.

[107] Bente Blanche Nicolaysen, "Voluntary Service Provision in a Strong Welfare State," Working Paper 35, Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, Mannheim, Germany, 2001.

and headed a center-right government in 1998 that has promoted women's caregiving in the home.[108]

The issue of women's employment has been more controversial in Norway than elsewhere in Scandinavia because of the relatively greater influence of religion in that country's politics.[109] Despite the political power of the Norwegian social democratic party, which exceeds the strength of its Danish equivalent, the issue of mothers' employment has been more politicized and the development of public day care occurred at a considerably slower pace than in Sweden or Denmark. Notably, many early childhood education programs are part-day services—resembling those of Germany or Austria—and nearly half of all day care places are run by nonprofit groups—most of which receive backing from churches.[110] By contrast, the more thorough secularization of politics in France, Sweden, and Denmark enabled public policies that support the movement of women into the paid labor force, particularly when economic circumstances justified such measures.[111]

An examination of the Scandinavian cases also reveals that Denmark and Sweden renewed their commitment to mothers' employment more than France.[112] While all three countries embraced measures to support mothers' employment by the early-to-mid-1970s, the expansion of public child care over the past three decades in Denmark and Sweden has been accompanied by a massive increase in the numbers of women in public office. Over the past two decades, the percentage of female parliamentarians has ranged from 30 to 50 percent in Sweden and Denmark, compared with a mere 5 to 10 percent in France. The presence of Swedish and Danish women in their local governments is particularly significant, because it gives them influence at the level where child care services are administered and many policy decisions are now made. The Swedish and Danish child care programs have therefore gained political allies who champion mothers' employment for its own

[108] Leira, "Caring as Social Right: Cash for Child Care and Daddy Leave," *Social Politics* 5, 3 (1998).

[109] Lauri Karvonen, "Christian Parties in Scandinavia: Victory Over the Windmills?" in David Hanley, ed., *Christian Democracy in Europe: A Comparative Perspective* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994); and Sainsbury, "Gender and the Social Democratic Welfare States," in Sainsbury (fn. 13), 97–98.

[110] Teppo Kröger, "The Dilemma of Municipalities: Scandinavian Approaches to Child Day-Care Provision," *Journal of Social Policy* 26, 4 (1997), 492–93.

[111] There may be applications to some Eastern European countries as well, as some of these centralized states subordinated religious and other forces in civil society and used public day care and universal kindergartens as a way to help mobilize women's labor supply at a time when economic circumstances required it.

[112] See chapters by Anette Borchorst and by Christina Bergqvist and Anita Nyberg in Sonya Michel and Rianne Mahon, eds., *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads: Gender and Welfare State Restructuring* (New York and London: Routledge Press, 2002).

sake, and who have propelled the continued expansion of these programs in times of economic distress.[113] In France, by contrast, public policies to support mothers' employment have been vulnerable to the shifting machinations of political elites who prioritize economic and fiscal outcomes over feminist policy goals.

Conclusion

This article has examined the historical foundations of French public policies for working women, linking the distinctive French approach to the way in which divisions over religion have shaped policies for early childhood care and education and more broadly, political life. Conflicts between clericalists and anticlerical republicans shaped some of the earliest public policies for the care and education of young children and had a lasting influence on the shape of French politics. The weakness of Christian democracy and the subordination of the voluntary sector to state power diminished the political strength of those espousing conservative views concerning gender roles and the family. Secularization enabled public policies that supported women's employment, particularly in the late 1960s and first half of the 1970s, when economic circumstances were favorable. During that period, government officials established the state's responsibility for day care and put in a place a system of financing that enabled the long-term expansion of the system.

These findings also have implications for how we should view the politics of mothers' employment in comparative perspective. The French case reinforces the notion that Christian democratic parties have blocked policies that support mothers' employment in most other continental European countries and points to an additional source of conservative influence in these welfare states—the religiously based voluntary sector. In addition, it illustrates the importance of a common quality that unites the French and Scandinavian cases—the secularization of political life. More generally, secularization emerges from both comparative and case-study analysis as a crucial precondition for public policies that promote the demise of the traditional family model.

[113] Bergqvist, Jaana Kuusipalo, and Auður Styrkarsdóttir, "The Debate on Childcare Policies," in Bergqvist et al., eds., *Nordic Democracies: Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1999).