

# An Assessment on Competitive Capacity of the Political Opposition in France During the Fifth Republic<sup>1</sup>

# Fransa'da Beşinci Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde Siyasi Muhalefetin Rekabet Etme Kapasitesi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme

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## Abstract

The declining trust in political institutions, decreasing voter turnout, and the escalation of peaceful protests into violent actions in France make it necessary to closely examine not only the ruling party but also the political opposition, which is a key stakeholder in the democratic regime. This study addresses the competitive capacity of political opposition under the Fifth Republic through an integrated framework combining neo-institutionalism and political culture theory. While the institutional analysis focuses on constitutional provisions, electoral law, party legislation, and parliamentary procedures, the cultural analysis considers citizens' attitudes toward authority, participation, and pluralism, drawing on Almond and Verba's concept of political culture and Dahl's notion of polyarchy as normative benchmarks. As a single-case study, this research provides a holistic perspective by incorporating both institutional and political culture factors to analyze the conditions that enable or constrain opposition. The study claims that the opposition's capacity to compete effectively depends not only on the nature of legal regulations but also on the strength of the country's democratic political culture. In this context, it is argued that during the Fifth Republic in France, the opposition's competitive power was guaranteed by an institutional framework, but the erosion of democratic political culture created a socio-political environment that limited this power.

**Keywords:** Pluralism, democracy, democratic regimes, France, political opposition

**JEL Code:** D72, H11, P16, Z18

## Öz

Fransa'da siyasi kurumlara olan güvenin giderek zayıflaması, seçmen katılımının azalması ve barışçıl protestoların şiddet hareketlerine dönüşmesi, sadece iktidarı değil, demokratik rejimin en önemli paydaşı olan siyasi muhalefeti de yakından incelemeyi gerekli kılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Beşinci Cumhuriyet döneminde siyasi muhalefetin rekabet kapasitesini, neo-kurumsalcılık ve siyasi kültür kuramını birleştiren bütünlük bir çerçeve aracılığıyla ele almaktadır. Kurumsal analiz, anayasal düzenlemeler, seçim yasası, siyasi partiler yasası ve parlamenter usullere odaklanırken; kültürel analiz, Almond ve Verba'nın siyasi kültür kavramı ile Dahl'in poliarşi yaklaşımını normatif bir ölçüt olarak benimseyerek, vatandaşların otoriteye, katılıma ve çoğulcu luğa yönelik tutumlarını dikkate almaktadır. Tek vaka çalışması niteliğindeki bu araştırma, hem kurumsal hem de siyasi kültür unsurlarını içeren bütüncül bir perspektif sunarak, muhalefet etmeyi mümkün kılan veya sınırlayan koşulları analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, muhalefetin etkili biçimde rekabet etme kapasitesinin yalnızca yasal düzenlemelerin niteliğine değil, ülkedeki demokratik siyasi kültürün gücüne de bağlı olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Fransa'da Beşinci Cumhuriyet döneminde muhalefetin rekabet gücünün kurumsal bir çerçeve ile güvence altına alındığı, ancak demokratik siyasi kültürde yaşanan aşınmanın bu gücü sınırlandıran bir sosyo-politik ortam yarattığı ileri sürülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çoğulculuk, demokrasi, demokratik rejimler, Fransa, siyasi muhalefet

**JEL Kodu:** D72, H11, P16, Z18

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## Introduction

The French political arena has recently experienced declining voter participation, intensified systemic debates, diminishing institutional trust, and recurrent episodes of violent protest. These developments have prompted research interest in the effectiveness of political opposition, encompassing all political parties other than the ruling one. Against this backdrop, understanding the conditions under which opposition actors can engage in meaningful competition with the government has become increasingly relevant. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the current competitive capacity of political opposition under the Fifth Republic.

While the institutional analysis focuses on constitutional provisions, electoral law, party legislation, and parliamentary procedures, the cultural analysis takes into account citizens' attitudes toward authority, participation, and pluralism, drawing on Almond and Verba's concept of political culture and Dahl's notion of polyarchy as normative benchmarks. Therefore, this study is based on a hybrid theoretical framework that synthesizes neo-institutionalism and political culture theory. This integrated approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the opposition's competitive capacity, by accounting not only for the legal and procedural architecture of the political system but also for the sociocultural environment in which it is embedded. The mere presence of constitutional institutions is not sufficient for a regime to be genuinely democratic. As citizens internalize and support democratic norms, values, and practices, the rooting and stabilization of a democratic order become more likely. In this context, trust in public institutions and commitment to democracy and civil-political liberties emerge as fundamental elements of a political culture conducive to democratic governance.

Unlike much of the existing literature that either narrows the focus to parliamentary mechanisms (Rozenberg & Thiers, 2013; Garritzmann, 2017; Yılmaz, 2016) or approaches opposition through broader systemic models (Helms, 2004; Soysal, 1964), this research integrates both institutional and extra-parliamentary dimensions of opposition into a comprehensive analytical framework. In doing so, the study builds on and critically engages with prior comparative and country-specific analyses. While Rozenberg and Thiers (2013) focus on the evolution of parliamentary opposition and the impact of the 2008 constitutional reform in France, Garritzmann (2017) offers a comparative assessment of opposition power across democracies through institutional indices. Yılmaz (2016), Helms (2004), and Soysal (1964) similarly contribute to our understanding of opposition mechanisms through theoretical and cross-national lenses. As a single-case study, it makes a unique contribution to the literature by analyzing the competitive capacity of political opposition in France through a perspective that integrates the existing legal framework and political culture, thereby distinguishing itself from previous research on the subject.

The study addresses the question of whether current constitutional arrangements, parliamentary procedures, electoral practices, legal regulations concerning political parties, and political culture collectively enable or constrain opposition forces in France. The study puts forward three core arguments: (1) The opposition's competitive capacity effectively depends not only on the nature of legal regulations but also on the strength of the country's democratic political culture. (2) The opposition's competitive power was guaranteed by an institutional framework in France. (3) The erosion of democratic political culture created a socio-political environment that limited this power.

This study is a qualitative research that employs document analysis based on secondary data rather than primary data. It is also a case study, as it involves "*an in-depth examination and description of a particular situation*" (Subaşı & Okumuş, 2017, p. 425), and addresses the questions of 'how' and 'why'. This research is an example of a single-case study, which is suitable for the in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon and is important for gaining as much detailed information as possible about a particular case. Methodologically, this study adopts an interpretive single-case approach in line with Lijphart's (1971) typology. Rather than seeking empirical generalizations, it offers a contextual and in-depth explanation of the French case. Through this lens, the study addresses the "how" and "why" of political opposition's functioning, contributing to democratic theory by illustrating how institutional design interacts with political culture to shape the boundaries of political contestation.

In this study, France is selected as the single case, and an in-depth analysis is conducted to explore the competitive power of opposition parties within the country. France is one of the oldest democracies in the world and, in this regard, possesses strong democratic traditions. Opposition parties, which hold a significant position both

constitutionally and politically, are key actors in French democracy and play a crucial role in maintaining continuous political competition. In this sense, they contribute significantly to the sustainability of democratic pluralism. However, in the literature on political opposition, France is mostly encountered in comparative studies. Particularly in Türkiye, there is a lack of comprehensive and up-to-date research that examines France as a single case in the context of political opposition. Therefore, analyzing the potential and competitive capacity of opposition parties through the example of France is considered to offer an important and meaningful contribution to the literature.

The article is structured in three parts. The first section outlines the conceptual foundations of political opposition. The second section analyzes the opposition's institutional capacity. Drawing on primary legal documents—including the French constitution, parliamentary rules of procedure, electoral law, and party legislation—this research evaluates the extent to which these frameworks support or hinder the development of a competitive opposition. The third section focuses on the political culture dimension. The institutional capacity and political culture dimensions identify the key structural and cultural factors that facilitate or constrain effective political contestation in contemporary France.

## Conceptual Framework on Political Opposition

Both political theorists and scholars in the field of political science typically focus on power. As Bertrand Russell (1999) puts it, the concept of power holds the same significance for the social sciences as the concept of energy does for the physical sciences. Max Weber defines political power as the ability of an individual or group to impose their will on others. In Marxist theory, political power is deeply linked to the control of economic resources. Marx argued that the state is a tool of the ruling class, serving to maintain the dominance of the capitalist class (bourgeoisie) over the working class (proletariat). In Thomas Hobbes's view, political power arises from a social contract, in which individuals agree to surrender certain freedoms in exchange for security and order provided by a sovereign authority. For John Locke, power arises from the people's natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that political power lies in the collective will of the people, which transcends individual interests. As can be seen, political science has traditionally focused on understanding political power, but it is equally important to study the role of the opposition to grasp how political systems function (Schapiro, 1965, p. 2). Despite being a vital element of political life and a cornerstone of democratic regimes, scholarly research on political opposition (Schapiro, 1965; Dahl, 1966; Ionescu and Madariaga, 1968; Barker, 1971; McLennan, 1973) only gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century, thus making it a relatively recent area of study.

The term "political opposition" is commonly used to refer to two meanings in the literature (i.e. Venice Commission, 2010; İslamoğlu, 2004; Meynaud, 1968; Turgut, 1984, p. 1) political opposition as an action, behavior, or function; and 2) political opposition as an actor. Opposition, as an action, behavior, or function, essentially means opposing, and political parties are the primary actors in this regard. In this context, political opposition refers to political activity carried out by all opposition parties other than the ruling party. In terms of actors, the political opposition includes all political parties, both inside and outside the parliament, except for the ruling party. They are political parties that seek to influence, limit, prevent, change, and replace power. The Venice Commission, officially European Commission for Democracy through Law, has also agreed to this dual classification. According to this, opposition is a function that encompasses all actions that oppose the majority's/government's policies on the one hand, and is political parties that do not have the right to govern on the other (Venice Commission, 2010, p. 8). To avoid conceptual confusion, political opposition is used with the meaning of actor in this study.

## Institutional Capacity of the Political Opposition in the French Fifth Republic The Effect of the 1958 Constitution on Competitive Capacity of the Political Opposition in France

The existence of a democratic and pluralistic constitution is essential for the emergence of a political opposition capable of competing strongly against the government. In this regard, the 1958 Constitution incorporates the

principle of a democratic state. However, the constitution does not contain a specific section on fundamental rights and freedoms. The preamble contains references to rights and freedoms, and this section is considered as fundamental norms for constitutional review. The 1789 Declaration, the preamble of the 1946 Constitution, and the 2004 Environmental Charter are primary texts for fundamental rights and freedoms.

The 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen de 1789*) introduced principles related to freedom, though it did not explicitly mention freedom of association. Article 2 of the Declaration identifies political association as safeguarding natural and inalienable rights such as liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. In French public law, this Declaration holds constitutional significance, providing a basis for understanding freedom of association among fundamental freedoms. Judicial interpretation, notably in cases like "*Amicale des Annamites de Paris*" (Conseil d'État, 1956) and "*Association des anciens combattants*," established freedom of association as a constitutional principle recognized by the Republic's laws. In the Case of "*Association des anciens combattants*" dated January 24, 1958, freedom of association was considered a constitutional freedom (Conseil d'État, 1958). However, the Constitutional Council's decision on July 16, 1971 further solidified freedom of association within the constitutional framework (Décision n° 71-44, 1971).

In France, political parties are not regulated by a specific law but are recognized constitutionally since the 1958 Constitution, which treats them similarly to other political groups and electoral organizations. The Constitution ensures parties can freely form and operate while emphasizing the importance of respecting national sovereignty and democracy (Akartürk, 2008). In French public law doctrine, parties are viewed as organized entities influencing political life through election participation and state power formation. The legal definition and regulations regarding parties are found in the 1901 Association Law, allowing their establishment without prior approval and permitting membership termination at will (Loi du 1er juillet 1901 relative au contrat d'association, art. 2 and art. 4). France maintains a liberal approach, not imposing restrictions on the freedom to form, join, or leave political parties, which supports dissenting views and enhances the competitive capacity of political opposition by fostering a libertarian environment.

Freedom of expression in France is guaranteed by Article 11 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen de 1789*). It is regulated as a fundamental right in the French legal system. The Constitutional Council's decision of June 10, 2009 emphasizes that freedom of expression and communication is "much more valuable because its implementation is a condition of democracy and one of the guarantees of respect for other rights and freedoms" (Décision n° 2009-580 DC, 2009). However, freedom of expression is not an absolute right. This means that there are certain limitations on the exercise of this freedom. Articles 4 and 5 of the Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights contain provisions regarding the limitation of rights and freedoms. Accordingly, freedom of expression may be restricted where it infringes upon the freedoms of others. Expressions about insults and profanity (Loi du 29 juillet 1881 sur la liberté de la presse, art. 29), attacks on private life (Code Civil, art. 9), protection of the presumption of innocence (Code Civil, art. 9/1), insults based on racial, religious or national (Code Civil, art. 32), discrimination, incitement to hatred or violence based on the same grounds (Code Civil, art. 24/6), protection of fundamental public interests and documents relating to national defense secrets (Code pénal, art. 413/9 and so on) or court documents (Code pénal, art. 38), statements denying war crimes and crimes against humanity (Loi du 29 juillet 1881 sur la liberté de la presse, art. 24) are not considered to fall within the scope of freedom of expression. As a result, freedom of expression in France, as in many democratic countries, is balanced with other rights and freedoms and public order. Therefore, there are no provisions that hinder the competitive power of the political opposition.

### **The Effect of Standing Orders on Competitive Capacity of the Political Opposition in France**

The standing orders are often referred to as the "silent constitution" due to the role they play in maintaining the balance of power between the government and the opposition in parliament (Teziç, 2009). These rules not only increase the visibility of the parliamentary opposition but also ensure that it functions effectively. Therefore, it is crucial that internal regulations have a democratic framework to enable the opposition to make its voice heard (Tunç, 1997). In line with the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of 3 June 1959, which was implemented in France, the competitive capacity of the opposition is analyzed through representation in the

Presidency of the Assembly, the participation of the intra-parliamentary opposition in the work of the General Assembly, the function and means of ensuring the supervision and accountability of the intra-parliamentary opposition.

In France, provisions are in place to support the presence and effectiveness of parliamentary opposition. These include rights such as attending Presidency Council meetings without voting privileges for group leaders, consideration of political assembly structure in selecting members besides the President, and allocation of executive membership positions to opposition deputies. Opposition groups also have limited speaking rights in commissions, proportional group representation, and participation in meetings where they are not members. Additionally, French parliamentary opposition can strategically bring important political issues to public and voter attention, leveraging constitutional resources to shape agendas effectively. The allocation of speaking times and order in parliament is crucial for its smooth operation and facilitates pluralistic debates. Each group is allotted five or ten minutes in the National Assembly, with the opposition or minority group speaker given ten minutes during general agenda discussions as per Article 48 of the Constitution. These practices enhance the visibility of parliamentary opposition and enable it to be empowered to carry out its roles efficiently.

It is generally accepted that France has a weak legislature vis-a-vis the executive due to the 1958 Constitution. When considering the distribution of law proposals between the government and the opposition in France, it is seen that the effectiveness of opposition groups in legislative activities is weak. However, the 1958 Constitution did not abolish parliamentary control over the government, despite all the advantages it confers on the executive branch. As a requirement of being a democratic country, the tools that allow the legislature to control the executive have continued to exist, and have even been strengthened at some points. In the standing orders in force in France, government statements, questions, discussions on the government program or the government's general policy statement, parliamentary investigation, parliamentary inquiry, motions of no confidence and no-confidence auditing tools are regulated.

In France, the parliamentary opposition plays an active role in overseeing the government through several mechanisms. Firstly, at the National Assembly, the government may deliver statements upon request from political groups, with half of the allocated time reserved for opposition groups during discussions. This ensures opposition's effective scrutiny beyond general political statements, although the government retains the decision on voting these statements. Additionally, oral questions in parliament are structured to allocate half to the opposition, ensuring their voice is heard, especially with the first question reserved for minority groups or independents. This framework aims to prevent their marginalization and uphold representation of voting citizens. Moreover, the motion of no confidence is another significant tool allowing opposition groups to exert control over the government, with half of the allotted negotiation time reserved for opposition use. The Standing Orders of the National Assembly reflect a pluralistic perspective, emphasizing the importance of opposition's representation in parliamentary management, commissions, General Assembly activities, and ensuring mechanisms for supervision and accountability. These regulations elevate the role of parliamentary opposition, making it a crucial and effective part of the legislative process in France.

In France, the Parliamentary Channel has broadcasted parliamentary proceedings since 1999 with a commitment to maintaining neutrality, especially during election periods. In Article 31, provisions regarding the operation of the Parliamentary Channel during the election period are included. It ensures programs avoid direct election campaign content, instead featuring debates and interviews that do not favor any candidate unfairly. The channel carefully selects political parties' statements and articles, striving for impartiality in commentary. Deputies speaking on the channel refrain from election-related statements, avoiding campaign themes, discussing opponents, or mentioning their own candidacy. Additionally, channel employees uphold neutrality to prevent influencing candidate equality and election reliability, remaining off-air from the official campaign opening until election results are declared. Strict regulations prohibit electronic dissemination of election propaganda from the day before voting until midnight, and commercial advertising for election purposes is barred six months before the election month until voting day. Furthermore, no partial or final election results or opinion polls may be published or commented on the day before and on the day of the election until after the final ballot box closure.

## The Effect of Electoral Practices on Competitive Capacity of the Political Opposition in France

A competitive political environment is essential for democratic regimes. One factor that encourages this is the electoral system. Legal regulations concerning the electoral system directly determine the opposition's place within the system. The electoral and party system established during the transition from the Fourth Republic aimed to address political instability. The Fifth Republic's constitution and election laws were designed to shift from the polarized pluralism of the previous era towards majority coalitions. France's two-round electoral system promotes not only multiparty dynamics but also encourages alliances and strategic withdrawals before the second round to consolidate support. This fosters a competition primarily between center-left and center-right blocs rather than promoting dominance by just two parties (Elgie, 2005; Gürbüz, 1997; Şaylan, 1981). Thus, the electoral system's impact on the party system encourages competitive dynamics among moderate political forces across the spectrum.

While the electoral system encourages competition between center-left and center-right alliances, it punishes independent parties or groups, especially small parties. Independent parties and small parties are encouraged to form such an alliance. Moreover, the two-round system gives voters some encouragement not to waste their votes. In this respect, it is common for senior politicians of major parties to talk about "le vote utile". This call is made before the first round. The net effect is that the multi-party logic of the two-round system is balanced by the binary alliance logic (Elgie, 2005).

The necessity of forming alliances in a two-round system has been clearly demonstrated since 1958. The center-right, represented by the Gaullists, emerged as the dominant political party and was able to form a government with the support of the non-Gaullist center-right, such as Giscard d'Estaing's Independent Republicans. Another example is from the early 1970s, when the Communists and Socialists formed an electoral alliance for the unity of the left. This alliance was based on a common government program and led to a mutual electoral agreement. In general, the two parties agreed not to compete against each other in the second round. This arrangement maximized the chances of a left-wing candidate's victory. Indeed, in 1974, François Mitterrand, the candidate of the united left in the first round of the presidential election, took this a step further. While it was unsuccessful, the benefits of the electoral agreement were clear. This agreement between the two parties ended in 1976, but the electoral arrangement has persisted since then (Elgie, 2005).

The two-round system has particularly fostered a binary competition between the left and the right. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Greens, led by Antoine Waechter, refused to accept any common program or mutual electoral arrangement and avoided forming any alliance with the left. However, the result was that they failed to win any seats in the National Assembly or to influence government policy. When Dominique Voynet was elected leader of the Greens, the situation changed. In the 1997 parliamentary elections, the Greens reached an agreement with the Socialists. In those elections, the Greens won seven seats in the National Assembly for the first time, and Voynet was appointed Minister of the Environment in the Socialist-led government (Elgie, 2005).

Nevertheless, the left-right competition takes place at the center. The ultimate effect of the electoral system on the party system is that it encourages center-left and center-right competition. Different factors motivate voters in the two rounds. In the first round, they vote according to their party preferences. In the second, their preferred party might not be an option, so they may be forced to vote for their second choice. The net effect is that the two-round system tends to reduce support for radicals. Since 1958, there has been a tendency for preferences in France to align along the left-right axis. As a result, both left and right alliances tend to move toward the center to increase their voter base. Indeed, in the early 1970s, the Communists understood the logic of the system's need for alliances and were willing to make an agreement with the Socialists (Sartori, 1997). In the 1974 presidential election, François Mitterrand, the united left's candidate, realized that elections were won at the center rather than on the radical fringes and began to distance himself from the united left's program in order to attract center-supporting voters. Seven years later, Mitterrand adopted the same strategy and succeeded (Elgie, 2005). Politics in the Fifth Republic was very different, and the party system operated in a completely different way, centered around right/left polarization (Bell, 2002).

The electoral system adopted with the Fifth Republic also had significant effects on the competitiveness of small parties. First of all, the two-round electoral system in France encourages multi-party competition. The multi-party logic of the system is related to the first round of the election. Smaller parties may think they have nothing to lose by competing in the first round. But on the contrary, they can make a profit by doing so. Because if they can gain wide enough support, they can become indispensable for the second phase of the alliance-building process. However, the election threshold puts small parties at a disadvantage in this process. The dam, which was 5% in 1958, was first raised to 10% in 1966 and then to 12.5% in 1976. This application of the threshold “punished” the smaller parties, as Elgie puts it, and supported the call for useful votes (*vote utile*). For Bartolini, this means the automatic exclusion of the non-majority candidate from the runoff, reducing the blackmail potential of small formations to almost zero (Elgie, 2005).

As a result, electoral practices in France privilege stability. The ultimate goal here is to prevent a recurrence of the instability experienced during the Fourth Republic. It is a fact that these practices limit the competitiveness of small parties. Nevertheless, it allows them to preserve their identities. It also creates a suitable environment for them to be represented in parliament.

### **The Effect of Political Party Practices on Competitive Capacity of the Political Opposition in France**

Political parties, in democratic systems, in the power-opposition dichotomy, besides being a means of obtaining power, their roles such as controlling the use of power of opposition parties, not allowing unlawfulness by attracting the public's attention on freedoms are indispensable for democratic life. The constitutional status of the opposition, the closure of political parties, the right of political parties to make propaganda, and the state aid to political parties are among the factors that affect the competitive capacity of the political opposition in terms of political party practices.

#### **Constitutional status of the opposition**

One of the practices adopted to show the importance of opposition in democratic regimes is to grant legal status to the main opposition parties or groups within the parliament. The 1958 Constitution did not initially allow for the authorization of the intra-parliamentary opposition. For this reason, the concept of opposition for a long time had no place in French positive law. The question of the status of the opposition emerged only in the 1970s. Especially during the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, it became concrete with the increase in the references to the opposition in the decisions of the Constitutional Council and the creation of the "Question to the Government", which was presented as a tool to the service of the opposition (Vidal-Naquet, 2009). However, in 1978, before the concept of opposition emerged, certain concepts of opposition were integrated into French positive law through paragraph 3 of article 167-1 of the election law, which concerns the participation of parties in the election campaigns of radio and television. According to this regulation; all parties and political groups not represented by parliamentary groups in the National Assembly have access to public service broadcasts of audio-visual communications for 7 minutes in the first round and 5 minutes in the second round, if they nominate at least 75 candidates at their request.

The first exchange of duties between the majority and the opposition, which took place as a result of elections in the 1980s, made today's majority realize the necessity of preparing for the conditions of tomorrow's minority. However, it was necessary to wait for the 2000s for constitutional arrangements. The phrase “Vous avez juridiquement tort parce que vous êtes politiquement minoritaires” (You are legally wrong because you are a political minority) spoken by Socialist Deputy André Laignel during a parliamentary debate on October 13, 1981 on expropriation clearly reveals the perception of opposition. On the other hand, the proposal of 7 June 2006, adopted to reorganize the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, for the first time directly integrated the term "opposition" into French law. With a constitutional arrangement, a legal status was given to the parliamentary opposition. With the major constitutional revision in 2008, intra-parliamentary opposition was incorporated into the French Constitution. According to the new regulation added to Article 48 of the Constitution; “At least one session per month is allocated to the agenda determined by both Houses, primarily with the initiative of the

opposition parties that have a group in the relevant Parliament, as well as minority groups.” With this regulation, the opposition is given the right to set the agenda. In line with the same approach, an amendment has also been made to Article 51/1 of the Constitution. “The rights of the Parliamentary groups established in the Assembly are regulated by the Rules of Procedure of the Assemblies themselves. The Rules of Procedure of the Assembly recognize the special rights of minority groups as well as opposition groups established in the relevant Assembly.” With this article, the opposition has the right to form a group under the name of opposition (Vidal-Naquet, 2009). In addition, it is pointed out that not all minorities are in opposition with this regulation. These regulations can be considered as the constitutional recognition of the status of the opposition. The constitutional recognition of opposition in France was interpreted by Nezzar (2013) as the evolution of the French political system towards the British parliamentary model.

### **Dissolution of political parties**

Political parties are not only the tools of the participation of the people in politics, but also the basic elements and even the guarantees of pluralist politics. Although Article 4 of the 1958 Constitution obliges parties to "respect the principle of national sovereignty and democracy", it did not directly envisage a ban on parties. In France, the basic legal regulations regarding the dissolution of political parties, which are subject to the Association Law of 1901, are also within the scope of this law. Therefore, the answer to the question of when political parties can be dissolved in France is the same as the answer to the question of when associations can be dissolved. No separate regulation has been made for political parties regarding closure. According to Article 3 of the 1901 Association Law; all associations that are illegal, founded on an unlawful, immoral reason or for the purpose of an issue or aiming to attack the national territorial integrity and republican form of government are null and void.

Another legislative act on the dissolution of associations or societies is the law of 10 January 1936 on combat groups and private militias (Loi du 10 janvier 1936 sur les groupes de combat et milices privées, 1936). However, this law was repealed by the regulation numbered 2012-351 of 12 March 2012 (Ordonnance n° 2012-351, 2012) on the legislative part of the Internal Security Law. However, today, the articles of this law are handled within the scope of the Internal Security Law. Therefore, the issue of the dissolution of associations or communities is the subject of Chapter 2 of the Internal Security Law titled “Order and Public Security”, Chapter 1 titled “Public Order”, Chapter 2 “Combat Groups and Private Securities”. It is regulated under Article L 212-1 titled “Militias”. According to this article, organizations and communities that perform at least one of the following activities are closed by the decision of the Council of Ministers:

1. Those who provoke armed demonstrations in the streets;
2. Those whose shape and military organization have the character of war or private militia groups;
3. Those with the aim of harming the national territorial integrity or forcibly damaging the republican form of Government;
4. Activity intended to fail the measures concerning the restoration of the legitimacy of the Republic;
5. Those who aim to bring together individuals accused of collaborating with the enemy or to glorify this cooperation;
6. Those who provoke discrimination, hatred or violence against a person or group of people, either because of their origin or because of their belonging to a particular ethnicity, nation, race or religion, or who provoke such discrimination, hatred or violence disseminate ideas or theories that justify or support violence;
7. Those who carry out actions on or starting from French territory with the aim of provoking terrorist acts in France or abroad.

In this context, the realization of any of these actions in France is basically considered as a violation of public order and results in the closure of the association or community that carried out the relevant action.

On the other hand, in France on 13 November 2015, after the armed and bomb attacks on the first, tenth and eleventh districts of Paris, as well as the French Stadium, a state of emergency was announced and a new regulation

was put into effect. Accordingly, L 212-1. Without prejudice to the provisions of the article, a decision has been taken to dissolve associations that have committed a serious violation of public order or facilitated or provoked the realization of such actions, by the decision of the Council of Ministers (Journal officiel de la République française [JORF], 2015). However, no closure decision was taken based on these legal regulations during the Fifth Republic Period.

### **Public funding of political parties**

State aid to finance political parties serves primarily to sustain a pluralistic democratic framework. This involves not only supporting major parties but also ensuring equal participation in political competition for both small and large parties. Regulations governing state aid are particularly critical for opposition parties, enabling them to present alternative policies and programs to the government before elections and effectively communicate with all sectors of society solely through state support. Until the end of the 1980s, there was no legal regulation on the financing of political parties in France. However, today there is a very detailed legal regulation on this subject. The financing of political parties was handled within the framework of the laws passed consecutively between 1988 and 2013.

Two organic laws numbered 88-226 and 88-227 on the financial transparency of political life, adopted on April 11, 1988, are the first documents to establish a normative framework for the financing of political parties and election campaigns in France. According to the law numbered 88-226, which stipulates the principle of transparency in the financing of parties, the principle of public disclosure of the assets of the President, deputies and candidates and the source of financing used in the elections has been adopted. The law on the financial transparency of political life, dated 12 March 1988 and numbered 88-227, contains provisions regarding the financing of political parties. In this law, the financing of political parties is handled under two headings: public financing and private financing. The legal regulation regarding the public financing of political parties in France is contained in Articles 8-10 of the Law No. 88-227. According to this; political parties benefit from financial assistance directly given by the state within the conditions specified in the law. Considering the parliamentary general elections, a distinction is made about the benefits that political parties can benefit from. According to this distinction, it is seen that while some political parties benefit from the aid according to the percentage of votes they receive in the parliamentary general elections, the political parties that have in parliament are also entitled to receive aid. Political parties whose candidates receive 1% or more of the votes in at least fifty constituencies in the parliamentary general elections can benefit from state aid. In addition, political parties that nominate candidates in at least one or more of France's overseas territories and whose candidates receive more than 1% of the vote are also eligible for public funding. This public aid is divided among the parties in proportion to the votes received by the parties. On the other hand, state aid is given by calculating the number of deputies and senators representing political parties in parliaments (Odyakmaz, Çınarlı & Özcan, 2012; Loi no 88-227 du 11 mars 1988; Le Monde, 2017).

The Law No. 90-55 of 15 January 1990, which deals with the upper limit of the election costs and the division of financial aid between the political parties that will nominate candidates from at least 50 constituencies in the general elections and the political parties represented in the parliament, was adopted on the limitation of election expenses and the disclosure of the financing of political activities (Loi n° 90-55 du 15 janvier 1990). This law was later rearranged within the framework of Law No. 93-122 of January 29, 1993 and Law No. 95-65 of January 19, 1995. Law No. 93-122 of 29 January 1993, also known as the “Sapin Law”, was adopted on the prevention of corruption and transparency of economic life and public procedures (Loi n° 93-122 du 29 janvier 1993). Then, the Law No. 95-65 dated 19 January 1995 on the financing of political life was adopted (Loi n° 95-65 du 19 janvier 1995, 1995). On 6 June 2000, the law numbered 2000-493 providing equal access to elections for women and men was passed. On April 11, 2003, the law numbered 2003-327 on state aid to political parties was adopted with the election of regional members and representatives of the European Parliament (Loi n° 2003-327 du 11 avril 2003). Finally, on 11 October 2013, a law numbered 2013-907 on the transparency of political life was adopted (Loi n° 2013-907 du 11 octobre 2013).

## **The right of political parties to make propaganda**

The importance of propaganda through audio-visual media tools, which have become the most effective propaganda tools thanks to technological developments, is more evident during election periods. Participation of candidates with different political tendencies in radio and television programs during election periods, announcing their political programs and thus making political advertisements are among the most widely used propaganda methods today. It is important in terms of the principle of political pluralism that all candidates are given the opportunity to make political advertisements via radio and television, especially during election periods, without making any distinction between the government and the opposition. Radio and television broadcasting in France was under a state monopoly until the 1980s. Various institutions were established to regulate radio and television broadcasting within the framework of the liberalization movements that started in the 1980s (Lecomte, 1998; Kuhn, 2011; Kuhn and Stanyer, 1999; Edmiston and Duménil, 2010).

Established in 1989, the Supreme Audio-Visual Council (CSA) (currently Arcom – Le régulateur de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique) has been the main institution providing freedom of audio-visual communication in France since then. It was decided by this Council in 2009 that political pluralism should be ensured in radio and television broadcasts and, in this context, editors of radio and television services should respect the principle of political pluralism (Délibération n° 2009-60, 2009). But essentially, a critical decision was made in 2017 regarding the observance of political pluralism in the audio-visual media during election periods. Just before the 2017 presidential elections, it was obligatory to observe the principle of equality among the candidates throughout the election campaigns, to be valid in these elections. While it was seen that the decision was taken to ensure political pluralism before, this time the principle of equality is definitely mentioned. Thus, another important step was taken in the name of political pluralism and fair election competition in France and it was revealed how important the existence of the opposition is for the sustainability of democracy.

## **The Effect of Political Culture on Competitive Capacity of the Political Opposition in France**

The mere presence of constitutional institutions is not sufficient for a regime to be genuinely democratic. As Almond and Verba (1963) emphasize, the structure and orientation of political culture play a critical role in shaping the nature and sustainability of political regimes. A democratic order is more likely to take root and stabilize when citizens internalize and support democratic norms, values and practices. This alignment between individual political orientations and institutional frameworks fosters what Almond and Verba term a “civic culture” - a cultural configuration in which elements of parochial, subject, and participant attitudes coexist in balance, enabling political stability and adaptability. In such a culture, citizens actively engage with political institutions while also maintaining trust and a sense of legitimacy toward them. Therefore, the effectiveness of institutions such as elections, political parties, constitutions, and bureaucracies is contingent not only on their formal existence but also on the cultural context in which they operate. In contrast, an authoritarian or anti-democratic political culture can hinder the diffusion of democratic norms, weaken institutional legitimacy, and obstruct the meaningful functioning of political roles and actors (Dursun, 2008, p. 79; Dahl, 2001, p. 159).

Foa and Mounk and (2016) argue that Western democracies have entered a period of “democratic deconsolidation.” According to them, “Citizens of democracies are less and less content with their institutions; they are more and more willing to jettison institutions and norms that have traditionally been regarded as central components of democracy; and they are increasingly attracted to alternative regime forms.” (2016, p. 16). Identifying France's profile in this regard, which represents an important example of participatory democracy, will provide a framework for both the opposition's capacity to compete and the overall state of democracy.

Trust in public institutions and commitment to democracy and civil and political liberties thus emerge as foundational elements of a political culture conducive to democratic governance. This section is based on data from the Insee, World Values Survey, the OECD Trust Survey, and CEVIPOF.

## **Trust in political institutions in France**

The OECD Trust Survey (2024) examines people's perceptions of public institutions in their countries and their levels of trust in government. Launched in 2021, the Trust Survey was conducted in 30 OECD countries in

October and November 2023. In 2023, 34% of French respondents reported having high or moderate trust in the national government, below the OECD average of 39%. Nevertheless, this figure represents a six-percentage-point increase compared to 2021. Approximately half of the population expressed high or moderate trust in local government (56%), national public services (53%), and courts and the judicial system (50%). The least trusted institutions are political parties (18%), news media (33%), and the national parliament (33%). Only 28% of the French public considered it likely that the government would refuse a corporate request that could harm the general interest of society, slightly below the OECD average of 30%. Moreover, only a quarter of the population (26%) believed that the current political system allows people like themselves to have a say in government decisions. This perception, a significant determinant of trust in the national government, is four percentage points below the OECD average of 30% (OECD, 2024).

According to the latest study published by CEVIPOF (Center for Political Research in France), citizens' confidence in the state and democratic institutions remains low in 2024. Among the 3,000 respondents, 74% indicated that they do not trust the French Presidency, and 86% reported a lack of trust in political parties. However, these figures have increased over the course of a year by seven and three percentage points, respectively. Trust in the National Assembly has significantly declined, with 74% of participants expressing distrust. Furthermore, the image of elected representatives has deteriorated: while 29% of the public trusted representatives in 2023, this figure fell to 22%. The data also shows that only a small portion of the French population perceives political leaders as attentive to the public's needs, with a significant proportion believing that politicians prioritize personal interests over the common good (Ipsos, 2024). Finally, for the 2017–2022 period, the World Values Survey reports levels of trust in France at 33.1% for parliament, 30.7% for the government, and 11.5% for political parties.

The most obvious manifestation of low trust in political institutions in France is seen at the ballot box. In 2002, turnout in the first round of the presidential elections rose from 73.6% to 86.2% in 2007. However, this rate gradually declined until 2022. Voter turnout was 82.2% in 2012, 81.2% in 2017, and finally 77.9% in 2022. A similar situation can be observed in the second round. Voter turnout, which was 81.8% in 2002, rose to 86.1% in 2007, but gradually declined to 83.6%, 78%, and 75.5% in 2012, 2017, and 2022, respectively. Considering the first round of legislative elections, voter turnout in 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, and 2022 was 65.8%, 61.6%, 60.2%, 52.2%, and 50.6%, respectively. While in the second round it was 61.4%, 60.9%, 58.6%, 45.4%, and 48.5%, respectively. While voter turnout gradually declined in the first round, only in 2022 was there an increase of approximately 3 points in the second round (Insee, 2022).

In conclusion, the findings of the OECD Trust Survey and CEVIPOF reveal that French citizens' trust in political institutions remains noticeably low. Although there has been a slight improvement in trust toward the national government since 2021, it still lags behind the OECD average. The CEVIPOF data indicate a profound distrust of the presidency, parliament, and political parties. Finally, the World Values Survey shows the low level of trust in parliament, the government, and political parties. At this point, it can be clearly stated that a crisis of representation exists. The consistently low levels of confidence in political institutions and political parties—arguably the cornerstones of representative democracy—pose a serious risk to the quality and legitimacy of democratic governance. Similarly, the limited trust in the presidency raises questions about the sustainability of France's semi-presidential system. If political institutions continue to lag behind in public confidence, the effectiveness of democratic representation and the opposition's ability to function as a legitimate alternative may be significantly impaired.

### **Support for democracy, civil and political liberties in France**

France has experienced various forms of political regimes throughout its history, yet the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958 marked a turning point in consolidating democratic governance. Since then, a broad societal consensus has emerged around the normative value of democracy. This democratic consensus is reflected in empirical findings, such as those reported by CEVIPOF (2020), which indicate that 75% of respondents consider having a democratic system to be beneficial. In 2025, this rate increased to 80% (CEVIPOF, 2025). These findings suggest that the French public retains a normative commitment to democratic ideals, even in the face of practical shortcomings in governance.

In the World Values Survey, the percentage of respondents who said democracy was “Absolutely important” was 43.5% in the 2005–2009 period. This percentage rose to 49.8% in the 2017–2022 period. This change shows that the importance of democracy for the French has increased over the years. Considering the average importance score, it was 8.52 in the 2005–2009 period and 8.61 in the 2017–2022 period, with a total of 8.58. Again, this indicates that the importance given to democracy is generally strong. Core democratic principles such as free and fair elections, civil liberties, and gender equality receive widespread support. A significant majority agrees that the election of leaders by the people is a defining characteristic of democracy, that civil rights safeguard individual freedoms against authoritarian overreach, and that men and women should enjoy equal rights under the law. These indicators suggest the persistence of a civic culture that is broadly supportive of liberal democratic norms.

Nonetheless, there is a growing disconnect between support for democratic principles and satisfaction with the actual functioning of democracy in France. According to CEVIPOF (2020), only 35% of respondents believe that democracy in France functions well, while 64% express dissatisfaction with its performance. In 2024, the proportion of people in France dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy rose to 68%, and by 2025, it increased to 71% (CEVIPOF, 2025).

This rising discontent presents a critical challenge, particularly for the political opposition. In a democratic regime, the opposition's capacity to compete, critique, and propose alternatives depends heavily on public confidence in the system's legitimacy and effectiveness. When citizens lose faith in democratic procedures and institutions, the competitive environment in which the opposition operates may become delegitimized or constrained, even if formal democratic structures remain intact.

While there is robust normative and attitudinal support for democracy among the French public, concerns about democratic performance, institutional responsiveness, and regime efficacy indicate a fragile equilibrium. The future of democratic competition—and by extension, the meaningful role of the opposition—depends not only on the maintenance of democratic norms but also on the perceived legitimacy and functional credibility of democratic governance.

Low levels of participation and trust, together with negative perceptions regarding the functioning of democracy, have brought to the forefront debates about whether democracy in France is undergoing erosion. The fact that the masses increasingly prefer the “streets” over the ballot box for political expression, and that they place diminishing trust in key political institutions, makes these questions even more salient. The decline in popular support leads to a growing questioning of institutional legitimacy.

However, it should be noted that data on electoral participation and trust in political institutions are far from reflecting France's image as a participatory democracy. Although electoral participation is crucial for ensuring representation and enabling the opposition to become an alternative to power, reducing French democracy to the act of voting alone would lead our discussions in a misleading direction.

At this point, Tiberj's (2021) analysis is particularly noteworthy. As Tiberj highlights “...citizens are no longer mere voters, and despite of a majority of pundits and scholars arguing the opposite, their level of participation has been on continuous increase, and their channels of political expression, increasingly diverse as well.” According to him, citizens increasingly refuse to remain passive followers who only vote during elections and allow elected officials to govern the country on their behalf. This, in turn, results in dissenting voices resonating in the streets. In fact, Tiberj's analysis also helps explain why social opposition has remained so strong in France. For him, “... it is now banal that a French government, whatever its political side, gets opposed in the streets and elsewhere”.

At this point, it can be argued that the ground for political opposition in France has shifted toward the streets. We are witnessing a growing preference for alternative forms of participation beyond elections. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that an erosion of democratic political culture is taking place. Low levels of trust in political institutions, declining electoral participation, and negative perceptions regarding the functioning of democracy all point to the need for a profound reform in France's approach to democratic governance.

## Conclusion

During the Fifth Republic in France, the political opposition has been equipped with strong and effective legal tools to enable it to effectively fulfill its functions. As a democratic regime, France has created appropriate institutional conditions that clearly emphasize the democratic and pluralistic nature of its constitutional/legal framework and prioritize opposition, enabling the political opposition to effectively fulfill its functions, maintain its presence, and compete with the ruling power within the existing system.

However, such legal mechanisms do not provide an adequate framework for determining the competitiveness of the opposition. The existence of a democratic political culture that will make these legal instruments meaningful and sustainable and ensure that the relationship between the ruling party and the opposition is conducted on a democratic basis is essential. Political culture gives meaning to these legal instruments. It reinforces or weakens them. Democracy is not merely a type of regime consisting of political institutions. It is also related to the political culture that sustains these institutions and acts as a pillar of the structure.

Low voter turnout, negative perceptions of the functioning of democracy in the country, and declining trust in political institutions are fueling debates about democracy in France. However, the constant existence of political competition encourages citizens to participate. Low voter turnout and a lack of trust in political institutions weaken the opposition's chances of coming to power. The weakening trend of democratic political culture in French society poses a significant threat not only to the stability of the democratic regime but also to the competitiveness of the opposition. Therefore, while Fifth Republic provides a strong institutional foundation for the opposition to continue to exist and operate effectively—or, to put it more precisely, to maintain its claim to power—the erosion of democratic political culture poses a critical challenge. Eliminating this erosion is vital for strengthening the resilience of French democracy.

This article analyzes the competitive capacity of opposition parties in France within the framework of the constitutional/legal instruments they possess and the country's democratic political culture. The most significant limitation of the study is that it is a single case study. Future opposition studies could make a strong contribution to the literature by addressing the topic from a comparative perspective that includes the United Kingdom and Germany.

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## Genişletilmiş Özet

### Amaç

Bu çalışma, Fransa'nın Beşinci Cumhuriyet döneminde siyasi muhalefetin rekabet etme kapasitesini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Fransa'da düşük seçim katılımı, yoğun sistem tartışmaları, siyasi kurumlara yönelik azalan güven, ülkede demokrasinin işleyişinden memnun olmayanların sayısında yaşanan artış ve barışçıl protestoların şiddete dönüşmesi, yalnızca iktidarın değil, siyasetin diğer asli öznesi olan muhalefetin de incelenmesini gerekli kılmaktadır. Siyasi muhalefetin sadece var olması değil, güçlü yasal araçlarla donatılması ve bunu anlamlı hale getirecek bir siyasal kültür ortamında varlık göstermesi rejimin niteliği açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır. İktidarın sınırlandırılmasından mevcut politikaların eleştirilmesine ve alternatif politikaların üretilmesine kadar bir dizi temel işleve sahip olan siyasi muhalefeti demokratik rejimlerin temel unsurudur. Bu nedenle, siyasi muhalefetin rekabet etme kapasitesi, bir rejimin niteliğinin belirlenmesinde güçlü bir göstergedir. Bu tartışmaların ortasında, Beşinci Cumhuriyet döneminde siyasi muhalefetin rekabet etme kapasitesi önemli bir araştırma sorunu olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

### Yöntem

Kurumsal analiz, anayasal hükümler, seçim yasası, parti mevzuatı ve parlamento usullerine odaklanırken; kültürel analiz, Almond ve Verba'nın siyasal kültür kavramı ile Dahl'ın çoğulcu demokrasi (polyarchy) anlayışını normatif ölçütler olarak temel alarak, vatandaşların otoriteye, katılıma ve çoğulculuğa yönelik tutumlarını dikkate almaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu araştırma, Neo-kurumsalcılık ile siyasi kültür teorisinin sentezinin yapıldığı karma bir teorik çerçeveye dayanmaktadır. Bu bütünlük yaklaşım, yalnızca siyasi sistemin yasal ve prosedürel yapısını değil, aynı zamanda içinde bulunduğu sosyokültürel ortamı da dikkate alarak muhalefetin rekabet etme kapasitesinin daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasını mümkün kılmaktadır.

Metodolojik olarak, bu çalışma Lijphart'ın (1971) tipolojisine uygun olarak yorumlayıcı tek vaka yaklaşımını benimser. Ampirik genellemeler aramak yerine, Fransız örneğinin bağlamsal ve derinlemesine bir açıklamasını sunar. Bu çalışmada da genel bir teori geliştirmek yerine Fransa vakasına odaklanılarak derinlemesine bir açıklama yapılmaktadır. Çalışma, vakanın kendine özgü yönlerini anlamaya ve açıklamaya çalışırken "neden" ve "nasıl" sorularına cevap aramaktadır.

Çalışmada Beşinci Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde siyasi muhalefetin rekabet etme kapasitesi anayasa, meclis içtüzüğü, siyasi parti ve seçim uygulamaları ile siyasi kültür çerçevesinde analiz edilmektedir.

### Bulgular

Çalışma, mevcut anayasal düzenlemelerin, parlamento prosedürlerinin, seçim uygulamalarının, siyasi partilerle ilgili yasal düzenlemelerin ve siyasi kültürün, Fransa'daki muhalif partileri destekleyip desteklemediğini veya kısıtlayıp kısıtlamadığına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma üç temel argüman ileri sürmektedir:

- (1) Muhalefetin rekabet gücü, Fransa'daki kurumsal çerçeve tarafından güvence altına alınmıştır.
- (2) Ancak muhalefetin rekabet gücü, yalnızca yasal düzenlemelerin niteliğine değil, aynı zamanda ülkenin demokratik siyasi kültürünün gücüne de bağlıdır.
- (3) Demokratik siyasi kültürün aşınma eğilimi göstermesi, bu gücü sınırlayan bir sosyo-politik ortam yaratmaktadır.

Fransa'da Beşinci Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde siyasi muhalefet, fonksiyonlarını etkin şekilde yerine getirebilmesi için güçlü yasal araçlarla donatılmıştır. Fransa, siyasi parti kurma, partiye katılma veya partiden ayrılma özgürlüğüne kısıtlama getirmeyen, muhalif görüşleri destekleyen ve özgürlükçü bir ortam yaratarak siyasi muhalefetin rekabet kapasitesini artıran liberal bir yaklaşım benimsemektedir. Birçok demokratik ülkede olduğu gibi Fransa'da da ifade özgürlüğü, diğer hak ve özgürlükler ve kamu düzeniyle dengelenmiştir. Bu nedenle, siyasi muhalefetin rekabet gücünü kısıtlayan anayasal/yasal hüküm bulunmamaktadır. Ulusal Meclis İçtüzüğü, muhalefetin parlamento yönetiminde, komisyonlarda, Genel Kurul faaliyetlerinde temsil edilmesinin ve denetim ve hesap verebilirlik

mekanizmalarının sağlanması önemi vurgulayan çoğulcu bir bakış açısını yansıtmaktadır. Bu düzenlemeler, parlamento muhalefetine rolünü öne çıkararak onu Fransa'daki yasama sürecinin önemli ve etkili bir parçası haline getirmektedir. Benzer şekilde muhalefetin anayasal statüsü, siyasi partilerin kapatılması, siyasi partilerin propaganda yapma hakkı ve siyasi partilere devlet yardımı ile ilgili düzenlemeler Fransa'da muhalif partilerin rekabet kapasitesi hakkında güçlü bir veri sunmaktadır. Parti uygulamaları, siyasi muhalefetin rekabet gücünü sınırlandıran değil; aksine güçlendiren bir çerçeveye sahiptir. Fransa'daki seçim uygulamaları incelendiğinde istikrarın öncelikli kılındığı anlaşılmaktadır. Buradaki nihai amaç ise Dördüncü Cumhuriyet döneminde yaşanan istikrarsızlığın tekrarlanmasını önlemektir. Bu uygulamaların küçük partilerin rekabet gücünü sınırladığı bir gerçektir. Bununla birlikte, kimliklerini korumalarına olanak tanır ve aynı zamanda parlamentoda temsil edilmeleri için uygun bir ortam yaratır. Sonuç olarak, anayasal ve yasal düzenlemelerin demokratik ve çoğulcu niteliği muhalefeti desteklemekte ve iktidara karşı rekabet edebilmesi için uygun koşulları yaratmaktadır.

Ancak bu araçların etkili ve sürdürülebilir olabilmesi, iktidar-muhalefet ilişkilerinin demokratik bir zeminde yürütülmesine bağlıdır. Bu yasal araçları anlamlı kılacak ve iktidar partisi ile muhalefet arasındaki ilişkinin demokratik bir temelde yürütülmesini sağlayacak bir siyasi kültürün varlığı esastır. Siyasi kültür, bu yasal araçlara anlam kazandırır; onları güçlendirir veya zayıflatır. Bu anlamda demokrasi, yalnızca siyasi kurumlardan oluşan bir rejim türü değildir. Aynı zamanda, bu kurumları ayakta tutan ve yapının temel direği olarak işlev gören siyasi kültürle de ilgilidir. Düşük seçmen katılımı, ülkedeki demokrasinin işleyişine ilişkin olumsuz algılar ve siyasi kurumlara olan güvenin azalması, Fransa'da demokrasi tartışmalarını giderek alevlendirmektedir.

2021 yılında başlatılan OECD Güven Anketi, Ekim-Kasım 2023 döneminde 30 OECD ülkesinde uygulanmıştır. 2023 yılında Fransız katılımcıların %34'ü ulusal hükümete yüksek ya da orta düzeyde güvendiğini belirtmiştir. Nüfusun yaklaşık yarısı yerel yönetimlere (%56), ulusal kamu hizmetlerine (%53) ve mahkemeler ile yargı sistemine (%50) yüksek ya da orta düzeyde güven duyduğunu ifade etmiştir. En az güvenilen kurumlar ise siyasi partiler (%18), medya (%33) ve ulusal parlamentodur (%33). Ayrıca nüfusun yalnızca dörtte biri (%26), mevcut siyasal sistemin kendileri gibi insanların hükümet kararlarında söz sahibi olmasına imkân tanıdığına inanmaktadır (OECD, 2024). Fransa Siyasal Araştırmalar Merkezi (CEVIPOF) tarafından yayımlanan son araştırmaya göre, vatandaşların devlete ve demokratik kurumlara olan güveni 2024 yılında da düşük seviyede kalmıştır. 3.000 katılımcı arasında yapılan ankette, %74'ü Fransa Cumhurbaşkanlığı'na güvenmediklerini, %86'sı ise siyasi partilere güven duymadıklarını belirtmiştir. Ulusal Meclis'e güven ise belirgin biçimde azalmış; katılımcıların %74'ü güvensizlik ifade etmiştir. Ayrıca seçilmiş temsilcilerin imajı da kötüleşmiştir: 2023'te halkın %29'u temsilcilere güvenirken, bu oran 2024'te %22'ye düşmüştür. Veriler, Fransız halkının yalnızca küçük bir bölümünün siyasal liderleri halkın ihtiyaçlarına duyarlı olarak gördüğünü, önemli bir kesimin ise siyasetçilerin kamu yararından ziyade kişisel çıkarlarını ön planda tuttuğuna inandığını göstermektedir (Ipsos, 2024).

Son olarak, Dünya Değerler Araştırması'na göre 2017–2022 dönemi için Fransa'da parlamento güveni %33,1; hükümete güven %30,7; siyasi partilere güven ise %11,5 seviyesindedir. Fransa'da siyasal kurumlara olan düşük güvenin en belirgin yansıması seçim sandığında görülmektedir. 2002'de cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinin ilk turuna katılım oranı %73,6 iken 2007'de %86,2'ye yükselmiştir. Ancak bu oran, 2022 yılına kadar kademeli olarak azalmıştır: 2012'de %82,2, 2017'de %81,2 ve 2022'de %77,9. Benzer bir durum ikinci turda da gözlemlenmektedir. 2002'de %81,8 olan ikinci tur katılımı, 2007'de %86,1'e yükselmiş; ardından 2012, 2017 ve 2022'de sırasıyla %83,6, %78 ve %75,5'e düşmüştür. Yasama seçimlerinin ilk turunda katılım oranları 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017 ve 2022'de sırasıyla %65,8, %61,6, %60,2, %52,2 ve %50,6'dır. İkinci turda ise bu oranlar sırasıyla %61,4, %60,9, %58,6, %45,4 ve %48,5'tir. İlk turda katılım oranı giderek azalırken, yalnızca 2022'de ikinci turda yaklaşık 3 puanlık bir artış gözlemlenmiştir (Insee, 2022). Sonuç olarak, OECD Güven Anketi ve CEVIPOF bulguları Fransız vatandaşlarının siyasal kurumlara duyduğu güvenin belirgin biçimde düşük olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

CEVIPOF verileri, cumhurbaşkanlığı, parlamento ve siyasi partilere yönelik derin bir güvensizliğe işaret etmektedir. Dünya Değerler Araştırması da parlamento, hükümete ve siyasi partilere duyulan düşük güven düzeyini teyit etmektedir. Bu noktada açıkça ifade edilebilir ki Fransa'da bir temsil krizi yaşanmaktadır. Temsili demokrasinin temel taşları olarak görülen siyasi partilere yönelik sürekli düşük güven düzeyleri, demokratik yönetişimin meşruiyeti ve kalitesi açısından ciddi bir risk oluşturmaktadır. Benzer şekilde, cumhurbaşkanlığına duyulan sınırlı güven, Fransa'nın yarı-başkanlık sisteminin sürdürülebilirliği hakkında soru işaretleri

doğurmaktadır. Siyasal kurumlar kamu güveninde geride kalmaya devam ederse, demokratik temsilin etkinliği ve muhalefetin meşru bir alternatif olarak işlev görme kapasitesi önemli ölçüde zayıflayabilir.

Fransız toplumunda demokratik siyasi kültürün zayıflama eğilimi, sadece demokratik rejimin istikrarı için değil, muhalefetin rekabet gücü için de önemli bir tehdit oluşturmaktadır. Bu nedenle, Beşinci Cumhuriyet muhalefetin varlığını sürdürmesi ve etkili bir şekilde çalışması, daha doğrusu iktidar iddiasını sürdürmesi için güçlü bir kurumsal temel sağlarken, demokratik siyasi kültürün aşınması kritik bir sorun teşkil etmektedir. Bu aşınmayı ortadan kaldırmak, Fransız demokrasisinin dayanıklılığını güçlendirmek için hayati önem taşımaktadır.

## Sınırlılıklar

Bu çalışma siyasi rejimlerin iki türünden biri olan demokratik rejimler ile sınırlandırılmaktadır. Böylece, demokratik olmayan rejimler bu çalışmanın kapsamında yer almamaktadır. Bir başka sınırlama, siyasi muhalefetin rekabet edebilme kapasitesini belirleyen faktörler bağlamındadır. Siyasi muhalefetin rekabet edebilme kapasitesini belirleyen faktörler iç ve dış faktörler olarak ikiye ayrılabilir. Bu çalışma, dış faktörler ile sınırlandırılmakta ve siyasi muhalefetin kendilerine özgü yapı ve özelliklerinden ileri gelen ve onların hem muhalefet anlayışlarını hem de bu fonksiyonu yerine getiriş şekillerini etkileyen faktörler (parti büyüklüğü ve gücü, sosyal tabanı, doktrin ve ideolojisi, parti içi ilişkilerin düzenleniş şekli gibi) ayrı bir çalışma olabilecek derinlikte bir konu olması nedeniyle çalışma kapsamının dışında tutulmaktadır. Dış faktörler ise, siyasi muhalefeti ilgilendiren anayasal/yasal düzenlemeler ile siyasi kültürle sınırlandırılmıştır. Bir başka sınırlılık da siyasi muhalefetin türleri ile ilgilidir. Bu çalışmada anayasal olmayan siyasi muhalefet türüne yer verilmemektedir. Temel hedefi anayasal düzeni tamamen değiştirmek ve bu nedenle anayasa karşıtı bir niteliğe sahip olan bu tür muhalefet odaklarının demokratik işlevlerinden bahsetmek oldukça güçtür. Son olarak, bu çalışma ülke incelemesi bakımından Fransa ile sınırlandırılmakta ve böylece bir tek vaka çalışması ortaya konulmaktadır.

## Öneriler

Bir demokratik rejim olarak Fransa'da anayasal/yasal düzenlemeler ile siyasi kültürün demokratik ve çoğulcu niteliğinin oldukça belirgin ve muhalefeti önceleyici olduğu ve siyasi muhalefetin mevcut sistemde fonksiyonlarını etkin bir biçimde yerine getirebilmesi, varlık gösterebilmesi ve iktidar karşısında rekabet edebilmesi için uygun bir ortamın var olduğu tespit edilmektedir. Fransa'da Beşinci Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde siyasi muhalefetin iktidar karşısında rekabet edebilme noktasında yüksek bir kapasiteye sahip olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmaktadır. Ancak Fransa'da siyasi kültürün demokratik niteliğinin zayıflama eğilimi göstermesi nedeniyle hem demokrasinin sürdürülebilirliği hem de siyasi muhalefetin varlığı ve rekabet edebilme kapasitesi açısından bir tehdidin var olduğu da dikkat çekmektedir. Bu anlamda demokratik siyasi kültürün zayıflamasına neden olan sorunlara etkili çözümler üretilmemesi durumunda rejim ve doğal olarak siyasi muhalefetin varlığı da tehlike altına girecektir.

Bu makale, Fransa'daki muhalefet partilerinin sahip oldukları anayasal/yasal araçlar ve ülkenin demokratik siyasi kültürü çerçevesinde rekabet gücünü analiz etmektedir. Çalışmanın en önemli sınırlılığı, tek bir vaka çalışması olmasıdır. Gelecekteki muhalefet çalışmaları, Birleşik Krallık ve Almanya'yı da içeren karşılaştırmalı bir perspektiften konuyu ele alarak literatüre önemli katkılar sağlayabilir.

## Özgün Değer

Çalışma, tek vaka çalışması olması nedeniyle Fransa'daki siyasi muhalefeyi inceleyen önceki araştırmalardan ayrılmaktadır. Parlamento mekanizmalarına odaklanan (Rozenberg & Thiers, 2013; Garritzmann, 2017; Yılmaz, 2016) veya muhalefeti daha geniş sistemik modellerle ele alan (Helms, 2004; Soysal, 1964) mevcut literatürün çoğundan farklı olarak, bu araştırma muhalefetin hem kurumsal hem de parlamento dışı boyutlarını kapsamlı bir analitik çerçeveye entegre etmektedir. Böylelikle, çalışma önceki karşılaştırmalı ve ülkeye özgü analizleri temel alır ve eleştirel bir yaklaşımla ele alır. Rozenberg ve Thiers (2013) parlamento muhalefetinin evrimine ve Fransa'da 2008 anayasa reformunun etkisine odaklanırken, Garritzmann (2017) kurumsal endeksler aracılığıyla demokrasilerdeki muhalefet gücünün karşılaştırmalı bir değerlendirmesini sunar. Yılmaz (2016), Helms (2004) ve Soysal (1964) da benzer şekilde teorik ve ülkeler arası bir bakış açısıyla muhalefet mekanizmalarının

anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Tek bir vaka çalışması olarak, mevcut yasal çerçeve ve siyasi kültürü birleştiren bir perspektifle Fransa'daki siyasi muhalefetin rekabet gücünü analiz ederek literatüre benzersiz bir katkı sağlar ve bu sayede konuyla ilgili önceki araştırmalardan ayrılır.