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# Introduction

“Gastronomy relates to: To natural history, through its classification of alimentary substances; To physics, through the examination of their compositions and qualities; To chemistry, through the various analyses and decompositions to which it subjects them; To cooking, through the art of preparing dishes and making them pleasing to the taste; To commerce, through seeking ways to buy what it consumes at the best possible price, and to sell what it offers most advantageously; Finally, to political economy, through the resources it presents for taxation, and through the means of exchange it establishes between nations.”<sup>1</sup>

—Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût*

In 2010, UNESCO inscribed the "Gastronomic meal of the French" on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognizing the entire tradition of French meals as something to preserve. As UNESCO defines it: "The gastronomic meal of the French is a customary social practice for celebrating important moments in the lives of individuals and groups, such as births, weddings, birthdays... It is a festive meal bringing people together for an occasion to enjoy the art of good eating and drinking. The gastronomic meal emphasizes togetherness, the pleasure of taste, and the balance between human beings and the products of nature"<sup>2</sup>. This recognition is the reflection of French philosophy illustrating that food is not merely fuel for the body but a part of our cultural identity, social cohesion, and national heritage. The French meal encompasses careful selection of dishes, wine pairing, table setting, and characteristic consumption rituals that transform eating into a social and cultural act. This emphasis on quality, seasonality, and cultural heritage differentiates French food culture from the industrialized and quantity-focused approaches that have come to dominate the Western world.

Yet this celebrated food culture has not been unchanged. French nutrition policies, since the 1950's, have struggled to balance the preservation this cultural heritage while addressing evolving public health challenges, economic pressures, and social transformations. The tension between maintaining traditional food practices and adapting it to modern realities has

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût*, (Champs, 2025), 62.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, « Gastronomic meal of the French », 2010, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gastronomic-meal-of-the-french-00437>.

shaped decades of policy decisions, illustrating the complex interplay between political ideology and nutritional governance.

This thesis examines: How have political ideologies shaped French nutrition policies since the 1950s? This question is significant for several interconnected reasons. First, nutrition policies have become increasingly important as diet-related diseases—including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease—have become growing public health challenges across developed nations. Understanding how political ideologies influence such policies helps explain why certain policy tools are chosen over other alternatives and why some approaches succeed while others fail. Second, France is a peculiar case study in nutrition governance. Unlike other countries that have implemented purely market-driven approaches to food systems, France has consistently preserved a strong state presence in food policy while simultaneously protecting cultural traditions<sup>3</sup>. Third, examining the ideological foundations of nutrition policies reveals underlying trends in contemporary governance. The evolution from Pierre Mendès France's technocratic republicanism through Georges Pompidou's conservative modernization to Lionel Jospin's pragmatic socialism depicts how changing political philosophies produce different approaches to the same fundamental problems. Understanding these patterns provides insights into the relationship between political ideology and public policy that extend beyond nutrition to other policy domains. Lastly, this research deepens our understanding of how policies can successfully navigate the complex landscape between public health imperatives, cultural preservation, and economic interests. The French experience offers both successful models and cautionary examples to nations worldwide confronted to similar challenges: maintaining food security while promoting health, preserving cultural practices while enabling economic development.

This thesis analyzes three central moments in French nutrition policy, each representing a distinct government ideology and revealing a different approach to food governance that shapes policy designs and implementation methods.

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<sup>3</sup>Graciela, Gutman. « Transformaciones recientes en la distribución de alimentos en Argentina », Buenos Aires: Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca y Alimentación (SAGPyA) and Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación Agrícola (IICA), 1997. Cited in Thomas, Reardon., Rose, Hopkins., « The Supermarket Revolution in Developing Countries: Policies to Address Emerging Tensions Among Supermarkets, Suppliers and Traditional Retailers », *The European Journal of Development Research*, Vol.18, No.4, December 2006, pp.526, DOI: 10.1080/09578810601070613.

Chapter 1 examines Pierre Mendès France's Milk and Anti-Alcohol Campaign (1954-1955), illustrating how technocratic republican ideology facilitated direct state intervention in nutrition habits. Through Mendès France's campaign to replace wine with milk in schools and reduce alcohol consumption, this chapter shows how ideological conviction can bypass powerful external constraints, including ingrained cultural practices and industry opposition.

Chapter 2 analyzes the Loi Royer (1973), which regulated large retail development to protect traditional commerce. This chapter explores how Georges Pompidou's conservative ideology shaped an indirect approach to nutrition policy—preserving traditional food distribution systems rather than directly intervening in consumption patterns. The analysis reveals how conservative governance inadvertently achieved nutritional benefits while prioritizing cultural preservation and political stability.

Chapter 3 investigates the Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS), adopted in 2001 by Lionel Jospin's pragmatic socialist government. This chapter examines how the constraints of cohabitation and adherence to neoliberal economic thinking led to a hybrid policy framework that combined public health objectives and an emphasis on voluntary mechanisms and market-compatible implementation strategies.

Being a French national, I developed a deep passion for food and culinary traditions as I grew up. I was born into a miller family whose heritage dates back to the 17th century. In parallel, my father continues this culinary lineage as a baker and growing up surrounded by the art of bread-making and the pursuit of quality ingredients formed in me a profound appreciation for qualitative products and French gastronomy.

I chose to pursue my future academic path in the food industry as I desire to contribute to the development of sustainable and equitable food systems. Understanding how different political approaches have shaped French nutrition policies provided me crucial insights for designing effective food policies that balance health outcomes with cultural values and economic realities. Observing how supermarkets slowly displaced neighborhood and how convenience foods infiltrated family kitchens sparked my interest in understanding how political decisions shape our food environments and, ultimately, our health.

As Brillat-Savarin observed over two centuries ago, gastronomy is connected to political economy—and this thesis demonstrates precisely how political ideologies shape the food system.

# Chapter 1 – Mendès France’s Milk Campaign

The Mendès France Milk and Alcohol Campaign (1954-1955) was a public health and economic modernization initiative launched by French Premier Pierre Mendès France that promoted sugared milk consumption while simultaneously reforming France's heavily subsidized alcohol industry. The campaign aimed to reduce France's chronic alcohol overproduction and combat widespread alcoholism by encouraging milk drinking among students, soldiers, and workers, while converting beet alcohol production to sugar manufacturing. The campaign became a symbolic choice between tradition and modernity, with Mendès France's public milk drinking earning him the nickname "Mendès-Lolo"<sup>4</sup> and positioning him as a leader willing to confront entrenched agricultural interests in favor of economic progress and public health. This chapter explores how Mendès France's technocratic republican ideology shaped this particular nutrition campaign. Most basically, this discussion examines the hypothesis that his ideology led Mendès France to prioritize public health over economic interests and cultural traditions in his nutrition policies, as particularly illustrated by his willingness to attack directly the powerful alcohol industry despite political costs.

## I. Historical Context

### Pierre Mendès France a Radical Republican

Pierre Mendès France was born on January 11, 1907, in Paris. His exceptional intellectual formation is evident from his early achievements: becoming France's youngest lawyer in 1926 at age 19, and in 1928 the youngest Doctor of Law. During his university years, Mendès France engaged politically by leading the "Ligue d'action universitaire républicaine et socialiste"—left wing student movement—opposing Action française students at the Sorbonne during the *Cartel des Gauches* period during which left wing parties formed a coalition for the legislative elections of 1924. This early political experience positioned him clearly within the republican camp laying, defending a common good, the foundations for his future ideology. His 1924 adhesion to the Radical Party placed him among the "Jeunes Turcs"

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre Poujade gave Mendès France this nickname after he publicly drank milk at an official reception in Geneva; see Luc Berlivet, "Une santé à risques. L'action publique de lutte contre le tabagisme et l'alcoolisme en France (1954-1999)," Ph.D. diss., University of Rennes I, 2000), 329.

alongside Jean Zay, Pierre Cot, Jacques Kayser, and Gaston Bergery, under the direction of Édouard Daladier. In 1929, he moved to Louviers and was elected deputy in 1932, becoming France's youngest deputy<sup>5</sup>.

Mendès France's ideology structured itself progressively through his first governmental experiences and his confrontation with the crises of the 1930s. As the Radical Party secretary, he defended the Popular Front's majority contract and became Under-Secretary of State for the Treasury in the Blum II government in March 1938, at only 31 years old, making him the youngest French minister<sup>6</sup>. During this period, he drafted a clearly Keynesian-inspired bill aimed at reviving the economy and preparing the nation's rearmament<sup>7</sup>. This early experience with Keynesian economic policy would durably orient his thinking toward dirigiste politics and a constant economic and financial rigor.

Furthermore, the war constituted a major turning point in his political evolution. His engagement as an aviation lieutenant, his arrest by Vichy authorities due to his Jewish origins, the confiscation of his electoral mandates, were firsthand consequences of authoritarian persecution that would deepen his commitment to democratic values<sup>8</sup>. He was later called by de Gaulle to Algiers as Finance Commissioner of the French Committee of National Liberation in November 1943, Mendès France developed a conception of the modern state, notably creating the Plan direction that would later become the Plan Commissariat that was planning a centralized technical economic authority in charge of production and import issues<sup>9</sup>. This experience forged his approach to democratic planning synthesizing state intervention with respect for democratic mechanisms.

His resignation from de Gaulle's government on April 5, 1945, reveals a central aspect of his ideology development. In 1945, Mendès France found himself in fierce disagreement with socialist and communist leaders as well as Gaullists and even his own centrist ally René Pleven, who was running the Finance Ministry. With France in ruins and desperately needing

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<sup>5</sup> France Archives, « Mendès France, Pierre (1907-1982) », [https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran\\_NP\\_010111](https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran_NP_010111).

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem

<sup>7</sup> Frédéric, Potier. "Pierre Mendès France, Socialiste Atypique." *Fondation Jean Jaurès*, (2022), 1-6, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> France Archives, « Mendès France, Pierre (1907-1982) », [https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran\\_NP\\_010111](https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran_NP_010111).

<sup>9</sup> Philippe, Mioche. « La planification comme «Réforme de structure» : l'action de Pierre Mendès-France, de 1943 à 1945. » *Histoire, économie et société*, 1<sup>er</sup> année, n°3 (1982), 471-488, p. 476; doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/hes.1982.1303>

to rebuild, Mendès France believed the country needed to freeze both prices and wages to control inflation and maintain strict fiscal discipline. His reasoning was straightforward by keeping a tight lid on spending. This approach revealed Mendès France's distinctive political philosophy: he combined the activist government intervention favored by Keynesian economists with the fiscal restraint that French republicans considered essential to comprehensive governance. It was a pragmatic blend that would define his approach to politics throughout his career<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, his international career started as governor of the International Monetary Fund and deputy governor of the World Bank from 1946 to 1958 and then permanent representative of France to the UN Economic and Social Council from 1947 to 1951 which enriched his vision with an international approach to economic problems<sup>11</sup>.

His accession to the Council presidency on June 17, 1954, allowed Mendès France to implement his technocratic republicanism in a government that lasted seven months and seventeen days. He was the driving force of the decolonization of Indochina and Tunisian autonomy with the Carthage speech revealing a coherent republican ideology: extending democratic principles implies ending colonial domination<sup>12</sup>. Additionally, his governmental method illustrated a "technique au service de la République", an approach that places expertise at the service of politics rather than subordinating democratic choice to technical considerations<sup>13</sup>. His policy of economic and social "rigor" (fight against alcoholism, economic modernization) inscribes itself in this same logic of democratic rationalization and Keynesian views. By promoting sugared milk consumption while simultaneously reforming France's heavily subsidized alcohol industry, Mendès France attempted to address multiple challenges: economic modernization, public health improvement, and the breaking of powerful lobbies that had long paralyzed parliamentary action.

## Post-War Nutritional Context

Even while caloric consumption had increased since the post-war era, public opinion and agricultural specialists recognized that French production priorities were not fulfilling the

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<sup>10</sup> Potier, Frédéric. "Pierre Mendès France, Socialiste Atypique", *Fondation Jean Jaurès*, 2022, 1-6, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> France Archives, « Mendès France, Pierre (1907-1982) », [https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran\\_NP\\_010111](https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran_NP_010111).

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem

<sup>13</sup> Gilles, Le Beguec. « Pierre Mendès France et la technocratie ». *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, n°63-64 (2001). Pierre Mendès France et la Modernité - Actes du colloque - Assemblée nationale - 15 juin 2001 :. 112-118, p. 113 ; doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/mat.2001.403292>

nation's nutritional requirements. Agronomist René Dumont complained in a popular 1953 essay against the government's that continuing subsidies for alcohol manufacturing was fiscally irresponsible in contrast to the needs of the population for protein and necessary foods: "To speak of increasing productivity while continuing to produce a useless alcohol, when we are lacking so many essential goods, is not serious."<sup>14</sup>.

The degree of nutritional shortage was illustrated graphically by demographic figures. Although the First World War had been far more deadly than the second, civilians were gravely shortchanged under Vichy and German rule. Teenagers in 1945 averaged being 7 to 11 centimeters shorter and 7 to 9 kilograms lighter compared to teenagers in 1935<sup>15</sup>. France's food supply fell below its public health demand and created remembrance of wartime and post-war frugality<sup>16</sup>, which built political agendas for nutrition transformation. This nutritional shadow of war had long since passed the simple calorimetric figures. An entire generation—the so-called "J3" on their wartime rationing card category—carried the psychological scars of hunger into the 1950s. These people had lived through adolescent years not simply of rumbling tummies but of the moral and social fissures that accrued to privation. Starvation came to be associated with delinquency and social revolts, poignantly illustrated in the case of Josette Ortaure, whose 1950 murder of a tailor during a robbery made her a haunting icon of a generation "marked by hunger."<sup>17</sup>

In this context of broader postwar nutritional challenges, alcohol consumption emerged as a particularly severe public health problem that both symbolized and exacerbated France's struggles with recovery and modernization. France was the world leader in per capita alcohol consumption by 1950, where 17.2 liters of pure alcohol per adult per year was being consumed<sup>18</sup>. For the year 1951, the adult consumption was even higher: Malignac estimated

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<sup>14</sup> René , Dumont. « Alcool, ou lait et viande ? Étude technique et économique d'orientation Agricole et alimentaire ». *Population (French Edition)*, 8(1) (1953), 57-72, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> Paul, Dutton. « A Votre Santé : Éducation et santé sous la IVe République, » review of Nourrisson D., *Annales de démographie historique*, n°2 (2003), 200-203, p. 201.

<sup>16</sup> Jean.-Louis, André. *Dis-moi ce que tu manges: Une histoire de la France à table*. (Odile Jacob, 2021), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Jean, Lereboullet. « Changes in alcohol consumption in France and abroad during the period 1950 to 1975 » in *Bulletin de L'Académie Nationale de Médecine*, 161, n°8 novembre 1977), p. 603.

an average national figure of 30.5 litres of pure alcohol per adult, and wine alone accounted for 70% of all alcoholic drink taken. That translated to a per-capita average of 137 litres of wine a year, underlining the role of wine not as a rare indulgence but as a regular staple<sup>19</sup>.

	Consommation d'alcool en 1951	
	par habitant (en litres)	par adulte (en litres)
France	21	30,5
Italie	9,2	14,2
Suisse	9,0	13,0
Belgique	6,3	8,8
Etats-Unis	6,2	9,4
Grande-Bretagne	5,9	9,3
Allemagne occidentale	4,2	6,1
Suède	3,5	5,1
Danemark	2,7	4,0

**Figure 1:** Alcohol consumption in different countries in 1951 per liter/inhabitants (left column) and per liter/adults (right column)<sup>20</sup>

This excessive consumption was not confined to a fringe population of alcoholics but extended extensively throughout the population. More than 3 million men drank over 20 cl of pure alcohol regularly per day, and more than 1 million women drank over 10 cl per day—both far above the amounts considered safe then. Moreover, even children were consuming wine in the canteen during school days<sup>21</sup>. In comparison, in 2017 the French Public Health recommended to limit daily consumption to maximum two regular glasses of alcohol (10 cl of wine) and advised not to drink every day<sup>22</sup>.

These drinking patterns directly translated into measurable negative health outcomes. France had one of the highest liver cirrhosis mortality rates in the world in the 1950s, which reflects the extreme impact of long-term alcohol consumption on the nation's public health. France

<sup>19</sup> Georges, Malignac. "La consommation d'alcool en France et à l'étranger", *Population* (French Edition), Vol. 8, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1953): 766-770+766-769, p. 770, *Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques*.

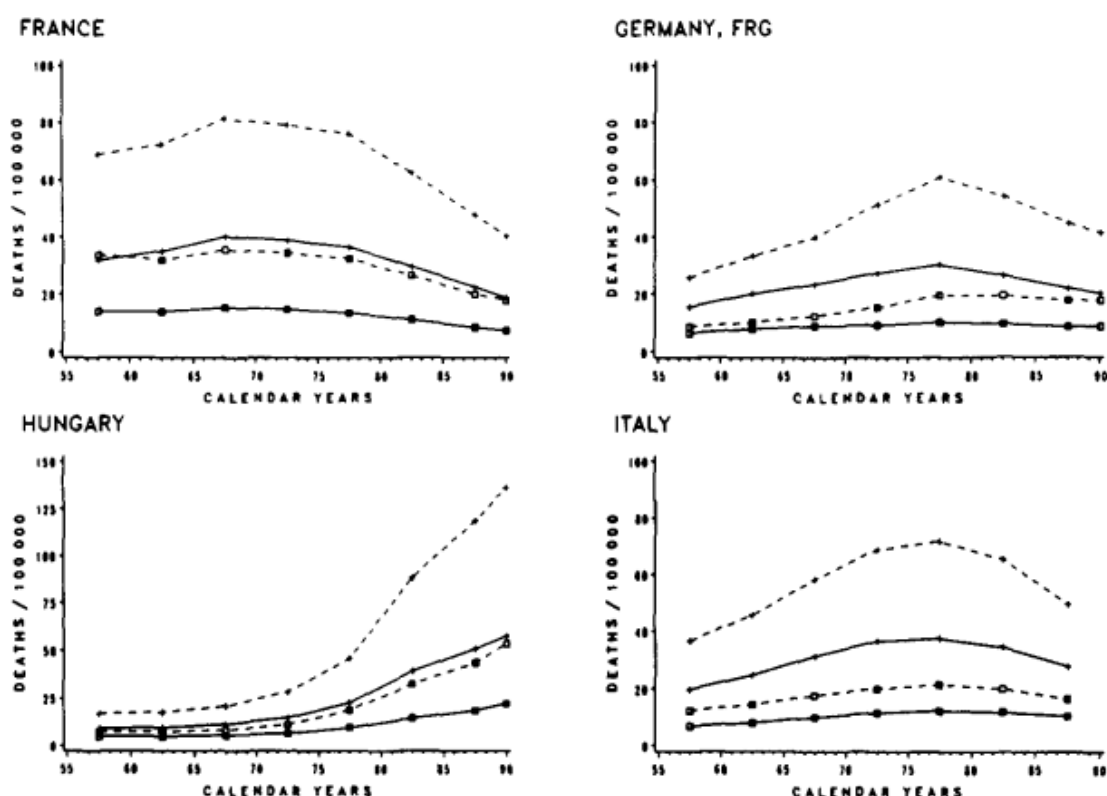
<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 769.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Louis, André. *Dis-moi ce que tu manges: Une histoire de la France à table*. (Odile Jacob, 2021), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Chloé, Marques., Guillemette, Quatremère., Raphaël, Andler. and Viêt, Nguyen-Thanh. "De nouveaux repères de consommation d'alcool pour limiter les risques sur sa santé." *La Santé en Action*, no. 452 (June 2020), p. 40.

experienced 31.8 and 14.0 deaths per 100,000 men and women, respectively, due to liver cirrhosis in the late 1950s<sup>23</sup>. These were among the highest in Europe, just behind Portugal and far ahead of places such as the United Kingdom or Sweden. These statistics indicate how by the middle of the century the alcohol-related liver disease had reached an epidemic level. Cirrhosis, a condition that is both preventable and directly related to lifestyle, was a clear sign of the medical and social cost of habitual drinking in postwar France.

#### TRENDS IN MORTALITY FROM LIVER CIRRHOSIS



**Figure 2:** Trends in age-standardized (world) mortality rates for liver cirrhosis in selected countries or groups of countries, 1955 to 1990 (note that four scales were adopted, i.e., 50, 100, 150, and 200/100,000).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Carlo, La Vecchia., Fabio., Levi. Franca, Lucchini., Silvia, Franceschi., & Eva, Negri. (1994). Worldwide patterns and trends in mortality from liver cirrhosis, 1955 to 1990. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 4(6), 480–486, p. 481. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1047-2797\(94\)90009-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/1047-2797(94)90009-4)

<sup>24</sup> Carlo, La Vecchia., Fabio, Levi., Franca, Lucchini., Silvia, Franceschi., & Eva, Negri. (1994). Worldwide patterns and trends in mortality from liver cirrhosis, 1955 to 1990. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 4(6), 480–486, p. 482. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1047-2797\(94\)90009-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/1047-2797(94)90009-4)

## Agricultural and Economic Context

The creation of the National Institute for Agronomic Research (INRA) in 1946 constituted a political engagement to apply science in order to modernize French agriculture. The agricultural sector thus embarked on a productivist era, characterized by the pursuit of higher yields and economic concentration in this after war and reconstruction period.

However, the nutritional landscape of the post-war era was further complicated by the economic importance of the production of alcohol, particularly wine. The wine industry employed hundreds of thousands of French citizens directly and indirectly and was a major export industry in an era when France desperately required foreign exchange. Politically, wine producers constituted a powerful lobby with members of both political parties<sup>25</sup>. The origins of the alcohol regime predate Mendès France's reforms and help explain the structural inertia he encountered. The subsidization system began during World War I, when the French state began purchasing beet alcohol for industrial and military uses—explosives, pharmaceuticals, and fuel<sup>26</sup>. Meanwhile, wine, which was already overproduced before the war, was redirected to beverage markets. After the war, the producers of wine and beet alcohol lobbied successfully to have the wartime status quo preserved, receiving state subsidies for excess purchase and immunity from competition. By 1931, not only did the state buy surplus wine but actively promoted its use, referring to Pasteur's celebrated adage: "wine, the most hygienic of beverages". This concentrated alcohol interests was visible with grape and beet growers increasingly merging and becoming politically powerful. Their lobbying victory brought alcohol subsidies into a central element of French agricultural policy by the early 1950s. Economic planners, frustrated with mounting surpluses—20 million hectoliters of wine in the early 1950s—tried to reform the system, but were faced with entrenched vested interests defending their position<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup>Joseph, Bohling. « The Mendès France milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954-1955 » *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 32, no. (2014), p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Bohling, Joseph. « The Mendès France milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954-1955 » *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 101.

Nonetheless, this entrenched economic position of the alcohol industry was beginning to conflict with emerging demographic realities. Jules Milhau, a wine economist from the Languedoc, provided compelling statistical evidence for the declining centrality of viticulture. Between 1948 and 1952, wine's share in the value of agricultural production fell from 12.5 percent to just 9 percent. Milhau interpreted this decline as the result of a demographic transformation: France's population remained stable at 42 million but now included 1.5 million more children than adults. As family needs began to outweigh individual consumption habits, Milhau predicted that milk would soon surpass wine as a staple of the French diet.<sup>28</sup>

While the dairy would eventually become an important part of French public health initiatives, the postwar agricultural sector was not conducive to meeting the nutritional requirements of the population. Agriculture was low in productivity and plagued by a chronic shortage of livestock, which resulted in an inadequate supply of animal products such as milk. The continued focus on the production of alcohol appeared increasingly absurd in the light of nutritional shortfalls and increased public health problems. The 1954 milk campaign thus called for an agricultural shift to productive, protein-oriented farming that could meet real social needs<sup>29</sup>.

## II. The Anti-Alcohol and Milk Campaign

In 1954, Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France raised eyebrows when he made a public speech with a glass of milk rather than the traditional glass of wine<sup>30</sup>. In a country where wine was not only a beverage but a cultural symbol, this simple gesture carried a deeper political

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<sup>28</sup>Jules, Milhau. (1953) "L'avenir de la viticulture française," *Revue économique* 4 : 724. Cited in Bohling, Joseph. « The Mendès France milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954-1955 » *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 102.

<sup>29</sup> Dumont, René. (1953). « Alcool, ou lait et viande? Etude technique et économique d'orientation Agricole et alimentaire. » *Population (French Edition)*, vol. 8, n°1 (1953), 57-72, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Bohling, Joseph. "The Mendès France Milk Regime : Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014) : 97–120, pp. 97. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

meaning. It marked the launch of a national anti-alcohol campaign, an ambitious—yet controversial—public health efforts of the Fourth Republic.

Alcoholism, long tolerated as part of everyday life, was now cast as a public health emergency and a drag on national productivity. He presented the campaign not merely as a matter of hygiene, but as a moral imperative, a way to uplift the French citizenry and move the country from a post war state toward a modern, rational future. Yet behind this technocratic optimism lay deeper tensions about identity, tradition, and the limits of state power.



**Figure 2:** Poster “The pleasure of drinking lasts only a moment!”, Santé Sobriété (1955-1985), Foré



**Figure 3:** Poster “Turn your back on alcohol... Drink healthy.!” , Foré, Santé Sobriété (1955-1985)

Pierre Mendès France's comprehensive reform program, launched between 1954-1955, began with a systematic dismantling of France's entrenched alcohol regime that had protected producers since World War I. In the Family code of July, 30th 1939, the alcohol policy component targeted the structural causes of overproduction through multiple regulatory measures: it limited the number of drinking establishments, imposed higher taxes on spirits containing 30% alcohol, and sought to control home distillation<sup>31</sup>. These measures specifically aimed at the estimated 3.5 million home distillers and the broader alcohol industry that employed one in five French citizens<sup>32</sup>, while seeking to eliminate the state's costly practice of purchasing alcohol surpluses that reached 20 million hectoliters of wine alone in the early 1950s<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph, Bohling. “The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976”, (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Joseph, Bohlings. “The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955.” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, pp. 97.

<https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 101.

The government created the Haut Comité d'études et d'information sur l'alcoolisme (HCEIA) to coordinate anti-alcoholism efforts and educate the public about the health and economic costs of excessive alcohol consumption<sup>34</sup>. One of campaign's major policy came in the form of a circular issued by the Ministry of Education on August 8, 1956<sup>35</sup>. This decree banned all alcoholic beverages, including diluted wine and cider, from being served in primary school canteens, whether public or private. Taken together, these reforms formed the core of what historian Paul Dutton later called "a veritable New Deal anti-alcoolique."<sup>36</sup>.

Complementing these restrictive measures, Mendès France launched a national milk distribution campaign as both a positive alternative and an economic solution to agricultural overproduction. The program was announced in September 1954 and formalized on October 1 with Decree No. 54-981, published in the *Journal Officiel*<sup>37</sup>. The milk policy decreed that sugared milk would be distributed free in public and private schools, to soldiers, and to workers, explicitly designed to "accustom young French people to consume it in greater and greater quantities"<sup>38</sup>. This initiative served multiple strategic purposes: it provided new markets for dairy farmers who had struggled to find outlets for increased milk production, created demand for sugar produced from converted beet alcohol facilities, and aimed to revolutionize French dietary habits by replacing the traditional practice of drinking wine or cider with milk consumption. As Mendès France stated: "For the producer nothing has changed. For the nation, there is an immense difference: more sugar and less alcohol"<sup>39</sup>. By promoting sugared milk as a symbol of modernity and health in contrast to alcohol's association with backwardness and illness, Mendès France sought to build public support for his broader economic modernization agenda while simultaneously addressing the political

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<sup>34</sup> Joseph, Bohling. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, pp.109. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>35</sup> Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, « 1956 : Interdiction de l'alcool dans les cantines scolaires, » *Les Actualités Françaises*, November 28, 1956.

<sup>36</sup> Paul, Dutton. « A Votre Santé : Éducation et santé sous la IVe République, » review of Nourrisson D., *Annales de démographie historique*, n°2 (2003), 200-203, p. 202.

<sup>37</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, Lois et décrets, n°230, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1954, p. 9264

<sup>38</sup> Institut Pierre Mendès France (hereafter IPMF), Carton 4 (Discours). "La Rénovation économique et le problème de l'alcool, Annecy, 26 septembre 1954." Cited in Bohling, Joseph. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p.108. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>39</sup> Pierre Mendès France, "La Reconversion de l'économie française et le problème de l'alcool: Discours prononcé à l'inauguration de la foire-exposition d'Annecy, 26 septembre 1954," *Gouverner c'est choisir*, 1954–1955, 352. Cited in Bohling, Joseph. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p.108. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

interests of powerful agricultural lobbies, particularly the Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles (FNSEA), whose president Jacques Lépicaud had previously led the beet growers' confederation and actively supported the milk distribution program<sup>40</sup>. It was, as historian Joseph Bohling puts it, a policy designed to "sober people up and stimulate the country's economic productivity"<sup>41</sup>. If alcohol represented indulgence, tradition, and inertia, milk stood for discipline, hygiene, and the promise of a healthier France.

### **III. Ideology Influence on the Campaigns**

The milk and alcohol campaigns of 1954-1955 demonstrated Pierre Mendès France's remarkable ability to overcome powerful external constraints through the strategic application of his technocratic republican ideology. Rather than being deterred by entrenched interests, cultural resistance, or political opposition, Mendès France used his ideological framework to transcend these obstacles and implement transformative policies that previous governments had been unable to achieve.

#### **Pierre Mendès France's Ideology**

The milk and alcohol campaigns of 1954-1955 were not merely pragmatic responses to economic problems or external pressures, but rather the direct expression of Pierre Mendès France's distinctive ideological synthesis developed over two decades of political experience. These campaigns represented the practical implementation of his core beliefs about modern governance, economic rationality, and republican democracy.

Mendès France's approach to the alcohol question had deep ideological roots stretching back to his formative experiences in the 1930s and 1940s. His 1935 milk distribution program in Louviers demonstrated an early commitment to using state intervention for both public health and agricultural modernization by helping Normandy dairy farmers—a preview of his later national campaign<sup>42</sup>. This early initiative revealed his belief that government should actively

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<sup>40</sup>Joseph, Bohling. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p.108.  
<https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, p.100.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 109.

shape social habits through scientific knowledge and rational policy, rather than simply defer to traditional practices or market forces.

His experience as Under-Secretary of Treasury in 1938, where he drafted Keynesian-inspired legislation for economic revival and rearmament, established his fundamental belief in dirigiste economics<sup>43</sup>. This was not socialism yet—he remained committed to market mechanisms and private enterprise—but rather a conviction that the state must actively guide economic development to serve national interests. The 1945 confrontation with de Gaulle over post-war economic policy crystallized this philosophy: his insistence on price and wage controls to fund reconstruction demonstrated his synthesis of Keynesian intervention with republican fiscal responsibility<sup>44</sup>.

Central to understanding how ideology shaped the campaigns is Mendès France's governing philosophy of "technique au service de la République"—placing expertise at the service of politics rather than subordinating democratic choice to technocratic considerations<sup>45</sup>. This was not technocracy in the traditional sense, but rather a belief that rational analysis and scientific knowledge could overcome the irrationality of entrenched interests and parliamentary paralysis.

The milk campaign embodied this philosophy perfectly. Mendès France marshaled nutritional science, economic statistics, and demographic analysis to make a democratic case for changing French consumption patterns. His public milk-drinking was not mere publicity for dairy products but a pedagogical act—demonstrating how political leaders should educate citizens rather than simply manipulate them<sup>46</sup>. The campaign's emphasis on distributing sugared milk to schoolchildren reflected his belief that education and rational persuasion, rather than coercion, were the proper tools of republican governance.

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<sup>43</sup>Frédéric, Potier. "Pierre Mendès France, Socialiste Atypique", *Fondation Jean Jaurès*, 2022, 1-6, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, pp. 1-2

<sup>45</sup> Gilles, Le Beguec. "Pierre Mendès France et la technocratie." *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 63, no. 1 (2001): 112–18, pp. 112-113. <https://doi.org/10.3406/mat.2001.403292>.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph, Bohling. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 104. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

## Keynesian Republicanism in Practice

The campaigns also demonstrated how Mendès France's Keynesian convictions had been filtered through his republican political philosophy. His approach to agricultural conversion—helping beet producers shift from alcohol to sugar production while supporting dairy farmers through increased milk consumption—reflected his belief that state intervention should facilitate economic modernization rather than preserve existing structures if the goal is general interest<sup>47</sup>. This was neither free-market capitalism nor socialism, but what might be called "guided capitalism"—using state power to redirect private economic activity toward more productive and socially beneficial ends.

Crucially, Mendès France's ideology gave the campaigns a moral dimension that went beyond mere economic calculation. His republican formation had instilled a belief in the state's duty to promote citizen and national general interest. The milk campaign was not just about agricultural surpluses or public health statistics, but about what kind of society France should become. His choice to drink milk publicly was a moral statement about sobriety, rationality, and self-discipline as civic virtues.

## Convictions Overcoming Lobby and Political Pressure

The Prime Minister's technocratic approach enabled him to overcome the formidable political power of alcohol lobbies that had previously overthrew Premier René Mayer's government<sup>48</sup>, while his republican convictions provided the moral authority to challenge their influence on democratic governance.

The alcohol industry declared that "the alcohol producer has become the scapegoat for all the wounds of the Fourth Republic"<sup>49</sup>, and regional political figures—such as Senator Jean Bène of Hérault (wine producing department)—also mobilized against the alcohol campaign, often framing their resistance in terms of protecting local economic interests and accusing Mendès France of using public health rhetoric to disguise an economic agenda, warning that the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 105.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph, Bohling. (2012). "The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976", (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2019), p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Henri Cayre, "L'Agriculture présente du nouveau," *Alcool et dérivés*, October 1952,1. Cited in Bohling, Joseph, "The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976," 2012, p. 47.

government was not worried about children health but simply favoring dairy regions—such as Normandy where he started his political career— over wine regions<sup>50</sup>. Consequently, Mendès France's administration responded working closely with technocrats from agencies like INED, INSEE, and the Ministry of Finance, which provided statistical justification for the campaign and demonstrating that alcoholism cost the state far more than alcohol taxes generated, with medical expenses of 132 billion francs in 1950 and 152 billion in 1952<sup>51</sup>. This lobby resistance was economic, to protect alcohol producers' interests but ideological as well, representing a defense of traditional sectoral privileges against technocratic modernization.

This technocratic strategy transformed what had been a political debate into an apparently objective economic calculation, while his republican belief in serving the general interest over particular interests gave him the moral courage to persist despite industry threats.

The coherence between Mendès France's long-standing beliefs and the specific policies of 1954-1955 suggests that ideology was the primary driver of these campaigns. His willingness to take on powerful alcohol lobbies despite obvious political risks demonstrated that these were not merely opportunistic policies designed to build coalitions, but rather the implementation of deeply held convictions about how France should be governed.

Furthermore, Mendès France's republican strategy of appealing directly to democratic legitimacy, reinforced by technocratic claims to objective expertise, enabled him to overcome parliamentary opposition by creating political costs for resistance that transcended traditional partisan divisions. The campaigns faced complex pressures from parliamentary politics that often transcended traditional ideological divisions. The Communist Party's initial resistance to restrictions on home distillation—due to their traditional alignment with small rural producers—created unexpected opposition from the left. When Communist deputy Robert Manceau submitted a motion to repeal key parts of the home distiller crackdown in November 1954, it drew immediate press criticism portraying the Communists as "protectors of alcoholism." This external pressure forced a rapid political recalculation. Facing reputational damage, and by January 5, 1955, Waldeck Rochet— an agricultural syndicalist and member

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<sup>50</sup> Jean Bène, "Le lait et le vin," *La Journée vinicole*, 4 January 1955. Cited in Bohling, Joseph. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 110. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph, Bohling. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 104. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

of the Communist Party— issued an internal report urging Communists to align with the anti-alcohol effort<sup>52</sup>. Consequently, one month later, the day the Mendès France government collapsed, the Communist party announced his participation to the anti-alcohol fight<sup>53</sup>.

## Rationality Over Cultural Resistance

Beyond economic interests, the campaigns confronted deeply rooted cultural resistance that proved equally constraining. The attempt to remove wine from school canteens and replace it with milk ignited symbolic protest that revealed the profound cultural dimensions of nutritional habits that technocratic planning often overlooked. For many, wine was not a public health risk but a marker of identity, a link to the land, a symbol of regional pride.

This cultural resistance took various forms, from populist attacks by figures like Pierre Poujade—who declared that if Mendès France "had a drop of Gallic blood in your veins, you would never dare to be served a glass of milk at an international reception"<sup>54</sup>. Prime Minister's willingness to stake his personal credibility on scientific evidence about nutrition and public health demonstrated how technocratic analysis could support republican moral leadership. Rather than accepting wine as an unchangeable marker of French identity, he used expert knowledge to reframe the debate around what kind of France citizens wanted to become, appealing to their capacity for rational self-governance. His 1954 radio address exemplified this synthesis: "It is a question of making men free and conscious of the dangers that threaten them and to help them avoid these dangers"—combining scientific information with republican faith in citizen education<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Archives départementales de Seine-Saint-Denis, "Archives du Parti communiste," 2 NUM 4/2. "Réunion du Bureau politique du 4/12/1954," 1. Cited in Bohling, Joseph. "The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976," 2012, p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> Archives de l'Association nationale de prévention en alcoologie et addictologie (hereafter ANPAA), S7. *France nouvelle*, 5 February 1955. Cited in Bohling, Joseph. "The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976," 2012, p. 71.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Poujade, *J'ai choisi le combat* (Saint-Céré: Société générale des éditions et des publications, 1955), 114. Cited in Bohling, Joseph. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 110. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>55</sup> Pierre Mendès France, "Divergence avec les socialistes sur la méthode de gouvernement, non sur les buts," radio speech on 13 November 1954, in *Œuvres complètes* vol. 3 *Gouverner c'est choisir, 1954-1955* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 461.

This approach proved remarkably effective in shifting public opinion, with INED polling showing growing support for alcohol restrictions from 54% to 61%<sup>56</sup>.

## **IV. External Influence shaping the Policy**

While Pierre Mendès France's ideology provided the conceptual framework for the milk and alcohol campaigns, the specific forms these policies took were shaped by external constraints as well. These external forces—ranging from entrenched economic interests to institutional fragmentation to popular resistance—created a complex environment that both enabled and limited the implementation of Mendès France's vision.

### **International Models and Comparative Pressures**

The campaigns were significantly shaped by international comparisons and pressures for modernization that positioned France as lagging behind other developed nations. Experts compared France unfavorably to "more industrialized countries such as England, where the government provided children with milk" while French children often drank alcohol<sup>57</sup>. By 1939, 87% of elementary schools in England and Wales were covered by the scheme, and over half of schoolchildren received a third of a pint of milk daily<sup>58</sup>. This international context created external pressure that influenced both the timing and specific mechanisms of the milk campaign. The comparison with England's school milk programs provided a ready-made policy model that legitimized government intervention in nutrition while also creating expectations about how such programs should be structured.

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph, Bohling. (2012). "The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976", (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2019), p. 72.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph, Bohling. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 108.  
<https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>58</sup> Peter, Atkins. « The Milk in Schools Scheme 1934–45: 'Nationalization' and Resistance ». In *History of Education*, 34, no.1 (2005), 1–21, p. 1.

## Demographic Pressures

External demographic shifts fundamentally shaped policy design in ways that went beyond government control or ideological preference. Wine economist Jules Milhau's analysis demonstrated that France's demographic transformation was creating new consumption patterns independent of any government intervention. By 1953, France had "a million and a half more children than adults," representing a fundamental shift from the pre-war demographic structure. This demographic pressure meant that, as Milhau predicted, "milk consumption would surpass wine consumption" regardless of government policy, as "family expenses surpassed individual expenses" in the new demographic reality<sup>59</sup>. These underlying social trends created

opportunities for Mendès France's policies because demographic change was already moving in the direction he favored. The baby boom and its associated changes in family structure created external pressure for policies that addressed the needs of a younger population.

## Economic Constraints

The broader economic context of 1954-1955 created fundamental constraints that shaped both campaigns. France faced massive reconstruction needs, budgetary pressures, and the imperative to modernize its economy for European competition. These external economic realities made the alcohol regime's costly subsidies increasingly unsustainable, creating pressure for reform that was as much about fiscal necessity as ideological preference.

The state's alcohol regime would cost 15 billion francs for the year which represented a significant drain on public resources that could otherwise be used for reconstruction, housing and modernization<sup>60</sup>. This fiscal reality created external pressure for policy changes that would reduce these subsidies while finding alternative outlets for agricultural production.

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<sup>59</sup> Jules, Milhau, "L'avenir de la viticulture française," *Revue économique* 4 (1953): 700. Cited in Bohling, Joseph. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 102.

<https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph, Bohling. "The Mendès France Milk Regime: Alcoholism as a Problem of Agricultural Subsidies, 1954–1955." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 97–120, p. 105.

<https://doi.org/10.3167/fpcs.2014.320306>.

Similarly, the dairy sector's overproduction problems and price instability created external economic pressures for government intervention. Senator Martial Brousse's—agronomist and member of the National Executive Board of the General Confederation of Agriculture (CGA), which was then the largest agricultural Union in France—complaints during the July 27, 1954 budget debate revealed the political pressure created by farmers struggling with surplus production and low prices<sup>61</sup>. Such economic constraints forced the government to design policies that addressed both public health objectives and agricultural economic needs, making the milk campaign a response to external economic pressure by supporting the dairy production and finding an outlet for the beet production and to ideological vision.

In contrast to the alcohol campaign's opposition, the milk initiative succeeded largely because it aligned with the interests of powerful agricultural lobbies, particularly the Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles (FNSEA) — National Federation of Agricultural Holders' Union. A positive external pressure was exercised by Jacques Lépicaud, the FNSEA's president, actively supported the school milk distribution policy, describing it as an opportunity to support both child nutrition and agricultural stability<sup>62</sup>. In this sense Mendès France was able to support dairy farmers and beet growers, by addressing overproduction as well as under-consumption, and simultaneously combat alcohol producers, who benefitted of overproduction and over-consumption.

The Mendès France milk and alcohol campaigns of 1954-1955 fundamentally demonstrate how political ideology serves as the primary driver of French nutrition policy formation rather than merely responding to external constraints. This case study reveals that Pierre Mendès France's distinctive technocratic republican ideology, forged through two decades of political experience from the 1930s crisis through post-war reconstruction, provided both the conceptual framework and practical tools necessary to implement transformative nutrition policies that previous governments had been unable to achieve.

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<sup>61</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, Mercredi July 28, 1954, Session de 1954, 47<sup>e</sup> Séance, p. 1386-1387.

<sup>62</sup> Institut Pierre Mendès France, Carton 4 (Économie). "Conférence de presse—Lépicaud & Génin—La FNSEA (Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles) estime que le marché rural est le facteur décisive du relèvement de l'économie nationale, 22 août 1954." Cited in Bohling, Joseph. (2012). "The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976", (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2019), p. 75.

Mendès France's ideological synthesis combined Keynesian interventionism with republican rationalism and moral commitment to the general interest. This philosophy shaped every aspect of his nutrition campaigns, from his choice of milk as a symbol of modernity over wine's traditionalism to his method of public pedagogical leadership. His approach demonstrated "*technique au service de la République*"—placing scientific expertise in service of democratic governance rather than subordinating political choice to technocratic considerations. The campaigns were not pragmatic responses to external pressures but direct expressions of deeply held convictions about how France should be governed and what kind of society it should become.

Crucially, this ideological framework enabled Mendès France to overcome external constraints that had previously paralyzed French governments. His technocratic approach transformed political debates into apparently objective technical discussions, providing statistical justification that neutralized alcohol industry opposition while his republican convictions gave him moral authority to challenge entrenched interests. Rather than accepting wine as an unchangeable marker of French identity, he used expert knowledge to reframe cultural debates around what kind of modern France citizens wanted to become. His strategy of appealing directly to democratic legitimacy, reinforced by claims to objective expertise, created political costs for resistance that transcended traditional partisan divisions, forcing even the Communist Party to abandon their initial opposition to his anti-alcohol measures.

The campaign's concrete achievements—removing alcohol from urban school canteens, increasing alcohol taxes, establishing licensing restrictions, and creating national discourse treating alcoholism as a public health issue—demonstrated the transformative potential of coherent ideological vision applied to nutrition policy.

However, the rapid reversal of these reforms after Mendès France's government fell in February 1955 equally confirms ideology's centrality. Without the sustained ideological commitment that generated these policies, they proved vulnerable to traditional political pressures as Edgar Faure's radical socialist government reinstated home distiller privileges, restored beet subsidies, and allowed closed distilleries to reopen<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Joseph, Bohling. (2012). "The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954-1976", (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2019), p. 79.

## Chapter 2: The Loi Royer (1973)

The milk campaign and anti-alcohol initiatives of Pierre Mendès France represented an early attempt by the French state to shape nutritional habits through direct intervention. While these policies emerged from a republican and technocratic ideology that prioritized public health over entrenched cultural identity and economic interests, the next significant chapter in French nutritional policy would take a distinctly different ideological approach. By the early 1970s, France's retail landscape had undergone an important transformation with the rise of hypermarkets and suburban shopping centers, fundamentally altering how French citizens accessed food. The Loi Royer (1973) tried to slow down this brutal development, requiring government authorization for large retail developments, in order to protect traditional small commerce from hypermarket expansion while preserving the commercial networks through which French food culture was transmitted.

Under President Georges Pompidou's more conservative government, the policy response to these changes would be driven by two fundamental imperatives: political stabilization and cultural preservation. Rather than focusing on what the French consumed, as Mendès France had done, the Pompidou administration concentrated on preserving the traditional commercial structures through which citizens obtained their food.

### I. Historical Context

#### Pompidou's Evolutive Ideology

A deeper examination of Georges Pompidou's governance reveals a significant evolution in his thinking that directly shaped French policies on commerce, industry, and by extension, food systems. George Pompidou was born in Auvergne and more specifically Cantal, an active countryside where his grandparents were farmers and he developed a close link to nature and agriculture<sup>64</sup>. He used to be a French literature professor before the war and his Gaullist political

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<sup>64</sup> Florence, Dartois. « Georges Pompidou : analyse du paradoxe de sa politique environnementale », *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel*, 2024.

career within the Union des démocrates pour la République party<sup>65</sup>. During his time as Prime Minister under de Gaulle (1962-1968) and later as President (1969-1974), Pompidou was fundamentally "a conservateur moderne" who sought to balance economic progress with cultural preservation<sup>66</sup>. Pompidou's approach reflected a "structured paradox" where economic modernization and cultural preservation were integrated elements of a coherent policy vision rather than contradictory impulses<sup>67</sup>. His governing philosophy emphasized the importance of politics in supporting development and to supervise it, meaning that political leadership should actively coordinate economic change rather than simply defer to market forces or technocratic solutions alone<sup>68</sup>.

As historian Sibre explains in an interview, "The core of his mission, following General de Gaulle's example, would be to maintain France's standing at the international level. France needed to be powerful both externally and internally. And power, at that time, was clearly defined at the economic and industrial level."<sup>69</sup> This perspective shaped his initial approach to food systems, where agricultural modernization and industrialized food production were prioritized. Pompidou championed policies that encouraged industrial concentration and modernization, seeing them as essential to French economic competitiveness.

Pompidou's modernization vision was perhaps most evident in his passionate promotion of automobile infrastructure. As a car lover he championed France's automobile industry and the development of a nationwide highway system. He personified this commitment by inaugurating the A6 autoroute in October 1970, notably driving a Renault 16 along the newly completed route connecting Marseille to Lille<sup>70</sup>. This car-centered development directly enabled the rise of peripheral hypermarkets that threatened traditional commerce. When Carrefour opened France's first hypermarket in 1963 at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois outside Paris<sup>71</sup>, it was explicitly recognized that commercial success depended on automobile access, positioning large retail spaces in suburban locations where land was cheaper and parking abundant. This

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<sup>65</sup> Dartois, Florence. « Georges Pompidou : analyse du paradoxe de sa politique environnementale », *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel*, 2024.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>70</sup> Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, « Georges Pompidou inaugure l'autoroute A6 au volant d'une R16 », October 29, 1970, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmeuqlOWXH0>.

<sup>71</sup> Sarah, Tuchscherer. « Il y a 60 ans, le premier hypermarché de France ouvrait dans l'Essone », *France Bleu*, June 15, 2023.

model, which depended entirely on the automobile infrastructure Pompidou advocated, directly undermined the traditional commercial centers that the Loi Royer would later attempt to protect.



**Figure 1:** First hypermarket Carrefour, at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, in 1963, AFP Handout/Carrefour.

However, by the early 1970s, Pompidou demonstrated a more nuanced position. While his advisor Bernard Esambert described France as being in an “economic war”, Pompidou simultaneously recognized the need to preserve environmental balance<sup>72</sup>. There is an evolution through his Chicago speech where he warned that “Material civilization dating back to Antiquity, this construction of humanity built on predation, or at least on growth and the exploitation of resources, can turn against itself.”<sup>73</sup>. Similarly, by 1972, after becoming President and facing both the social realities of rapid commercial transformation and the political crisis of small merchant mobilization, Pompidou's rhetoric had shifted dramatically. Most tellingly, his statement that “gigantism today shows its limitations and reveals its disadvantages.” signaled a reconsideration of the unchecked modernization he had previously

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<sup>72</sup> Dartois, Florence. « Georges Pompidou : analyse du paradoxe de sa politique environnementale », Institut National de l’Audiovisuel, 2024.

<sup>73</sup> Olivier Sibre, « Georges Pompidou : analyse du paradoxe de sa politique environnementale », interviewed by Florence Dartois, Institut National de l’Audiovisuel, 2024.

advocated<sup>74</sup>. Furthermore, Pompidou has a strong connection to rural France, described as "un homme enraciné", meaning a rooted man with deep ties to the Cantal region. His 1967 Aurillac speech specifically addressed agricultural policy, where he describes his vision of nature, but especially agriculture as "essential to national prosperity."<sup>75</sup> This rural connection provided a counterbalance to purely modern and economic approaches to food systems. What emerges from this examination is not, as historian Olivier Sibre emphasizes, a contradictory "en même temps"<sup>76</sup> position, but rather a "paradoxe structuré"<sup>77</sup>— as defined earlier— where economic modernization and cultural preservation were integrated elements of a coherent policy vision: "he is someone who coordinates and structures all of his action. There is this essential notion in his thinking of the importance of politics in supporting development"<sup>78</sup>.

By reframing commercial policy as a matter of cultural preservation and political stabilization rather than simply economic rationalization, Pompidou established the conceptual framework within which Royer would craft his legislation. This balanced approach established a foundation upon which subsequent French governments would approach nutrition policy— seeking to modernize food systems while preserving France's exceptional culinary heritage and gradually incorporating emerging public health and environmental concerns.

## The Hypermarket Revolution

The transformation of French retail that began in the late 1950s—caused by the major population shift to the suburbs, as people moved en masse out of congested city centers to settle in peripheral areas— fundamentally altered how citizens accessed food, creating both a cultural dilemma and a political challenge that would be approached very differently under Pompidou's conservative government than it had been under Mendès France's technocratic and republican vision. The rise of large-scale retailing in France began in the 1960s, with the first supermarket opening in 1957 and the first hypermarket following in 1963<sup>79</sup>. By 1972, France had 209

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<sup>74</sup> Anne Marie, Lebrun. "La Grande Distribution face à la Loi Royer Evolution et Enjeux", (Colloque, Université de Bourgogne, 1999), p. 313.

<sup>75</sup> Florence Dartois. « Georges Pompidou : analyse du paradoxe de sa politique environnementale », Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, 2024.

<sup>76</sup> "At the same time »

<sup>77</sup> "Structured paradox »

<sup>78</sup> Florence, Dartois. « Georges Pompidou : analyse du paradoxe de sa politique environnementale », Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, 2024.

<sup>79</sup> Anne Marie, Lebrun. "La Grande Distribution face à la Loi Royer Evolution et Enjeux", (Colloque, Université de Bourgogne, 1999), p. 313.

hypermarkets and 2,334 supermarkets, a transformation that revolutionized food purchasing patterns and dietary possibilities for millions of French citizens<sup>80</sup>.

This retail revolution presented a dual threat for small merchants: politically, it endangered the livelihoods of a significant and politically powerful merchant class; culturally, it challenged traditional French food practices and social interactions. Hypermarkets fundamentally restructured the French food environment by making a wider range of processed and packaged foods available at lower prices, reducing direct interaction between consumers and food producers or specialists, creating a self-service model that emphasized visual marketing over traditional guidance<sup>81</sup>. The neighborhood butcher who advised on cuts and preparation techniques, the local cheese merchant who recommended seasonal varieties, and the baker who provided daily fresh bread were increasingly replaced by impersonal, standardized shopping experiences. This transformation represented not merely an economic shift but a cultural rupture threatening traditional patterns of food knowledge transmission and social interaction around food. The "métiers de bouche" were seen as guardians of culinary wisdom that could not be replicated in hypermarket formats.

## Early Regulatory Attempts

In response to these rapid changes in the retail landscape, the government began implementing regulatory measures that revealed emerging concerns about both the cultural implications of changing food access patterns and the political ramifications of small merchant discontent. As early as July 29, 1969, a circular established commissions responsible for commercial planning in connection with urban development schemes and land use plans<sup>82</sup>. Though these commissions lacked decisive power, they represented an early recognition that unrestricted retail development might have undesirable consequences for France's food culture, social fabric, and political stability.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibidem

<sup>81</sup> Steven Leslie, Burt. « The Loi Royer and hypermarket development in France – a study of public policy towards retailing », (Thesis, University of Stirling, 1985), pp. 44-45.

<sup>82</sup> Marchand M., "Les effets pervers de la loi Royer, *Revue Française de Gestion*", 23, 1979. Cited in Cliquet, Gérard, Véronique des Garets, and Guy Basset. "50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales," 2008, p.3.

Building on these initial efforts, further regulatory steps followed on August 27, 1970, when a circular created a 15-member consultative committee chaired by the prefect that would issue opinions on all retail spaces exceeding 1,000m<sup>2</sup>, as well as smaller spaces if they threatened existing commercial structures. By December 1970, the threshold for committee intervention was raised from 1,000 to 3,000m<sup>2</sup> through an amendment to the Finance Law<sup>83</sup>.

These preliminary efforts revealed the beginnings of what would become the dual imperative driving the Loi Royer: the political need to respond to small merchant mobilization and the cultural desire to preserve traditional commercial forms. The Loi Royer would attempt to address both imperatives within a coherent regulatory framework that preserved traditional food knowledge while channeling small merchant discontent from the streets into institutional procedures.

## II. Loi Royer

### Policy Content and Implementation

Building on Pompidou's evolving approach to balancing modernization with tradition, the Loi Royer, officially titled "Loi d'orientation du commerce et de l'artisanat" belonged to a category of French legislation that established general principles and frameworks rather than detailed regulations. This approach drew criticism during Senate debates, where Marcel Martin—Meurthe-et-Moselle Senator not affiliated to any group but supporter of Loi Roer—complained of finding "very few dispositions of positive law, but many declarations of intention" and characterized the "formula of orientation laws" as "often a law of resignation"<sup>84</sup>.

Despite these criticisms, the law's had influential provisions such as "*urbanisme commercial*"—a system requiring prior authorization for large retail developments. This represented an innovative extension of state planning authority from traditional land-use concerns to questions

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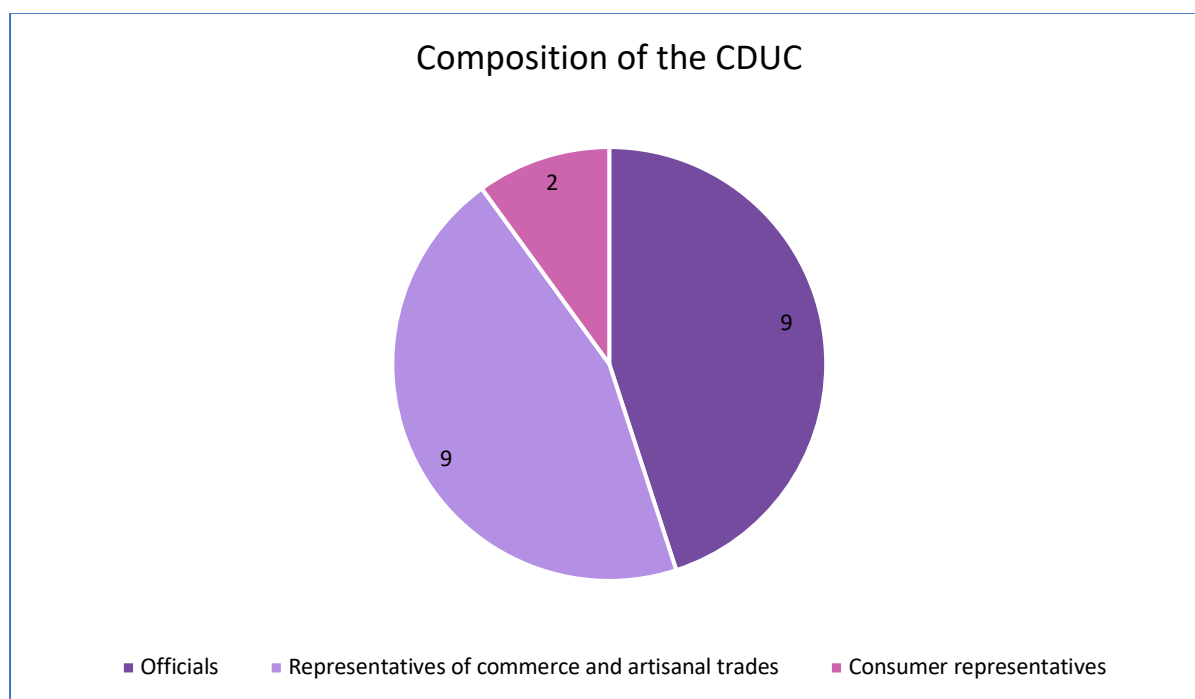
<sup>83</sup> Cliquet, Gérard, Des Garets Véronique, and Basset Guy. "50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales," 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.3.

<sup>84</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, Compte Rendu Intégral, Séance du Mercredi 14 Novembre 1973, p. 1655

of economic structure and cultural preservation. More significantly, it created an institutional mechanism for addressing both political imperatives (giving small merchants formal voice in development decisions) and cultural concerns (evaluating retail projects against criteria that included "quality of life" and "urban and rural vitality").

## The CDUC System

At the heart of the Loi Royer stood the creation of Commissions Départementales d'Urbanisme Commercial (CDUCs), departmental committees charged with authorizing or denying retail developments above certain thresholds. Article 29 of the law stipulated that retail developments with sales areas exceeding 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> (or 1,500 m<sup>2</sup> in communes with 40,000 inhabitants or more) would be subject to prior authorization by the departmental commercial urban planning commissions<sup>85</sup>. The commissions themselves had a calculated composition that revealed the law's dual political-cultural imperative: 20 members including nine elected officials, nine representatives of commerce and artisanal trades, and two consumer representatives. This tripartite structure—combining political, commercial, and (minimally) consumer interests—aimed to create a deliberative body that could weigh multiple considerations while giving significant voice to small merchants.



<sup>85</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République française*, Lois et Décrets 30 décembre 1973, p. 14142

## **Figure 2: Composition of the CDUC**

The CDUCs composition represented a deliberate political strategy to channel merchant discontent from disruptive street protests into institutional procedures. By giving commercial interests equal representation with elected officials, the law offered merchants not just protection but political voice. Simultaneously, by including criteria related to "quality of life" and social impact, the commissions were empowered to consider cultural preservation alongside economic factors<sup>86</sup>. The prefect chaired the commission but had no voting rights, a limitation that reflected both decentralizing tendencies in French administration and the government's desire to distance itself from potentially controversial decisions, in case of conflict will be submitted to the Minister of Trade and Crafts but only in case of last resort<sup>87</sup>. This structure institutionalized a distinctly conservative approach to governance: decisions would be made not by technocrats and bureaucrats but by local stakeholders directly affected by commercial developments.

## **III. Ideology Influence on Loi Royer**

### **Cultural Preservation as a Conservative Practice**

The Loi Royer demonstrated how conservative ideology shaped the nutrition sector through indirect means rather than direct intervention. Unlike Mendès France's technocratic approach using scientific expertise to challenge traditional practices, the Loi Royer reflected conservative belief that traditional institutions naturally sustained proper cultural practices, including food habits. Pompidou's governing used a dirigiste method however—contrarily to Mendès France—not to impose change but to preserve traditions.

Beyond establishing the CDUC system as a procedural mechanism, the Loi Royer explicitly codified cultural preservation as a foundational principle of French commercial policy. The

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<sup>86</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République française*, Lois et Décrets, 30 décembre 1973, pp. 14139

<sup>87</sup> Cliquet, Gérard, Des Garets Véronique, and Basset Guy. "50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales," 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.4.

law's first article established this foundational principle, affirming that commerce and craft industries must contribute to "quality of life," "urban and rural vitality," and "balanced economic competitiveness"<sup>88</sup>. In the context of food retail, these principles reflected the belief that traditional merchant networks supported both French cultural identity and social cohesion in ways that mass distribution could not provide. Further emphasizing this cultural preservation mandate, the law wanted to avoid a "*croissance désordonnée*"<sup>89</sup> of new distribution formats that might "crush small businesses and waste commercial infrastructure"<sup>90</sup>. For food retailers, this framing positioned the hypermarket not merely as an economic competitor but as a potential threat to the fine-grained knowledge network through which culinary traditions and dietary guidance flowed to French consumers.

The law invoked a planning logic that considered moral, social, and territorial balance considerations rather than purely economic ones<sup>91</sup>. In cultural terms, this logic suggested that French identity and social cohesion depended not merely on food availability and pricing but on maintaining the commercial institutions through which traditional knowledge was transmitted between generations. Where Mendès France had sought to reshape French dietary habits through direct state intervention, the Loi Royer aimed to preserve the commercial institutions that conservatives believed naturally sustained proper French eating habits and social relations.

## IV. External Influences

### CIDUNATI and Small Merchant Activism

While the government was developing its initial regulatory framework, the hypermarket revolution sparked unprecedented political mobilization among small merchants, creating a crisis that demanded government response. CID-UNATI (Confédération Intersyndicale de Défense et d'Union Nationale des Travailleurs Indépendants), founded by Gérard Nicoud in

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<sup>88</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République française*, Lois et Décrets, 30 décembre 1973, pp. 14139

<sup>89</sup> "Disorderly growth"

<sup>90</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, Lois et Décrets, 30 décembre 1973, pp. 14139

<sup>91</sup> Steven Leslie, Burt. « The Loi Royer and hypermarket development in France – a study of public policy towards retailing », (Thesis, University of Stirling, 1985), p. 136.

1969, represented a confrontational style of small merchant activism. The CID (Committee of information and defense)— independent trade union with neo-Poujadist tendencies — was born in 1968, initially as a protest movement against the mandatory health insurance law for non-salaried, non-agricultural workers<sup>92</sup>. Unlike earlier small business organizations that operated through traditional lobbying channels, CI-DUNATI positioned itself as a revolutionary movement fighting against what it saw as a commercial colonization by large retail chains. Its rhetoric explicitly framed hypermarkets as an existential threat not merely to small merchants' livelihoods but to the French way of life itself.

The group's tactics escalated dramatically after this failure, with Nicoud declaring that "to make the formidable machine that is the State back down, it is necessary to take to the streets" and acknowledging that "the government only understands a fist on the table"<sup>93</sup>.

CID-UNATI's confrontational tactics were born from the political confusion that had shaken France just months earlier. In May 1968, students had occupied universities while millions of workers paralyzed factories— by walking off their jobs— across the country, bringing de Gaulle's seemingly unshakeable government to its knees. This lesson wasn't lost on small merchants like Gérard Nicoud. If students could shut down the Sorbonne and workers could bring factories to a standstill, why couldn't shopkeepers fight back against the hypermarkets threatening their livelihoods? May '68 had shown that polite petitions and parliamentary procedures weren't the only way to get the government's attention.

Nicoud's arrest in April 1969 following an attack on tax offices in La Tour-du-Pin sparked violent demonstrations that left 40 police officers and 10 protesters injured, transforming him into a martyr figure for small merchants<sup>94</sup>. The movement's tactics became increasingly aggressive, with CID-UNATI militants carrying out spectacular actions including intimidating

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<sup>92</sup> Bryan, Muller. "Le CID(-UNATI), un syndicat « subversif » (1968-1974) ?:" *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, N° 139-142, no. 1 (2021), p.113. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mate.139.0113>.

<sup>93</sup> Muller, Bryan. "Le CID(-UNATI), un syndicat « subversif » (1968-1974) ?:" *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* N° 139-142, no. 1 (2021), p114. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mate.139.0113>.

<sup>94</sup> « Ce que disent les commerçants », Panorama, RTF, 17 avril 1969. < <https://www.ina.fr/video/CAF86015143/ce-que-disent-les-commerçants-video.html>. >. Cited in Muller, Bryan. "Le CID(-UNATI), un syndicat « subversif » (1968-1974) ?:" *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* N° 139-142, no. 1 (2021), p. 114. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mate.139.0113>.

tax inspectors in their homes, threatening social security officials, and even kidnapping public officials—including the Gaullist mayor of La Tour-du-Pin in September 1969<sup>95</sup>.

Date	Place	Type of violence	Consequences
26/09/69	La Tour-du-Pin	Kidnapping	Nicoud on the run and 9 protesters arrested
25/11/70	Pont du Cheruy	Confrontation	Light injuries on UDR side and mutual accusations
23/02/71	Nantes	Confrontation	
17/04/72	Marseille	Obstruction and assault	
19/04/72	Lyon	Obstruction and confrontation	Journalists assaulted by the SAC
21/04/72	Brest	Obstruction and assault	Police intervention
21/04/72	Rouen	Obstruction attempt and assault	
22/04/72	Marcq-en-Baroeul	Confrontation	Police intervention, 5 protesters arrested, injured on both sides
22/02/73	Nantes	Assault	No injured

Figure 1, Incidents between Gaullist organizations and CID-UNATI under the IVth legislature, Muller (2021)

Unlike earlier small business organizations that operated through traditional lobbying channels, CI-DUNATI positioned itself as a revolutionary movement fighting against what it saw as a commercial colonization by large retail chains. Its rhetoric explicitly framed hypermarkets as an existential threat not merely to small merchants' livelihoods but to the French way of life itself. It was ultimately "the violent actions of CID-UNATI members that led the government to legislate and to limit the opening of large stores by the end of 1973."<sup>96</sup> Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of CID-UNATI's approach. The Royer Law provided critical "breathing room" for independent retailers. Between 1972 and 1986, the market share of

<sup>95</sup> Le Progrès, 26 septembre 1969 cited in Muller, Bryan. "Le CID(-UNATI), un syndicat « subversif » (1968-1974) ?" *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* N° 139-142, no. 1 (2021), p. 114. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mate.139.0113>.

<sup>96</sup> Gérard, Cliquet., Véronique, Des Garets., and Guy, Basset. "50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales," 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.3.

independent retailer associations grew substantially, with retailers' associations (*groupements de détaillants*), including Leclerc and Intermarché, increasing from 4.5% in 1972 to 22.2% of market share by 1986<sup>97</sup>. This remarkable growth occurred precisely during the period when the Royer Law's protections were in place, demonstrating how political activism translated into concrete economic benefits for small merchants.

The organization's use of violence through protests, threats and kidnappings caused serious concern, as did its growing influence within institutions. These developments convinced Pompidou's government that they were facing a real political crisis that required new laws to address. The 1972 "general strike against business tax" shows how the government tried to ease the fears of small business owners who worried about losing their social status. The government reduced the tax by 15% for merchants with fewer than fifteen employees, and later, through the Royer Law, exempted the poorest independent workers from certain taxes altogether<sup>98</sup>. This political pressure would become a primary driver of the Loi Royer, fundamentally shaping its approach and implementation. This legislation slowed the expansion of large retail outlets and encouraged external growth strategies, effectively constraining the expansion of large retail formats while giving independent merchants the opportunity to organize and adapt<sup>99</sup>.

CID-UNATI's leader himself recognized the effectiveness of these tactics: "no one can deny the evidence when comparing the results obtained by our social class until 1969 and those from 1969 to today... our victories are clearly the work of CID-UNATI"<sup>100</sup>. The movement achieved significant electoral successes between 1970 and 1972, gaining representation in professional bodies that institutionalized its influence, with Nicoud eventually becoming president of the national health insurance fund (CNAM)<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> Didier, Bury. Le « grand » commerce de détail en France de 1972 à 1986. *Économie & prévision*, n°79, 1987-3. p. 14, table 11; doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/ecop.1987.4985> [https://www.persee.fr/doc/ecop\\_0249-4744\\_1987\\_num\\_79\\_3\\_4985](https://www.persee.fr/doc/ecop_0249-4744_1987_num_79_3_4985)

<sup>98</sup> Muller, Bryan. "Le CID(-UNATI), un syndicat « subversif » (1968-1974) ?" *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* N° 139-142, no. 1 (2021), p.116. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mate.139.0113>.

<sup>99</sup> Bury Didier. Le « grand » commerce de détail en France de 1972 à 1986. In: *Économie & prévision*, n°79, 1987-3. p. 4 ; doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/ecop.1987.4985> [https://www.persee.fr/doc/ecop\\_0249-4744\\_1987\\_num\\_79\\_3\\_4985](https://www.persee.fr/doc/ecop_0249-4744_1987_num_79_3_4985)

<sup>100</sup> Nicoud cited in Muller, Bryan. "Le CID(-UNATI), un syndicat « subversif » (1968-1974) ?" *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* N° 139-142, no. 1 (2021), p. 114. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mate.139.0113>.

<sup>101</sup> Michel David, « L'épisode CIDUNATI 1968-1998 », *Cahiers de l'Institut supérieur des métiers*, août 1998, p. 17. Cited in Muller, Bryan. "Le CID(-UNATI), un syndicat « subversif » (1968-1974) ?" *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* N° 139-142, no. 1 (2021), p. 114. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mate.139.0113>.

Complementing its cultural preservation aims, the law represented a deliberate attempt to channel small merchant discontent from disruptive street protests back into institutional politics. By creating the CDUC system, it offered small merchants a formal voice in commercial development decisions, potentially defusing the confrontational tactics that had made CID-UNATI so disruptive. This strategy of political pacification through procedural inclusion reflected the conservative preference for stability over change and institutional mediation over direct action. The law created a "clientelist" relationship between the governing party and small merchants—a relationship based on exchanging regulatory protection for political support. By institutionalizing merchant influence in the retail approval process, it transformed an unpredictable protest movement into a more manageable interest group integrated into formal decision-making. This political calculation proved largely successful: while CID-UNATI continued to criticize specific aspects of implementation, the intensity of small merchant protest declined significantly after the law's passage<sup>102</sup>.

## **The Implicit Health Argument**

The Loi Royer's approach to public health reveals perhaps the most striking contrast with Mendès France's nutrition policies. Where Mendès France had explicitly targeted health outcomes through direct interventions in consumption habits, the Loi Royer addressed health only indirectly and implicitly, subordinating it to the law's political and cultural imperatives. Yet this apparent neglect of health considerations would later receive unexpected validation from evolving nutritional science.

The Loi Royer contained an implicit health argument that was rarely articulated directly: traditional French commerce, with its emphasis on personal relationships and specialized expertise, would naturally promote healthier eating patterns than impersonal hypermarkets with their emphasis on processed, packaged goods. The neighborhood merchants provided several nutritional benefits that hypermarkets threatened. They offered personalized guidance on food selection based on seasonal availability and quality, while preserving regional food specialties and preparation methods. These local shops facilitated social reinforcement of traditional meal patterns and food combinations, and enabled knowledge transfer between generations about proper food handling and preparation. Yet this argument remained unstated and unexamined in

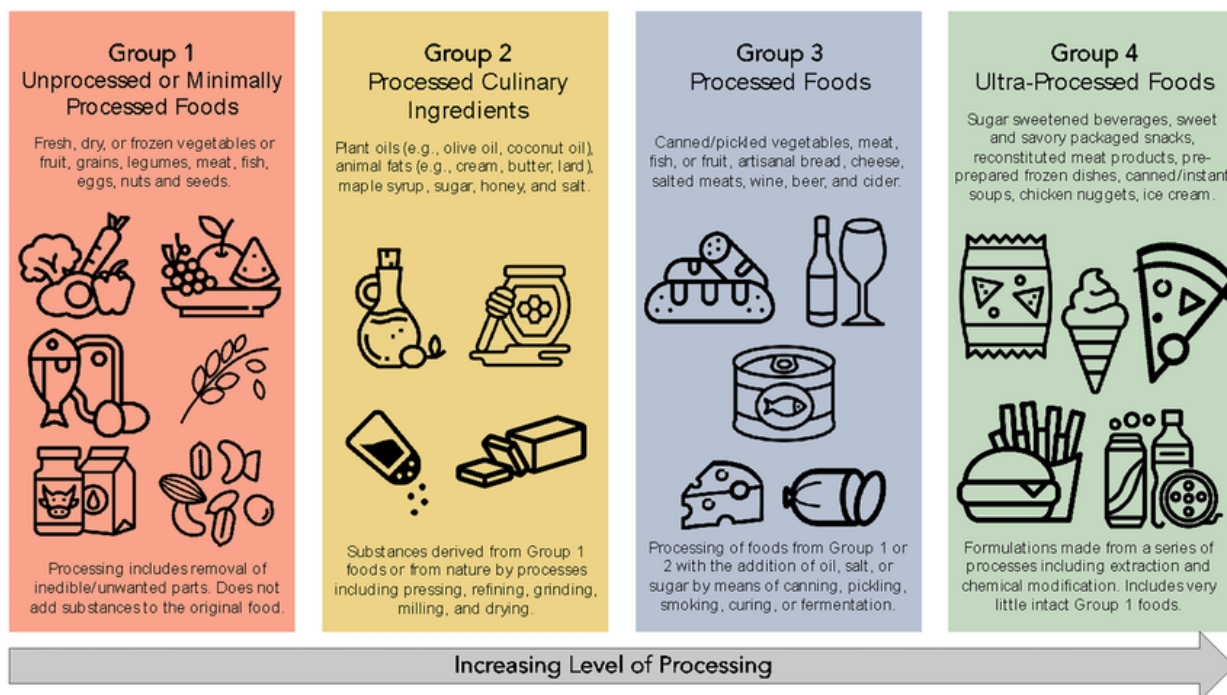
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<sup>102</sup> Steven Leslie, Burt. 1985, « The Loi Royer and hypermarket development in France – a study of public policy towards retailing », (Thesis, University of Stirling, 1985), pp. 493-494.

the law's development. Unlike Mendès France's milk campaign, which had been explicitly justified in public health terms and supported by nutritional science, the Loi Royer made no systematic attempt to demonstrate or measure the health benefits of traditional commercial forms. Instead, the legislation relied on an unexamined faith in tradition and prioritized political objectives over public health considerations.

Hypermarkets, by contrast, accelerated several nutritional transitions that would later be associated with poorer health outcomes. They increased ultra-processed food consumption because these products offered higher profit margins and because their extended shelf-life reduced inventory management costs. They promoted convenience foods that emphasized packaged, ready-to-eat products often containing higher levels of sodium, sugar, and saturated fats than fresh alternatives sold by traditional merchants. Hypermarkets also created a disconnection from seasonal eating patterns by sourcing globally and emphasizing year-round availability, disrupting traditional seasonal eating patterns that had implicitly balanced nutritional intake throughout the year. Finally, they pioneered marketing-driven consumption through sophisticated merchandising techniques that promoted impulse purchases of nutritionally poor foods.

Nutrition research in the decades following the Loi Royer has increasingly validated the health benefits of traditional food systems that the law inadvertently helped preserve. The NOVA classification system, developed in the 2000s, explicitly categorizes foods by degree of processing rather than nutrient content alone, recognizing that industrial processing itself affects nutritional quality independent of ingredient lists. By this standard, the traditional commerce protected by the Loi Royer predominantly traded in NOVA Group 1 (unprocessed/minimally processed foods), Group 2 (processed ingredients) and Group 3 (processed foods), while hypermarkets significantly expanded the market for Group 3 and Group 4 (ultra-processed foods).



**Figure 3:** Spectrum of processing of foods based on the NOVA classification. The figure provides examples of foods and types of processing methods within each NOVA classification group. Definitions are adapted from Monteiro et al. (2018)<sup>103</sup>

This retrospective validation offers a paradoxical insight into conservative approaches to nutrition policy. The defense of traditional commerce as cultural preservation and political stabilization may have simultaneously been an unrecognized defense of nutritional quality against industrialization processes that optimized for efficiency, convenience, and shelf-stability rather than health. The *métiers de bouche* were indeed, if unwittingly, guardians of nutritional wisdom embedded in traditional French foodways.

<sup>103</sup> Carlos Augusto, Monteiro., Geoffrey, Cannon., Jean-Claude Moubarac., Renata Bertazzi, Levy., Maria Laura C., Louzada., & Constante Jaime, Jaime. The UN Decade of Nutrition, the NOVA food classification and the trouble with ultra-processing. *Public health nutrition*, 21, no. 1 (2018), 5–17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980017000234>

## V. Outcomes

### Commercial Structure Outcomes

The practical impact of the CDUC system was both immediate and significant. CDUC authorization requirements resulted in very high rejection rates in the years following the law's passage. By 1977, for example, 57% of large store opening requests were denied, compared to 44% the previous year, with hypermarkets being the main victims at an 83% rejection rate<sup>104</sup>. Despite the Loi Royer's restrictive intent, the modernization of French retail continued at a remarkable pace. Statistical evidence reveals the law's limited effectiveness in slowing hypermarket expansion: between 1974 and 1992, while 23 million square meters of retail space were denied approval, 16 million were still authorized. By 1992, hypermarkets and supermarkets accounted for over 30% of all retail sales in marketable goods<sup>105</sup>. This growth, occurring well after the law's implementation, demonstrates the powerful economic forces driving retail consolidation despite regulatory barriers that try to follow the trend with amendments of the law.

Despite the comprehensive regulatory framework established by the Loi Royer, the law triggered immediate adaptive responses from retail developers determined to continue expansion despite new regulatory barriers. The most obvious strategy involved building stores just below the regulatory thresholds, creating what became known as "magasins de 999m<sup>2</sup>"—stores designed to maximize sales area while avoiding CDUC review. Many retailers sought to bypass the intent of the law by establishing multiple stores of exactly 999 square meters next to one another on the outskirts of major cities, thereby exploiting a legal loophole. This strategy led to the formation of “large shopping centers, known as “American style” shopping centers”<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> Gérard, Cliquet., Véronique, Des Garets., and Guy, Basset. “50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales,” 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.4.

<sup>105</sup> Anne Marie, Lebrun. “La Grande Distribution face à la Loi Royer Evolution et Enjeux”, (Colloque, Université de Bourgogne, 1999), p. 315.

<sup>106</sup>Lebrun, Anne Marie. “La Grande Distribution face à la Loi Royer Evolution et Enjeux”, (Colloque, Université de Bourgogne, 1999), p. 313.

These circumvention tactics revealed the limitations of policy approaches driven primarily by political and cultural imperatives rather than economic realities. While the law could establish procedural barriers to particular retail forms, it could not override the fundamental economic forces driving retail evolution. The result was not prevention of retail modernization but its channeling into alternative forms—forms that often preserved the economic advantages of scale while circumventing the law's specific restrictions<sup>107</sup>.

Beyond circumvention strategies by large retailers, the political coalition supporting the Loi Royer also faced internal challenges as small merchants themselves adapted to changing market conditions. Many independent merchants joined cooperative groups like Leclerc or Intermarché, which provided collective purchasing power and marketing support while preserving nominal independence. This strategy blurred the distinction between "small commerce" and "large distribution" that had animated the law's political framing.

In response to the strategies retailers used to circumvent existing regulations—such as building several medium-sized stores that individually remained under the legal threshold but collectively formed large retail complexes—the government introduced a legislative amendment at the end of 1990. This amendment broadened the scope of CDUC review to commercial ensembles whose aggregate space exceeded the thresholds, even if individual stores remained below them<sup>108</sup>.

To define "*ensemble commercial*" (retail complex) the law established four criteria: developments conceived as part of the same land operation, stores subject to common management, entities united within a common legal structure, or facilities sharing communal services or appearing as a single commercial entity. The last two criteria explicitly targeted the mini-centers developed by groups like Intermarché<sup>109</sup>.

Furthermore, the Sapin Law of 1993 brought a noticeable shift in how retail development projects were reviewed. The commission overseeing approvals was restructured to include fewer members, with only a couple of professionals from the sector, in an effort to reduce the influence of big retailers in the process. On top of that, appeals were no longer handled by the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibidem

<sup>108</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>109</sup> Ibidem.

minister but by a new national commission, and developers were now required to submit impact studies to better assess the consequences of their projects<sup>110</sup>.

Despite these reforms, "*les implantations de magasins ont continué*"<sup>111</sup> – store development persisted, albeit through increasingly sophisticated adaptation to the regulatory framework.

The adaptation of merchant groups to new market realities demonstrated both the political success and limitation of the Loi Royer. While it had successfully channeled merchant discontent from disruptive protest into institutional forms, it could not prevent the economic evolution of merchant operations themselves.

## Political Stabilization Versus Consumer Welfare

The implementation of the Loi Royer sparked significant debate that revealed the tensions between its political preservation aims and consumer economic interests. Calais-Auloy (1974) criticized the "The numerical imbalance between merchants and artisans on one side, and consumers on the other" as "truly scandalous"<sup>112</sup>. With nine representatives of commerce and artisanal trades versus only two consumer representatives, the commissions structurally favored producer interests over consumer welfare.

This imbalance reflected the law's prioritization of cultural preservation and political stabilization over consumer economic interests. From a consumer perspective, the hypermarket revolution had delivered tangible benefits: lower prices, greater variety, and one-stop shopping convenience. By obstructing the growth of these formats, the Loi Royer potentially denied consumers access to these advantages in the name of protecting established commercial interests and traditional retail forms.

The subordination of consumer interests to political and cultural imperatives pervaded discussions of the Loi Royer. Throughout the law, "the consumer is sacrificed wherever their interests clash with those of small shopkeepers or retail elites."<sup>113</sup> This critique highlighted how

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<sup>110</sup> Anne Marie, Lebrun. "La Grande Distribution face à la Loi Royer Evolution et Enjeux", (Colloque, Université de Bourgogne, 1999), p. 316.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem, p. 314.

<sup>112</sup> Jean, Calais-Auloy., and Mario, Bessone. "La loi Royer et les consommateurs." *Il Foro Italiano*, 97 (1974): 179/180-193/194, pp. 184.

<sup>113</sup> Jean, Calais-Auloy., and Mario, Bessone. "La loi Royer et les consommateurs." *Il Foro Italiano*, 97 (1974): 179/180-193/194, pp. 183.

thoroughly the duality of ideology and external influence dominated the law's conception and implementation, marginalizing competing values like economic efficiency or consumer choice.

However, the law's consumer protection provisions, including restrictions on misleading advertising (Article 44) and empowerment of consumer associations to take civil action (Article 45), produced more unambiguous benefits<sup>114</sup>. These measures strengthened consumer rights and helped professionalize the emerging consumer protection movement in France. The provisions requiring price transparency and prohibiting deceptive promotional practices established standards that would later be incorporated into broader consumer protection frameworks at European levels with the directive on misleading and comparative advertising (2006/114/EC) and the directive on unfair commercial practices (2005/29/EC).

In food quality terms, the preservation of traditional commerce may have helped maintain higher standards in certain product categories, particularly fresh foods where specialized knowledge affects selection and handling. The continued presence of specialized butchers, bakers, cheese vendors, and greengrocers in the French commercial landscape has provided consumers with alternatives to standardized supermarket offerings, maintaining diversity in food quality that might otherwise have been lost to homogenization and processed products.

## **Politics above Economic Rationality**

Beyond the consumer welfare critique, a central criticism of the Loi Royer characterized it as "malthusianist"—artificially restricting competition and economic development to satisfy political constituents rather than promoting economic efficiency. During Senate debates, senator Marcel Martin warned that the law risked creating "a rent situation" for already-established large retailers while failing to address the fundamental advantages they enjoyed through preferential taxation, infrastructure subsidies, and financing advantages<sup>115</sup>.

This criticism identified a paradox at the heart of the Loi Royer: by restricting new entry into large-format retail, it potentially strengthened the market power of existing players while claiming to protect small merchants. This paradox revealed how the law's political imperative—responding to small merchant mobilization—could produce economic outcomes at odds with

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<sup>114</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République française*, Lois et Décrets, 30 December 1973, p. 14143.

<sup>115</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, Compte Rendu Intégral, Séance du Mercredi 14 Novembre 1973, p. 1655

its stated purpose. The law might satisfy the political demand for visible action while failing to address the underlying economic forces driving retail transformation. Critics identified the law's potential conflicts with broader economic principles early in its implementation. Cliquet et al. (2008) note that scholars like Calais-Auloy (1974) promptly recognized implicit threats to entrepreneurial freedom and elements of corporatism in the law, despite its alleged foundation on 'freedom and willingness to undertake' according to Royer himself<sup>116</sup>.

Some legal scholars went further, arguing that the law conflicted with the Treaty of Rome<sup>117</sup>, particularly regarding the principle of freedom of establishment in Article 52<sup>118</sup>. However, the European Court twice confirmed judgments against merchants who had expanded their retail space without authorization, clarifying that Article 52 applied only to merchants establishing themselves in another member country<sup>119</sup>.

The Royer law ultimately was insufficient in addressing the concerns of small merchants concerns and it eventually led to further social unrest. Although officials asserted that the law had prevented an acceleration in the pace of large store openings<sup>120</sup>, the shortcomings of this law that intended to provide “the” solution and particularly to pacify small merchants led to new social troubles. In 1995, another small merchant union, the CDCA (Comité de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans), pressured the government to legislate again after setting fire to the tax office in Bordeaux, a city whose mayor Alain Juppé, was the Prime Minister at the time<sup>121</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> Gérard, Cliquet., Véronique, Des Garets, and Guy, Basset. “50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales,” 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.8.

<sup>117</sup> Cas G., Bout R., “La création et l’extension des magasins à grande surface, Lamy Droit économique 2000”, *Concurrence, Distribution, Consommation*, 1999, p. 139. Cited in Cliquet, Gérard, Des Garets Véronique, and Basset Guy. “50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales,” 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.8.

<sup>118</sup> Garron R., *Confrontation entre la loi française d’orientation du commerce et les dispositions du traité de Rome*, Etudes offertes à Alfred Jauffret, Faculté de Droit et de Sciences Politiques d’Aix-Marseille, 1974, pp. 307 et 319. Cited in Cliquet, Gérard, Des Garets Véronique, and Basset Guy. “50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales,” 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.8.

<sup>119</sup> Gérard, Cliquet., Véronique, Des Garets., and Guy, Basset. “50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales,” 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.8.

<sup>120</sup> Le Coq V., « Vingt années d’application de la réglementation des centres commerciaux, » *Actualité Juridique de la Propriété Immobilière*, 1994, p. 102. Cited in Cliquet, Gérard, Véronique des Garets, and Guy Basset. “50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales,” 2008, pp.8.

<sup>121</sup> Gérard, Cliquet., Véronique, Des Garets., and Guy, Basset. “50 ans de grandes surfaces en France : entre croissance débridée et contraintes légales,” 71th International Congress Marketing Trends Venice, 2008, p.8.

By focusing on controlling store openings rather than equalizing competitive conditions, the law prioritized visible symbolic action over structural economic reform, a choice that reflected its origins in political crisis management rather than economic planning.

## International Comparisons

In this sense, the Loi Royer distinguished French commercial development from the more rapid and complete transformation seen in less regulated retail markets. In developing countries like Argentina, Chile, and Indonesia, the absence of strong regulatory frameworks allowed for dramatic disruption of traditional retail. In urban Argentina, approximately 64,000 small food shops went out of business between 1984 and 1993 during the most intense period of supermarket expansion<sup>122</sup>. In Chile, nearly 16,000 small shops disappeared in just four years (1991-1995) in Santiago alone<sup>123</sup>. The Indonesian experience shows a continuing 2% annual decline in traditional retail while supermarket sales rise by 15% yearly<sup>124</sup>.

However, compared to countries like Italy, where small specialty food shops maintain a stronger presence in everyday life, France has experienced a more pronounced decline in its *petit commerce* ecosystem. While France did preserve certain specialty shops—particularly bakeries, which remain cultural institutions—the overall trend has favored consolidation. Today, the majority of French consumers conduct their regular food shopping at supermarkets

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<sup>122</sup> Graciela, Gutman. « Transformaciones recientes en la distribución de alimentos en Argentina, Buenos Aires: Secretaría de Agricultura », Ganadería, Pesca y Alimentación (SAGPyA) and Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación Agrícola (IICA), (1997). Cited in Reardon, T., Hopkins, R., « The Supermarket Revolution in Developing Countries: Policies to Address Emerging Tensions Among Supermarkets, Suppliers and Traditional Retailers », The European Journal of Development Research, Vol.18, No.4, December 2006, p.526, DOI: 10.1080/09578810601070613.

<sup>123</sup> Faiguenbaum, S., Berdegue, J.A. and Reardon, T., 2002, 'The Rise of Supermarkets in Chile: Effects on Producers in the Horticulture, Dairy, and Beef Chains', Development Policy Review, Vol.20, No.4 (September), pp.459–471. Cited in Reardon, T., Hopkins, R., « The Supermarket Revolution in Developing Countries: Policies to Address Emerging Tensions Among Supermarkets, Suppliers and Traditional Retailers », The European Journal of Development Research, Vol.18, No.4, December 2006, p.526, DOI: 10.1080/09578810601070613.

<sup>124</sup> Natawidjaja, R.S., Perdana, T., Rasmikayati, E., Insan, T., Bahri, S., Reardon, T. and Hernandez, R., 2006, 'The Effects of Retail and Wholesale Transformation on Horticulture Supply Chains in Indonesia: With Tomato illustration from West Java', Draft report for the World Bank by the Center for Agricultural Policy and Agribusiness Studies (CAPAS) Padjadjaran University, Bandung, and Michigan State University, October 2006. Cited in Reardon, T., Hopkins, R., « The Supermarket Revolution in Developing Countries: Policies to Address Emerging Tensions Among Supermarkets, Suppliers and Traditional Retailers », The European Journal of Development Research, Vol.18, No.4, December 2006, p.526, DOI: 10.1080/09578810601070613.

and hypermarkets, with only a small elite minority consistently supporting local merchants, organic markets, and specialty food shops.

This shift correlates with broader societal changes that the Loi Royer could not address. The increased participation of women in the workforce — after Second World War and the decrease of patriarchal ideas following a strong secularization — significantly reduced the time traditionally devoted to daily food shopping and meal preparation. This social transformation created demand for convenience that supermarkets were uniquely positioned to satisfy.

The consequences of this phenomenon for French culinary traditions have been profound. The knowledge of traditional cooking techniques has declined precipitously among younger generations. Few modern French households regularly prepare sauces or time-consuming dishes that once defined French gastronomy such as pot-au-feu or coq-au-vin. Even in the restaurant industry, establishments serving authentic traditional French cuisine have diminished, replaced by international concepts. This concerning trend in the diminution of authentic French culinary establishments "constitutes a significant preoccupation" for two-Michelin-starred chef Jean-François Piège, as articulated during his Europe 1 interview. His perspective, supported by renowned chef Yves Camdeborde, highlights the progressive disappearance of traditional French restaurants throughout Paris and all over France<sup>125</sup>. On the contrary stands Italian gastronomy that is still dominating all over the peninsula with regional specialty and national cuisine. This culinary resilience may potentially be attributed to Italy's historically entrenched patriarchal social structure, which was significantly reinforced by religious institutions, coupled with a comparatively steady pace of economic development and modernization.

Unlike Mendès France's direct technocratic interventions—driven by clear ideological conviction that challenged cultural practices in the name of public health—the Loi Royer emerged primarily as a reactive response to merchant mobilization and political crisis. While the law was eventually framed within Pompidou's conservative philosophy of preserving traditional networks, its fundamental architecture was dictated by the violent protests of CID-UNATI and the urgent need for political stabilization rather than by any coherent ideological vision about nutrition or food systems.

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<sup>125</sup> Laurent Mariotte, host, *La Table des Bons Vivants*, Intégrale du 25 janvier 2025, 57min, Europe 1, <https://www.europe1.fr/emissions/laurent-mariotte-vous-accueille-a-la-table-des-bons-vivants/integrale-du-25-janvier-les-inventions-culinaires-les-plus-folles-de-lhistoire-laurent-mariotte-recoit-jean-francois-piege-259107>.

This contrast—between ideologically-driven policy and externally-pressured reaction—illuminates a crucial paradox in nutrition governance. While Pompidou's government never explicitly framed the Loi Royer as a health intervention, its protection of traditional commerce inadvertently preserved food distribution systems that modern nutritional science now recognizes as superior to the ultra-processed food environments promoted by hypermarkets. The *métiers de bouche*—butchers, bakers, cheese vendors, and greengrocers—were indeed guardians of nutritional wisdom, though neither they nor their political protectors understood their role in these terms.

The law's reactive origins also created perverse economic incentives that distorted market competition while failing to achieve its preservation goals. By restricting new large-format retail while leaving existing hypermarkets protected from competition, the Loi Royer inadvertently strengthened the market position of established players—the very forces it claimed to resist. The result was a policy that appeared to protect small commerce while actually consolidating the dominance of existing large retailers.

Furthermore, by institutionalizing merchant political influence through the CDUC system, the law transformed nutrition-related commercial decisions from matters of public policy into exercises in interest group management. This shift from technocratic evaluation to political negotiation meant that food access questions—with their profound implications for public health—became subject to the bargaining power of organized commercial interests rather than evidence-based assessment of nutritional and social needs.

This analysis suggests that sustainable nutrition policy requires strong ideological frameworks rather than reactive responses to external pressures. While the Loi Royer's external influences accidentally preserved beneficial food distribution systems, this preservation occurred despite, not because of, the policy's reactive origins. The law's continuous need for amendments and its ultimate inability to prevent retail transformation demonstrates how policies shaped primarily by external pressures lack the ideological coherence necessary for lasting effectiveness.

## **Chapter 3: The Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS)**

The Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS), initiated on January 31, 2001, is a public health policy crafted for the improvement of population health supported by a balanced diet, physical activity, and chronic disease prevention through scientifically validated and culturally relevant strategies. This program enabled the country to move to a worldwide leading position as regards nutritional prevention of chronic diseases and for health promotion.

The PNNS introduced a new direction in French approaches to food and nutrition policy, by shifting from a traditional quantitative concern about food security to qualitative considerations of nutritional quality and health outcomes. This transition reflected the evolution of historical context moving from post-war concerns about scarcity and insufficient production to contemporary challenges of overconsumption, poor dietary quality, and nutrition-related chronic diseases. The program was developed at a time when the French political economy shifted from an active state to market-oriented governance models which endorsed individual responsibility and voluntary market solutions. Understanding how these broader ideological shifts manifested in nutrition policy provides insights into the changing nature of French public policy and the complex interplay between domestic political orientations and external constraints. Therefore, this chapter investigates how political ideologies, particularly the pragmatic socialism of Lionel Jospin's government, shaped the creation, implementation, and evolution of the PNNS.

### **I. Historical Context**

#### **The Cohabitation Context**

The PNNS's was launched during the third cohabitation of the Fifth Republic (1997-2002), a period that fundamentally altered French political dynamics and created particular settings that favored a pragmatic policy innovation. This cohabitation between President Jacques Chirac (Rassemblement Pour la République, center-right) and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (Socialist

Party) was the longest since 1958 and significantly influenced the political context for policy development. This cohabitation differed significantly from its predecessors, as it represented the first time since 1958 that a right-wing president faced a left-wing prime minister and parliamentary majority, creating an unprecedented configuration that left the head of state significantly weakened after only two years in office. This situation profoundly altered the balance of executive power in favor of the Prime Minister, with the cohabitation leaning toward a constitutional interpretation that privileged governmental authority over presidential prerogatives in domestic affairs<sup>126</sup>.

This political setting generated significant tensions and conflicts between the two heads of the executive. These tensions reflected a fundamental reality: both the president and prime minister remained rivals impatient to end a cohabitation that constrained them both. The apparent consensus achieved during cohabitation represented not genuine agreement but rather a forced alignment around the lowest common denominator, as both parties avoided publicly contesting each other's positions and sought to avoid ostensibly hindering one another<sup>127</sup>. However, some conflicts arose between President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin, with frequent clashes over both domestic and foreign policy issues. These conflicts ranged from economic policy (Chirac's criticism of the 35-hour work week as "hazardous experiments") to foreign affairs (disagreements over NATO integration, Middle East policy, and post-9/11 responses). These tensions revealed the inherent instability of divided executive authority<sup>128</sup>.

Jacques Chirac was born in Paris in 1932 and whose political career spanned over four decades and included successive positions as Minister of the Interior, Prime Minister under both Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand, Mayor of Paris for eighteen years, and President of the Republic from 1995 to 2007<sup>129</sup>. His political trajectory was marked by formative events that shaped his ideological identity in paradoxical ways, transforming potential weaknesses into sources of political strength. The creation of the RPR (Rassemblement pour la République) in 1976 provoked a "collective indignation" that united "the barons of Gaullism, the entire political class, journalists and intellectuals" against him, with accusations ranging from fascism to

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<sup>126</sup> Bernard, Lachaise. *Presidents, Prime Ministers and Majorities in the French Fifth Republic*. Edited by Sergiu Mişcoiu and Pierre-Emmanuel Guigo. Palgrave Studies in Presidential Politics. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024, p. 133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44664-1>.

<sup>127</sup> Samy, Cohen. "La diplomatie française dans la cohabitation", *Esprit*, June 2000, No. 264 (6) (Juin 2000) : 45-60, p. 56

<sup>128</sup> Ibidem, p. 140

<sup>129</sup> Ministère de l'Intérieur, « Jacques Chirac », <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/ministere/lhistoire-du-ministere/ministres-de-linterieur-de-1790-a-nos-jours/ve-republique/jacques>.

threats to democracy itself, even if it claimed to be an heir of Gaullism<sup>130</sup>. This stigmatization, rather than destroying his political prospects, paradoxically became a powerful political resource that distinguished him from traditional Gaullist leadership<sup>131</sup>. The RPR moved away from the more traditional, statist Gaullism toward a more electorally pragmatic and activist approach<sup>132</sup>. This formation forged a particular relationship to politics founded on solid confidence in politics itself to "save oneself symbolically and politically," enabling him to navigate multiple scandals and setbacks throughout his career, notably through social relations<sup>133</sup>.

Lionel Jospin was born on July 12, 1937, in Meudon. Son of a midwife who became a social worker for the Ministry of Education, a school teacher militant and member of the SFIO, Lionel Jospin was educated in a socialist and Protestant culture<sup>134</sup>. After graduating from Sciences Po Paris and the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA), he briefly pursued a diplomatic career before transitioning to academia as an economics professor. His political trajectory began in the margins, initially aligning with Trotskyist movements before joining the Socialist Party (PS) in 1971, where he quickly rose through the ranks to become a close ally of François Mitterrand<sup>135</sup>. Serving as First Secretary of the PS from 1981 to 1988, then as Minister of Education from 1988 to 1992, Jospin embodied a pragmatic form of socialism that sought to balance market efficiency with social justice<sup>136</sup>. After a second-place finish in the 1995 presidential election, he became Prime Minister in 1997 following the left's electoral victory, leading what would become the longest-serving government of the Fifth Republic. The Jospin government's characteristic approach emphasized practical action over ideological proclamation. This orientation reflected both the constraints of cohabitation and Jospin's personal preference for demonstrating governmental capacity through concrete achievements rather than rhetorical positioning<sup>137</sup>. The government sought to act on the left without explicitly

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<sup>130</sup> Annie, Collovald. "Le fabuleux destin de Jacques Chirac ou les mésaventures de la démagogie politique." *Mouvements* 23, no. 4 (2002), p. 124. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mouv.023.0123>.

<sup>131</sup> Bernard, Lachaise. *Presidents, Prime Ministers and Majorities in the French Fifth Republic*. Edited by Sergiu Mişcoiu and Pierre-Emmanuel Guigo. Palgrave Studies in Presidential Politics. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024, p. 133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44664-1>.

<sup>132</sup> Annie, Collovald. "Le fabuleux destin de Jacques Chirac ou les mésaventures de la démagogie politique." *Mouvements* 23, no. 4 (2002), p. 124. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mouv.023.0123>.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>134</sup> Gouvernement Français, « Lionel Jospin », December 11 2024, <https://www.info.gouv.fr/les-anciens-premiers-et-premieres-ministres-de-la-ve-republique/lionel-jospin>.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>137</sup> Michel, Marian. "Lionel Jospin, le socialisme et la réforme", *Esprit*, Mars-avril 1999, No. 251 (3/4) (Mars-avril 1999), p. 112.

invoking reform rhetoric, aiming to restore confidence in political engagement through demonstrated effectiveness rather than programmatic declarations.

The cohabitation period created political conditions that proved favorable to public health policy innovation. The need to avoid partisan controversy encouraged the government to prioritize consensual policy domains such as health promotion where broad agreement existed on goals, even if the preferred methods varied. In this context, public health emerged as a politically safe yet socially impactful arena for action. Prime Minister Jospin, when confident in a policy area, tended to centralize strategic decision-making while delegating operational details to administrative actors— which means delegating the content of the policy— even when those actors did not always align with the government's political objectives<sup>138</sup>. This mode of governance reflected a broader technocratic drift, increasingly visible in domains requiring complex implementation. Crucially, the emphasis on technocratic competence, scientific validation, and practical effectiveness aligned perfectly with the emerging logic of public health policy, allowing the PNNS to gain traction in a politically fragmented environment.

## **Economic Context and Adaptation to Capitalism**

The period surrounding the PNNS's creation coincided with exceptional economic performance that significantly influenced policy possibilities and governmental priorities. The year 2000 marked the culminant point of an expansion phase that had begun in mid-1996, with France experiencing sustained growth of 3.2% driven primarily by domestic demand but also benefiting from exceptional export performance (+13.6%) due to strong global demand and favorable competitiveness conditions for European economies<sup>139</sup>. These conditions offered fiscal space for public investment, yet the government chose a selective strategy: rather than expanding direct welfare provision, it emphasized activation, individual responsibility, and voluntary partnership which are key tenets of neoliberal governance. This ideological shift shaped the PNNS's design, favoring non-coercive instruments, soft regulation, and “government through labels”<sup>140</sup>.

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<sup>138</sup> Jean-Pierre, Sérén, and Dominique, Taddei. “Le gouvernement Jospin, de l’embellie à la désillusion”, *Mouvements* no. 41, (September 1, 2005), pp. 106. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mouv.041.0102>.

<sup>139</sup> Michel, Devilliers., and Lisa, Fratacci. “Retour sur l’année 2000”, INSEE, (March 2001), p. 20.

<sup>140</sup> Henri, Bergeron., Patrick, Castel., and Sophie, Dubuisson-Quellier. “Gouverner par les labels: Une comparaison des politiques de l’obésité et de la consommation durable.” *Gouvernement et action publique* VOL. 3, no. 3 (October 1, 2014), p.9. <https://doi.org/10.3917/gap.143.0007>.

The Jospin government's economic approach reflected a distinctive attempt to reconcile left-wing political identity with pragmatic adaptation to capitalist market constraints and globalization pressures<sup>141</sup>. The political voluntarism evident in youth employment programs and the 35-hour work week was accompanied by sound neo-Keynesian approaches, with economic policy focusing on consumption recovery to support activity, breaking favorably with previous deflationist logic<sup>142</sup>. This dual approach demonstrated what Frémeaux (2002) describes as the government conducting "a kind of French 'Blairism'" without directly acknowledging it, pursuing a policy of modernization aimed at elevating productivity and territorial attractiveness while ensuring this policy reinforced social cohesion<sup>143</sup>. France operated as a capitalist democracy strongly integrated into the European Union and global economy, with no political or sociological majority existing to break with this situation, profoundly shaped its policy approaches across domains. This economic policy approach demonstrated broader ideological transformations affecting public policy styles, with the government's preference for tax cuts over social investment, its continuation of privatization programs, and its embrace of European market integration directives all revealing the penetration of neoliberal economic thinking into Socialist governance<sup>144</sup>.

## Public Health

At the turn of the 21st century, France was facing a growing public health challenge marked by the rising prevalence of chronic diseases closely linked to nutritional factors. Cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes, obesity, and osteoporosis were becoming increasingly prevalent, with serious human, social, and economic consequences<sup>145</sup>.

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<sup>141</sup> Philippe, Frémeaux. "Lionel Jospin entre économie et politique." *L'Économie politique* 14, no. 2 (2002), p.54. <https://doi.org/10.3917/leco.014.0048>.

<sup>142</sup> Philippe, Frémeaux. "Lionel Jospin entre économie et politique." *L'Économie politique* 14, no. 2 (2002), p.50. <https://doi.org/10.3917/leco.014.0048>.

<sup>143</sup> Ibidem, p.51

<sup>144</sup> Ibidem, p.54

<sup>145</sup> Serge, Hercberg. "Le Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS) : un vrai programme de santé publique." *Cahiers de Nutrition et de Diététique* 46, no. 2 (May 2011): S5–10, p.S6. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960\(11\)70013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960(11)70013-X).

<i>Diseases</i>	<i>Mortality and Disease Rate</i>	<i>Cost</i>
<b>Cardiovascular diseases</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> cause of mortality  32% of deaths  (170 000 deaths/year)	€3 billion/year
<b>Cancers</b>	29% of deaths among men  23% among women  (240 000 new cases/year)	€8 billion/year
<b>Obesity</b>	7 to 10% of adults  10 to 12% of children aged 5-12	€1,8 billion/year
<b>Osteoporosis</b>	10% of women at age 50 ; 20% at age 60 ;                      40% at age 75  (2,8 millions women affected)	€1 billion/year
<b>Diabetes</b>	2-2,5% of adults	

**Figure 1:** Rapport Haut Conseil de la Santé Publique (2000), S. Hercberg & A. Tallec

Although France maintained one of the lowest rates of obesity in Europe at the time, this situation was constantly deteriorating<sup>146</sup>. Between 1997 and the early 2000s, a continuous rise in overweight and obesity was observed across the adult population, with prevalence increasing in nearly all age groups and both sexes, among women the prevalence of obesity rose from 11.9 to 13.6% between 2003 and 2006<sup>147</sup>. In parallel, the French adult population showed metabolic

<sup>146</sup> Katia Castetbon, Michel Vernay, Aurélie Malon, Benoit Salanave, Valérie Deschamps, Candice Roudier, Amivi Oleko, Emmanuelle Szego, and Serge Hercberg. "Dietary Intake, Physical Activity and Nutritional Status in Adults: The French Nutrition and Health Survey (ENNS, 2006–2007)." *British Journal of Nutrition* 102, no. 5 (September 14, 2009): 733–43, p.733. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114509274745>.

<sup>147</sup> Marie-Aline Charles, Eveline Eschwège, and Arnaud Basdevant. "Monitoring the Obesity Epidemic in France: The Obepi Surveys 1997–2006." *Obesity* 16, no. 9 (September 2008): 2182–86, p.2184. <https://doi.org/10.1038/oby.2008.285>.

profiles that diverged from other Western countries. The so-called "French paradox" was particularly notable: despite high total cholesterol levels, French individuals—especially men—had lower LDL cholesterol (the so-called “bad” cholesterol) and higher HDL cholesterol (“good” cholesterol). These biological profiles may partly explain the relatively low cardiovascular mortality in France at the time, though they did not offset the growing burden of nutrition-related conditions<sup>148</sup>. Additionally, insufficient intake of essential nutrients, low levels of fruit, vegetable, and seafood consumption, and suboptimal physical activity levels were becoming evident across the population, as later confirmed by an ENNS survey<sup>149</sup>. These factors all contributed to a national context that justified the creation of a comprehensive, government-led nutrition strategy.

## **II. Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS)**

### **Content of the PNNS**

The PNNS defines specific, measurable objectives that are updated every five years in accordance with public health legislation, based on expert recommendations coordinated by the Haut Conseil de la santé publique and informed by scientific assessments led primarily by ANSES (the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety). The program created a foundation of nutritional benchmarks, conforming to national food culture while associating public health objectives with notions of taste, pleasure, and conviviality.<sup>150</sup> This approach represented a deliberate attempt to reconcile public health imperatives with French cultural values, avoiding the prescriptive and prohibitive approaches characteristic of traditional public health interventions such as the Pierre Mendès-France’s Milk campaign. The PNNS was built on the idea that health and pleasure are not mutually exclusive, following dietary recommendations while sticking to the cultural heritage of French gastronomy is not incompatible. This cultural sensitivity distinguished the PNNS from more extreme technocratic

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<sup>148</sup> Katia Castetbon, Michel Vernay, Aurélie Malon, Benoit Salanave, Valérie Deschamps, Candice Roudier, Amivi Oleko, Emmanuelle Szego, and Serge Hercberg. “Dietary Intake, Physical Activity and Nutritional Status in Adults: The French Nutrition and Health Survey (ENNS, 2006–2007).” *British Journal of Nutrition* 102, no. 5 (September 14, 2009): 733–43, p.740. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114509274745>.

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem, p.733.

<sup>150</sup> Michel Chauliac. “Le Programme national nutrition santé : conception, stratégies, mise en œuvre, impacts.” *Les Tribunes de la santé* n° 49, (January 4, 2016): 29–39, p.30. <https://doi.org/10.3917/seve.049.0029>.

approaches to nutrition policy, reflecting both political necessities and genuine commitment to preserving French food culture.

The PNNS's nine priority nutritional objectives for the initial program demonstrated its comprehensive scope. These objectives included: increasing fruit and vegetable consumption to reduce small consumers by at least 25%; increasing calcium consumption while reducing vitamin D deficiencies by 25%; reducing average lipid intake contribution to less than 35% of daily energy intake; increasing carbohydrate consumption to contribute more than 50% of daily energy intake; decreasing annual alcohol consumption per capita by 20%; reducing average cholesterolemia by 5% in adults; reducing average systolic blood pressure by 2-3 mmHg in adults; reducing overweight and obesity prevalence by 20% in adults while stopping growth in children; and increasing daily physical activity by 25%<sup>151</sup>.

This positive approach extended to the program's communication strategy. Rather than focusing on nutrients, the PNNS developed consumption guidelines referring to foods "as purchased and consumed (fruits and vegetables, dairy products, bread, cereals, legumes, potatoes, meats, eggs, fish, added fats, sweet products, beverages, salt) and physical activity". These guidelines provided both quantitative information (such as "at least 5 fruits and vegetables per day") and qualitative guidance (such as "favor complete cereals or brown bread")<sup>152</sup>. The program's guides were developed by nutrition experts in close collaboration with communication professionals and were validated by multiple scientific bodies, ensuring both credibility and accessibility<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>151</sup> Serge Hercberg. "Le Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS) : un vrai programme de santé publique." *Cahiers de Nutrition et de Diététique* 46, no. 2 (May 2011): S5–10, p.S7. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960\(11\)70013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960(11)70013-X).

<sup>152</sup> Ibidem, S8

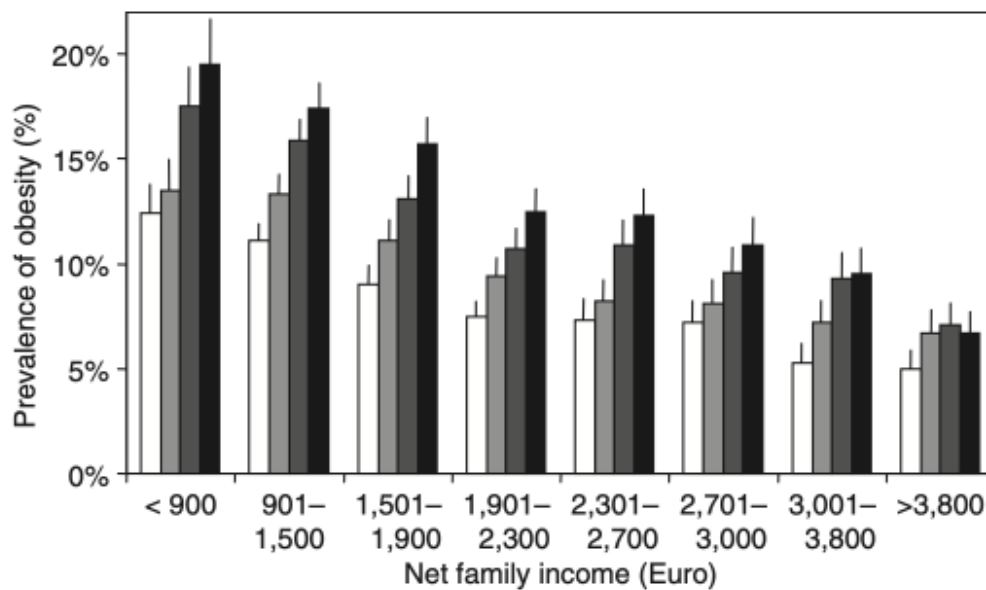
<sup>153</sup> Serge Hercberg. "Le Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS) : un vrai programme de santé publique." *Cahiers de Nutrition et de Diététique* 46, no. 2 (May 2011): S5–10, p.S8. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960\(11\)70013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960(11)70013-X).



**Figure 2:** “Fresh, canned, or frozen, fruits and vegetables protect your health”, Programme National Nutrition, 1990-2007

However, the program also faced significant challenges in establishing its authority and legitimacy. This positioning faced resistance when economic interests felt undervalued, leading to arguments about "stigmatization" of foods, prohibition, "medicalization" of food, food "hygienism," and culpabilization that allowed rejection of PNNS messages "in the name of a narrow vision of food pleasure or limited individual freedom."<sup>154</sup> The socio-economic impact has important consequences on obesity prevalence as visible on Figure 3 however it will only be considered as an issue under the second PNNS.

<sup>154</sup> Michel Chauillac. “Le Programme national nutrition santé : conception, stratégies, mise en œuvre, impacts.” *Les Tribunes de la santé* n° 49, no. 4 (January 4, 2016): 29–39, p.31. <https://doi.org/10.3917/seve.049.0029>.



**Figure 3:** Prevalence of obesity (with the upper 95% confidence interval) by monthly net household income in 1997 (white bar), 2000 (light grey bar), 2003 (dark grey bar), and 2006 (black bar): the French Obepi surveys<sup>155</sup>.

## Territorial Implementation

The PNNS implementation was realized through territorial governance, attempting to balance national coherence with local adaptation. While the policy and its program were designed at the central level, they underwent a process of territorial adaptation that created articulation between national and local levels. The national level developed reference frameworks and provided incentives, while local authorities worked to actively engage territorial communities in program implementation. This non-mandatory nature gave territorial stakeholders significant leverage, as national success depended on their cooperation. Even though, political dynamics sometimes discouraged elected officials, especially from opposing parties, from openly supporting the initiative<sup>156</sup>. This territorial approach reflected broader transformations in French governance, moving away from centralized administration toward more flexible, participatory approaches.

<sup>155</sup> Marie-Aline Charles, Eveline Eschwège, and Arnaud Basdevant. "Monitoring the Obesity Epidemic in France: The Obepi Surveys 1997–2006." *Obesity* 16, no. 9 (September 2008): 2182–86, p.2185. <https://doi.org/10.1038/oby.2008.285>.

<sup>156</sup> Solange Hernandez, and Leila Messaoudène. "La territorialisation de la politique alimentaire française : le regard des acteurs publics sur la gouvernance du PNNS." *Management & Avenir* n° 35, no. 5 (August 1, 2010): 235–53, p. 236. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mav.035.0235>.

For the French state, territorializing policies represents not a concession to local particularisms but rather an essential condition for effective action, with national policies being adapted into local initiatives. This evolution reflects efforts to create better coordination between different territorial levels and to build collaborative public action among diverse actors. The traditional state monopoly on collective intervention has gradually given way to new processes emphasizing interaction, collaboration and negotiation between various stakeholders with different backgrounds and interests<sup>157</sup>.

However, this territorial governance revealed important asymmetries in power relationships. The territorialization of the PNNS did not create a genuine balance of power between central and local levels, instead it was operating almost exclusively through top-down processes where policy flowed from national to local authorities<sup>158</sup>. The program's national character manifested across several dimensions, with communication strategies, objective setting and measurement, and financing arrangements remaining under central control. Given France's republican principles and national territory, a program with such ambitious goals necessarily required national coordination to ensure unified direction across all regions. Local initiatives were required to align with PNNS frameworks to receive support, with rigorous oversight mechanisms ensuring compliance with scientifically validated recommendations<sup>159</sup>.

Moreover, the PNNS label, created in October, 2001, and regulated by the ministerial decree of April 27, 2004, enabled recognition of actions aligned with program objectives<sup>160</sup>. More specifically, it ensures that messages related to nutrition—covering both diet and physical activity—are reliable and aligned with PNNS standards when featured in communication materials. It also contributes to maintaining the overall consistency of nutrition-related information and initiatives carried out in France<sup>161</sup>. Cities could become “PNNS cities” by respecting six general principles such as “the promotion and support of actions contributing to reach PNNS objectives”, while companies could obtain authorization to use specific

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<sup>157</sup> Solange Hernandez, and Leila Messaoudène. “La territorialisation de la politique alimentaire française: le regard des acteurs publics sur la gouvernance du PNNS:” *Management & Avenir* n° 35, no. 5 (August 1, 2010): 235–53, p. 240. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mav.035.0235>.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibidem*, p 236.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 243.

<sup>160</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, n° 0126, June 2, 2004.

<sup>161</sup> Ministère de la Santé, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, Institut National de Prévention et d'Éducation pour la Santé (INEPS), « Procédure d'attribution du Logo PNNS », [www.mangerbouger.fr](http://www.mangerbouger.fr).

formulations in their communications through voluntary engagement charters<sup>162</sup>. State-led communication strategies around labeled products are closely tied to broader efforts to publicly promote corporate and professional initiatives, often through events or campaigns where public



logos appear alongside private brands to signal collaborative legitimacy<sup>163</sup>.

**Figure 4:** Logo Programme National Nutrition Santé, [santé.gouv.fr](http://santé.gouv.fr)

The implementation approach revealed both opportunities and constraints of territorial governance. While enabling local adaptation and stakeholder engagement, it also created dependency relationships. The absence of coercive mechanisms meant that program success depended heavily on voluntary compliance and local motivation, creating significant "obstacles" including "system inertia, bad will of targeted consumers, and resistance from food industry professionals."<sup>164</sup>.

<sup>162</sup> Honta, M., Haschar-Noe, N., « Les politiques préventives de santé publique à l'épreuve de la territorialisation : l'introuvable gouvernance régionale du Programme national nutrition santé en Aquitaine », *Sciences sociales et santé*, vol 29, no. 4 (2011), p. 33-62. Cited in Bergeron, Henri, Patrick Castel, and Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier. "Gouverner par les labels: Une comparaison des politiques de l'obésité et de la consommation durable." *Gouvernement et action publique* VOL. 3, no. 3 (October 1, 2014): 7–31, p. 16. <https://doi.org/10.3917/gap.143.0007>.

<sup>163</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier. "Gouverner par les labels: Une comparaison des politiques de l'obésité et de la consommation durable." *Gouvernement et action publique* VOL. 3, no. 3 (October 1, 2014): 7–31, p. 16.

<sup>164</sup> Solange Hernandez, and Leila Messaoudène. "La territorialisation de la politique alimentaire française : le regard des acteurs publics sur la gouvernance du PNNS:" *Management & Avenir* n° 35, no. 5 (August 1, 2010): 235–53, p. 240. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mav.035.0235>.

### III. Ideologies influence on the PNNS

The program's development demonstrates how Jospin's pragmatic socialist approach, operating within the institutional constraints of cohabitation with President Chirac, produced a hybrid policy framework that embodied an ideological adaptation and political compromises.

Jospin's ideological influence on the PNNS design reflected his broader governmental philosophy of what Frémeaux (2002) characterized as "French Blairism" - a pragmatic approach that combined left-wing social objectives with market-compatible implementation mechanisms<sup>165</sup>. The program's emphasis on a health campaign that would be accessible to everyone through informational tools and state coordination emphasizing multisectoral organization reflected traditional Socialist commitments to promoting a common good, public sector leadership and evidence-based policy, while its voluntary compliance framework and industry engagement strategies aligned with Jospin's adaptation to capitalist market constraints and therefore right wing ideology. The program's cultural sensitivity, emphasizing pleasure and conviviality rather than prohibition, embodied Jospin's approach avoiding direct confrontation with powerful interests. The PNNS's institutional design directly reflected Jospin's ideological priorities within the constraints of cohabitation governance. It demonstrated Socialist commitment to reorienting state priorities toward social and economic objectives.

Moreover, the need to maintain governmental unity and avoid partisan controversy encouraged emphasis on technocratic, evidence-based approaches that could claim scientific rather than purely political legitimacy. This dynamic favored governance approaches that "rely on disciplines that offer theoretical legitimacy and 'politically practicable' instruments," enabling policy innovation while minimizing political confrontation with President Chirac's center-right orientation<sup>166</sup>. The labeling and voluntary engagement systems represented sophisticated adaptations of Socialist ideological commitments to changed political and economic circumstances. It allowed state influence over private sector behavior while respecting market

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<sup>165</sup> Philippe Frémeaux. "Lionel Jospin entre économie et politique." *L'Économie politique* 14, no. 2 (2002), p.51. <https://doi.org/10.3917/leco.014.0048>.

<sup>166</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Étienne Noguez. "Lutter contre l'obésité en gouvernant les conduites des consommateurs." *Questions de santé publique*, no. 25 (June 2014): 1–4, p. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1051/qsp/2014025>.

mechanisms and avoiding regulatory confrontation that might generate opposition from President Chirac or industry interests.

This adaptation demonstrated how cohabitation dynamics encouraged pragmatic adaptation while constraining more ambitious interventionist approaches that might have reflected purer ideological preferences. Additionally, the neoliberal approach of this program allowed its continuity through four different periods and governments highlighting the effectiveness of its implementation techniques and depoliticization created through the cohabitation.

## IV. External Influences

### Industry Pressure

The PNNS operated within a context of significant industry influence on nutrition policy, reflecting broader power relationships characteristic of neoliberal governance arrangements. Companies could obtain symbolic benefits from association with PNNS through charter arrangements and labeling opportunities while maintaining substantial autonomy over product development and marketing strategies<sup>167</sup>. This arrangement satisfied industry preferences for self-regulation while providing government with appearance of industry cooperation and shared responsibility for addressing public health challenges<sup>168</sup>. However, this approach created what critics identified as fundamental asymmetries in policy implementation. The emphasis on individual behavior change while maintaining existing food environments and marketing practices created situations "structurally unfavorable to citizens."<sup>169</sup> Public health messaging

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<sup>167</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier. "Gouverner par les labels: Une comparaison des politiques de l'obésité et de la consommation durable." *Gouvernement et action publique* VOL. 3, no. 3 (October 1, 2014), p. 13. <https://doi.org/10.3917/gap.143.0007>.

<sup>168</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Étienne Nouguez. "Lutter contre l'obésité en gouvernant les conduites des consommateurs." *Questions de santé publique*, no. 25 (June 2014), p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.1051/qsp/2014025>.

<sup>169</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Étienne Nouguez. "Lutter contre l'obésité en gouvernant les conduites des consommateurs." *Questions de santé publique*, no. 25 (June 2014), p. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1051/qsp/2014025>.

competed with commercial marketing campaigns that spread "in everyone's daily life with promises of dreams, youth, energy, positive values according to current norms."<sup>170</sup>

This system created complex dynamics where industry actors became simultaneously targets and partners of public policy. Companies could benefit from association with public health objectives while avoiding mandatory regulations that might constrain commercial activities more significantly. The arrangement enabled government to claim industry cooperation and shared responsibility while avoiding direct confrontation with powerful economic interests<sup>171</sup>. Companies signing charters committed to various improvements in product formulation, marketing practices, and consumer information provision. In exchange, they received authorization to use specific formulations in communications and association with PNNS legitimacy. The Ministry of Health described this as enabling signatories to identify themselves as "engaged in a nutritional approach encouraged by the State (PNNS)"<sup>172</sup>. Consequently, the effectiveness of this approach remained contested. The absence of mandatory requirements or significant sanctions for non-compliance meant that industry participation depended primarily on perceived commercial benefits rather than public health imperatives.

## The Economic Weight of Healthcare

The economic burden of nutrition-related diseases provided compelling arguments for a state intervention in the health sector because nutrition-related chronic diseases are placing increasing strain on France's welfare state and social security system. As Hercberg (2011) notes, "the major public health challenges represented by pathologies in which nutritional factors are implicated: cardiovascular diseases, cancers, obesity, osteoporosis, diabetes... have major consequences on human, social and economic levels."<sup>173</sup>. This fact is observable on the table (Figure 1) with the cost, for the Health Care System, of curing each of these diseases. It transcended ideological divisions creating a consensus around the need for a comprehensive

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<sup>170</sup> Michel Chauliac. "Le Programme national nutrition santé : conception, stratégies, mise en œuvre, impacts." *Les Tribunes de la santé* n° 49, no. 4 (January 4, 2016), p. 31. <https://doi.org/10.3917/seve.049.0029>.

<sup>171</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Étienne Nouguez. "Lutter contre l'obésité en gouvernant les conduites des consommateurs." *Questions de santé publique*, no. 25 (June 2014), p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.1051/qsp/2014025>.

<sup>172</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier. "Gouverner par les labels: Une comparaison des politiques de l'obésité et de la consommation durable." *Gouvernement et action publique* VOL. 3, no. 3 (October 1, 2014), p. 17. <https://doi.org/10.3917/gap.143.0007>.

<sup>173</sup> Serge Hercberg. "Le Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS) : un vrai programme de santé publique." *Cahiers de Nutrition et de Diététique* 46, no. 2 (May 2011): S5–10, pp. S6. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960\(11\)70013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960(11)70013-X).

nutrition policy. In parallel, prevention appears economically attractive compared to continued expansion of curative services<sup>174</sup>. This convergence around economic logic helped legitimize significant public investment in nutrition policy while providing a politically neutral framework that could attract support from diverse publics concerned about healthcare sustainability, making the PNNS a policy initiatives that could claim genuine cross-partisan support.

## European and International Influences

The PNNS's development was significantly shaped by European integration processes and international policy trends that provided both opportunities and constraints for domestic policy innovation. These external influences operated through various mechanisms including regulatory harmonization, policy learning, and institutional coordination that fundamentally influenced program design and implementation.

The economic context was further complicated by European integration pressures because nutrition policy must respect European competition rules and avoid creating barriers to the single market. This economic constraint would prove crucial in shaping the voluntary, partnership-based approach that emerged, as regulatory interventions risked legal challenges under EU trade law (article 34 of the TFEU). European Union influence became increasingly important throughout the program's evolution. As Chauliac (2015) highlights, "nutrition as a health determinant has been very strongly developed at the international level and particularly in Europe. The subject of nutrition in the broad sense has been carried by very numerous resolutions and conclusions of the European Council since 2000."<sup>175</sup>. France's experience with the PNNS enabled it to contribute to European policy development while adapting domestic approaches to European frameworks. The regulatory dimension of European influence proved particularly significant with for instance: the regulations on Health Claims (2006) created a

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<sup>174</sup> Henri Bergeron, Patrick Castel, and Étienne Nouguez. "Lutter contre l'obésité en gouvernant les conduites des consommateurs." *Questions de santé publique*, no. 25 (June 2014), p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.1051/qsp/2014025>.

<sup>175</sup> Michel Chauliac. "Le Programme national nutrition santé : conception, stratégies, mise en œuvre, impacts." *Les Tribunes de la santé* n° 49, no. 4 (January 4, 2016): 29–39, p. 30. <https://doi.org/10.3917/seve.049.0029>.

framework affecting nutrition policy implementation, while establishing European-level standards that constrained national policy autonomy.

International organizations, particularly the World Health Organization, provided significant influence on program development through various mechanisms. The WHO's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (2004) provided international legitimacy for comprehensive nutrition policies while establishing frameworks that influenced domestic policy design. The European Charter on Counteracting Obesity, signed by Health Ministers in Istanbul in 2006 created international commitments that influenced domestic policy priorities and approaches. The international context of obesity as an "epidemic" declared by the WHO in 1997 required urgent policy response and provided additional legitimacy for policy innovation while constraining available approaches. This international dimension helped legitimize nutrition policy development while influencing specific approaches and instruments adopted and pressuring member states for national policy development.

## **Evolution of the PNNS**

The comparison between PNNS1 (2001-2006) and PNNS3 (2011-2017) reveals how changing political contexts influenced program evolution while maintaining core programmatic continuity. This evolution demonstrates both the institutionalization of nutrition policy and its adaptation to changing political priorities and external pressures.

PNNS1 emerged during the center-right government of Jacques Chirac and reflected the political and ideological context of early 2000s France. It was born out of the Jospin government's ambition to modernize welfare through prevention, in line with a technocratic and public health-oriented vision of governance. It sought to respond to the rise of chronic diseases, particularly obesity and cardiovascular problems, by relying on the authority of scientific expertise and the legitimacy of state intervention<sup>176</sup>. The initial program emphasized individual responsibility, voluntary compliance, and evidence-based intervention, characteristic of the emerging neoliberal approach to public health policy. The program's creation during cohabitation fostered consensus-building and technocratic approaches that avoided partisan controversy while enabling significant policy innovation. The first PNNS's objectives focused

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<sup>176</sup>Serge Hercberg. "Le Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS) : un vrai programme de santé publique." *Cahiers de Nutrition et de Diététique* 46, no. 2 (May 2011): S5–10, p. S8. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960\(11\)70013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960(11)70013-X).

primarily on nutritional behavior modification and population-level health outcomes. The nine priority objectives established quantitative targets for dietary change, physical activity improvement, and health indicator modification<sup>177</sup>. The implementation approach emphasized national communication campaigns, professional education, decentralization and voluntary industry engagement. The program was relying heavily on voluntary compliance and professional motivation. PNNS1's institutional design reflected the political context of its creation.

By contrast, PNNS 4, adopted in 2019 under President Macron's centrist administration, emerged in a dramatically different environment. The agenda was more focused on the consideration of incomes as it was the case since the second PNNS which reflected an ideological position and an adaptation of the first PNNS to reach more effectiveness.

On the other side, the program no longer stood as a primarily political initiative but rather as a response to a dense network of external constraints. Among these were intensifying ecological imperatives as well as the influence of supranational powers. France's alignment with European and international frameworks such as the EU Green Deal, European Food and Nutrition Action Plan (2015-2020), the WHO Global Action Plan for physical activity and health (2018-2030), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2030) shaped both the content and orientation of the program<sup>178</sup>. France could not only be attentive to its possible non-compliance to the EU competition law and internal market rules, but it had to obey nutritional and environmental supranational requirements. Another significant factor was the strong influence of industry lobbies, particularly from sectors producing processed and animal-based foods within Parliament<sup>179</sup>. Food companies have become increasingly adept at negotiating their visibility and legitimacy within state-led nutritional initiatives, which has contributed to a dilution or delay of certain measures (such as Nutri-Score)<sup>180</sup>. Civil society actors have pushed for bolder interventions, but policy outcomes have often been the result of compromise rather than

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<sup>177</sup> Serge Hercberg. "Le Programme National Nutrition Santé (PNNS) : un vrai programme de santé publique." *Cahiers de Nutrition et de Diététique* 46, no. 2 (May 2011): S5–10, p. S7. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960\(11\)70013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0007-9960(11)70013-X).

<sup>178</sup> Programme National Nutrition Santé, Ministère des Solidarités et de la Santé, 2019.

<sup>179</sup> Daniel Benamouzig, Joan Cortinas Muñoz. « L'industrie agroalimentaire et ses activités politiques », 2021. halshs-03575247

<sup>180</sup> Franceinfo, « Trois questions sur le nouveau Nutri-Score qui froisse une partie des industriels de l'agroalimentaire », (March 15th, 2025).

ideological conviction. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted the program's implementation timeline and priorities.

This contrast underscores a broader transformation in French nutrition policy: from an ideologically driven initiative shaped by national public health priorities to a reactive and constrained framework operating within the limits of European regulation, economic feasibility, and political neutrality. While both PNNS versions aimed to improve dietary behaviors and reduce chronic disease, the conditions of their production—political and adapted in the case of PNNS 1, external and negotiated in the case of PNNS 4 demonstrate the evolving relationship between political ideologies and public health governance. This evolution demonstrates how institutionalized policy frameworks can adapt to changing political contexts while maintaining programmatic coherence. However, the PNNS's flexibility enabled incorporation of new priorities and approaches without fundamental program restructuring, contributing to policy stability across political transitions. The political sustainability of the PNNS across different government configurations indicates a successful depoliticization of nutrition policy through technical expertise and broad consensus on health objectives even if ideology still shapes the priorities and accessible tools. However, the program's evolution also reveals how external pressures and changing political priorities continually reshape policy implementation and emphasis, even within stable institutional frameworks.

The PNNS represents a complex case study of how political ideologies interact with external constraints in shaping contemporary French public policy. The program's hybrid character, combining state leadership with market mechanisms, national coordination with territorial flexibility, and health objectives with cultural values, reflects the complex negotiation between ideological orientations and external realities rather than simple ideological determination.

The program's creation during the third cohabitation (1997-2002) demonstrates how Jospin's pragmatic socialism, operating within institutional constraints, produced a policy framework that successfully reconciled left-wing social objectives with market-compatible implementation mechanisms. This "French Blairism" embodied both ideological adaptation and political necessity, emphasizing voluntary compliance, cultural sensitivity, and partnership-based approaches that avoided direct confrontation with powerful interests while maintaining Socialist commitments to universal health promotion and evidence-based policy.

The PNNS's institutional design reveals the deep penetration of neoliberal logic into French public health policy through "government through labels," voluntary industry engagement, and individual responsibility mechanisms. This shift from coercive regulation to soft governance tools illustrates the broader transformation of French state capacity, creating governance arrangements that enabled the appearance of participatory decision-making while preserving central control over policy frameworks and scientific validation.

External factors fundamentally shaped domestic policy possibilities throughout the program's evolution. European integration pressures, particularly competition law requirements, effectively ruled out more interventionist approaches. Moreover, industry influence operated through both direct lobbying and structural power. And finally, the economic burden of nutrition-related diseases created compelling fiscal arguments that transcended ideological divisions.

Furthermore, the program's remarkable continuity across four different governments demonstrates successful policy innovation through strategic depoliticization that transformed potentially controversial health interventions into technocratic, evidence-based programs. However, this evolution from PNNS1's ideologically and adaptative driven innovation to PNNS4's reactive adaptation to external constraints illustrates the progressive narrowing of domestic policy autonomy.

This analysis ultimately suggests that the relationship between political ideology and public policy in contemporary France is neither one of simple determination nor complete constraint, but rather one of complex negotiation where ideological orientations shape responses to external pressures while being simultaneously transformed by those responses. The PNNS's success in maintaining programmatic coherence while adapting to changing circumstances demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of ideological influence in contemporary French governance, with the complex interplay between domestic political orientations and external constraints in an integrated European context.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has examined the complex relationship between political ideologies and external influences in shaping French nutrition policies since the 1950s. Through analyzing three pivotal moments—Pierre Mendès France's Milk and Anti-Alcohol Campaign (1954-1955), the Loi Royer (1973), and the Programme National Nutrition Santé (2001)—the research reveals that the relative weight of ideological conviction versus external pressures varies significantly across different contexts and periods, producing distinct patterns of policy formation and implementation.

The comparative analysis demonstrates three different dynamics between ideology and external influences. In Mendès France's campaign, strong ideological conviction served as the primary driver, enabling transformative policy change despite powerful external constraints. His technocratic, republican and Keynesian interventionism provided both the conceptual framework and moral authority necessary to challenge entrenched alcohol interests and cultural traditions. The campaign succeeded precisely because Mendès France's ideological clarity—his belief in "technique au service de la République"—allowed him to overcome industry opposition, cultural resistance, and political pressure through strategic use of scientific evidence and democratic legitimacy. However, the rapid reversal of these reforms after Mendès France's government fell in February 1955 confirms ideology's centrality.

The Loi Royer represents the opposite dynamic with the domination of external influences, particularly the violent mobilization of small merchants through CID-UNATI which became the primary governing force behind policy formation. While Georges Pompidou's conservative philosophy eventually provided a cultural and protectionist justification for defending traditional commerce, the law's fundamental architecture was dictated by political crisis management rather than coherent ideological vision. The result was legislation that inadvertently preserved beneficial food distribution systems while creating perverse economic incentives and failing to achieve lasting preservation of small commerce with the continuous expansion of supermarkets.

The PNNS illustrates a third pattern: policy adaptation to multiple competing ideologies operating within constrained political contexts. Lionel Jospin's pragmatic socialism provided the initial framework, but the institutional constraints of cohabitation with President Chirac's center-right orientation forced ideological compromise and adaptation. The program's evolution from PNNS1's more activist approach to PNNS4's market-compatible mechanisms reflects how policies must navigate between competing ideological frameworks while adapting to external

constraints including European integration, industry influence, and neoliberal economic orthodoxy. Rather than one ideology dominating, the PNNS represents continuous negotiation between different political philosophies and external pressures that weaken its positive consequences.

These findings reveal that the relationship between political ideology and nutrition policy is far more nuanced than simple ideological determination. Instead, policies emerge from dynamic interactions where sometimes ideology provides the driving force capable of overcoming external obstacles, sometimes external pressures overwhelm ideological preferences, and sometimes multiple ideologies compete while external constraints narrow available options.

This analysis illuminates several crucial insights about nutrition governance. First, ideological coherence matters most when external constraints are strongest—Mendès France succeeded precisely because his clear ideological framework enabled strategic action despite opposition. Second, when external pressures become overwhelming, they can fundamentally reshape policy regardless of governing ideology, as demonstrated by the Loi Royer's reactive character. Third, contemporary governance increasingly requires navigation between multiple ideological frameworks and external constraints, making policy coherence more difficult to achieve but also potentially more adaptive to complex challenges.

Ultimately, this thesis confirms that Brillat-Savarin's observation about gastronomy's connection to political economy captures an essential truth: food systems are inherently political, shaped by complex interactions between competing ideas, interests, and constraints. Understanding these dynamics provides essential insights for anyone seeking to improve public health, preserve cultural heritage, or promote sustainable development through food policy.

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