



political developments in the countries and empires of Europe. The internal political history of each state is somewhat distinct, so that the following sections look at different countries separately. There are certain themes that we can follow in all – or at least most – of them: an expansion of centralized authority, whether held by a monarch alone or shared by a representative body; the continued development of government bureaucracy; and the pursuit of territorial power and colonial wealth.

France

Along with war, the other constant in European politics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the dominant power of France. Except for Russia and the Ottoman Empire, France was the largest state in Europe geographically, and its population was by far the largest outside the Ottoman Empire; in 1620 it had about twenty million people, which was four times the population of England, and twice that of Spain or Russia. In the sixteenth century Ottoman and Spanish armies were the largest in Europe, but by the seventeenth century the largest army belonged to France.

Though Bossuet was the most eloquent defender of royal authority, and Louis XIV its most famous exemplar, the kings of France had already begun an expansion of central power before Louis's accession. In 1598 Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes, which declared that France was officially a Catholic country but that Calvinist Protestants (Huguenots) would have the right to practice their faith and maintain military garrisons in 150 towns. Assisted by his Protestant chief minister, Maximilian de Béthune, duke of Sully (1559–1641), Henry IV tackled other problems as well, restoring public order, overhauling government finances, lowering taxes on the peasants somewhat, and supporting measures that encouraged trade. He expanded the sale of royal offices begun by his predecessors, and made royal officials pay an annual tax, the *paulette*, if they wanted their offices to remain hereditary.

Henry's toleration of Protestantism was too much for some, and in 1610 he was stabbed in the streets of Paris by a fanatical Catholic assassin; the monarchy passed to his son Louis XIII (ruled 1610–43), who was only eight. Actual power was held by the queen-mother, Henry IV's second wife Marie de' Medici (1573–1642), and various high nobles. Different factions rose and fell in favor and influence, but by the 1620s the most powerful figure was Armand-Jean du Plessis, a nobleman and bishop who was made Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642). Shrewd and extremely able, Richelieu became chief minister, and succeeded in keeping the forces threatening the power of the monarchy in balance. Always acting in the name of the king, he further limited the independent power of the high nobility, rewarding those who supported him with high offices, military commands, and advantageous marriage alliances, while sending those who opposed him into exile or even executing them. The list of exiled nobles eventually included the queen-mother herself, who had demanded her son

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dismiss Richelieu but instead ended up spending the rest of her life outside France. Richelieu used cultural patronage to support royal power, recruiting writers to defend crown policies in print through newsletters, gazettes, and histories. In 1635 he gave official support to the Académie Française, a society of writers and philologists intent on standardizing the French language, which would provide a cultural counterpart to political measures of centralization.

Richelieu extended the power of royal officials called *intendants*, who were appointed directly by the monarch so that they did not own their offices, and were almost always members of the newer *noblesse de robe*. Each intendant had authority over a certain district, collecting taxes, recruiting men for the army, ordering soldiers to be billeted with families, regulating economic activities, administering local courts, and enforcing royal decrees. Intendants could not be native to the district in which they operated, so they had no independent base of power; their activities worked to build up the power of the centralized state and further weaken the regional nobility. They were assisted by deputies who did much of the actual work and understood local power relations, so that these too could be used to royal advantage. Louis and Richelieu also asserted stricter controls over the Huguenots, continuing to allow them freedom of worship but forbidding them from maintaining fortified towns. They successfully besieged the Atlantic port city and Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle when its inhabitants objected, pulling down its walls and suppressing the municipal government.

Foreign policy under Louis and Richelieu was marked by continued opposition to Habsburg power, which led France into war in Italy and Spain, and into the Thirty Years War, first backing Sweden and then as a combatant. The financial drains of these wars were enormous; rising taxes and grain shortages led to popular rebellions and collective violence in cities and rural areas. Peasants in the Angoumois region of southwestern France, for example, killed or drove off royal tax collectors in 1636, burning their houses and refusing to pay higher taxes or the costs of garrisoning troops. A manifesto issued in the name of the peasants ordered "all inhabitants of each parish to arm themselves according to their means and to be well supplied with lead and powder," and specifically requested local nobles to "provide arms and march in our defense."⁷ With much of its military away fighting in Germany, the royal government initially made some concessions to this regional opposition, though the following year royal troops returned, defeated the peasants, and executed their leaders.

Rebellions against the monarchy and its policies culminated in the 1640s, after the death of Richelieu in 1642 and Louis XIII the following year. The situation was much the same as it had been a generation earlier: the new king, Louis XIV, was only a child, and real power was held by the queen-mother, Anne of Austria (1601–66), together with a cardinal and chief minister, Jules Mazarin (1602–61). The rebellions, known as the Fronde, shook the monarchy, but were never intended to topple it; the focus of the rebellion was Mazarin, who was described as an evil foreigner building up his own power and leading the queen and young king to neglect the true interests of the country. At

Mazarin's death, Louis decided to rule without a chief minister, taking over the day-to-day operation of government himself in what would be the longest reign in the history of Europe.

Louis was hard-working, suspicious, and cautious, supporting measures that worked toward greater uniformity in law and practice. He read the dispatches of ambassadors, officials, and spies, and supervised all aspects of the military, personally appointing all officers down to the rank of colonel. Careful not to give the nobility or other influential individuals a chance to come together outside his presence, he never called a meeting of the Estates General. He frequently backed projects where royal and noble interests merged, however, such as the building of canals. He recognized that the most sensible solution to France's financial problems – taxing the nobility – was politically impossible, so he supported commercial activities that would bring in wealth. He and his controller-general of finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–83), subsidized the production of cloth, steel, and firearms, gave bonuses to ship-builders, expanded the merchant marine, organized guilds in many industries, established trading companies, and developed preferential policies on immigration, imports, and exports. Colbert sent peasants as settlers to New France in North America, and supported explorations in the American interior, including that of Robert la Salle (1643–87), who claimed the delta of the Mississippi River for France in 1684, naming it, not surprisingly, “Louisiana.”

Louis's desire for unity and uniformity in his realm extended to matters of religion. Huguenots were increasingly deprived of their political rights, barred from many professions, ordered to quarter more troops in their households, and sometimes forced to undergo Catholic baptism. They were officially forbidden to emigrate to New France – though some did – a policy that contrasted with that of

35 The Fronde

In the 1630s, France joined the forces opposing the Habsburgs in the Thirty Years War, first financially supporting Swedish actions and then sending in French troops. The costs of the war meant government expenditures doubled between 1630 and 1640, and the government attempted to establish new means of raising revenue. In 1648, Queen Anne and her chief minister Cardinal Mazarin tried to force the *parlement* of Paris, the most prestigious and influential court in France, to accept new taxes. They refused, the queen arrested some of their leaders, and the populace of Paris reacted with violence. Civil order completely collapsed and mobs threatened the royal family, breaking into the palace and forcing them to flee the city. Several months later the queen made peace with the rebels in Paris, which calmed the city for a while, but the situation in many provinces was very unstable. Local *parlements* refused to send any taxes to the capital, and a series of revolts and civil wars broke out from 1648 to 1653. Together these disturbances became known as the Fronde, a word that means “slingshot” in French and was derived from the weapons that poor children used to throw mud against the coaches of the rich. *Frondeurs* did include poor urban workers and peasants protesting high taxes, but also many groups armed with far more than slingshots and mud. High nobles led many of the provincial rebellions against royal officials, arguing that they were attempting to restore structures of power to what they had been before Richelieu. Royal intendants, meant to be the enforcers of absolutism, became part of the resistance, demanding that the crown pay more attention to their interests. Thousands of pamphlets, written by well-educated political writers, not peasants, accused Mazarin, who was Italian, of treachery; some included the queen-mother, born the daughter of the Habsburg king of Spain, in their denunciations of the influence of evil foreigners.

The very breadth of the Fronde was part of the reason it did not succeed, however, as the rebels were never able to unify their plans or aims. Mazarin played one faction off against the others and used loyalty to the young king as a tool to counter the rebels. In 1651, at the age of thirteen, Louis was declared ruler in his own right – that is, no longer under the regency of his mother – and much of the rebellion disintegrated. Most of the leaders were pardoned, and Mazarin was even exiled for brief periods, though he eventually returned and continued to lead the government until his death in 1661. The dramatic and frightening events of the Fronde had deeply influenced Louis, however, who hated revolts, hated Paris, and favored anything that encouraged order and enhanced his own regal power.

England, where the rulers were happy to let religious malcontents such as Puritans and Quakers leave the country. In 1685, Louis formally revoked the Edict of Nantes, ordering Protestant churches and schools closed and Protestant clergy to leave the country. Protestant lay people were ordered to convert and forbidden to emigrate, though tens of thousands of them did, fueling hatred of Louis in northern Europe. Inside France, however, Louis won wide praise for this action, especially among the nobility. In some areas of France, the emigration of Huguenots meant a loss of substantial numbers of skilled people (and their taxes), but overall this did not have a dramatic effect on economic development.

The French economy could survive the loss of Huguenot knowledge and skills, but it could not absorb the ever-expanding costs of Louis XIV's wars. Pushing northeastward, he invaded the Spanish Netherlands and the United Provinces, ultimately gaining some Flemish towns and the area of Franche-Comté. In the 1680s, he seized the city of Strasbourg, and sent his armies into the province of Lorraine. Though his army was gigantic and well-trained, the efforts of his opponents and his inability to squeeze any more money out of the taxable portion of the French population prevented him from annexing any more territory. A series of bad harvests caused starvation, disease, and depopulation in many parts of France, leading to renewed peasant revolts in the 1690s. These problems halted Louis's military adventures only briefly, for the last years of his reign were taken up with trying to secure the throne of Spain for his grandson Philip when the ruling Habsburg king died childless, in a war that became known as the War of the Spanish Succession. (Louis XIV's mother, and thus Philip's great-grandmother, was the daughter of one Habsburg king of Spain, and Louis XIV's wife, who was Philip's grandmother, was the daughter of another.) In this he was successful, and Philip became the first Bourbon king of Spain, but only after extended war and a peace treaty that specified that the crowns of France and Spain were never to be held by the same member of the Bourbon family. The treaty also gave far more land to the Austrian Habsburgs than to France. All of Louis's military efforts had gained relatively little territory and had financially exhausted the country; his subjects greeted his death with relief.

Louis's successors, his great-grandson Louis XV and his great-great-grandson Louis XVI, engaged in warfare on a scale slightly more limited than Louis XIV, but still ruinously expensive. The nobility saw the constant need for more revenue as an opportunity to reassert their dominance after decades of subservience to the Sun King. The *parlement* of Paris and other regional *parlements* challenged all attempts by the monarchy to impose emergency or regular taxes, using their traditional privileges increasingly as a basis from which to push for the right to approve all taxes and limit the power of the monarchy. The *parlements* reasserted their right to review royal decrees before they became law. Louis XV (ruled 1715–74) disbanded the *parlements* in an attempt to crush his opposition, who increasingly portrayed themselves as representing the entire French nation. Louis and his ministers were attacked in anonymous pamphlets

as degenerate despots. His attempts at reform and modernization, including a reorganization of the judiciary, were often short-lived and vacillating. Louis XVI (ruled 1774–92) reinstated the *parlements*, a measure widely supported by public opinion, and promoted trade and industry. He would not agree to other measures of reform, however, and France drifted toward political upheaval.

Spain and Portugal

The costs of a huge army and an expansionary foreign policy led to revolts and political crises in Spain as well as France. In the sixteenth century, Spain was the wealthiest and most powerful country in Europe, conquering Portugal in 1580 and ruling an empire that stretched around the world. Gold and silver from New World mines poured into Spain, and Spanish oil, wine, and wool were exported to the colonies. Serious problems were already in evidence by the end of the century, however. Spanish armies had not been able to quash the revolt in the Netherlands, and in 1609 Philip III (ruled 1598–1622) recognized the independence of the northern part of the Netherlands as the United Provinces. Dutch and English ships took over much of the trade with the Spanish colonies, and Spanish attempts to prohibit this were futile. Central and South American mines gradually produced less metal, and the Indians and Africans forced to work in them died of disease and malnutrition. Royal expenses continued to increase, so much so that the crown declared bankruptcy five times between 1590 and 1680. Declaring bankruptcy cancelled debts in the short term, but only heightened the crisis, as new loans to keep the government afloat could only be secured at higher and higher rates of interest, thus transferring more wealth to the bankers and merchants (many of them outside Spain) who were willing to risk loaning money to the government.

Like the old French nobility, Spanish aristocrats disdained commercial ventures as vulgar and lived off the rents of their lands. Their hostility to change and devotion to past military glories were stronger than those of nobles elsewhere, however, largely preventing the ennobling of new families through service as judges or officials. Though wealthy commoners could increasingly buy noble titles, they expected after doing so to live off rents, not hold a legal or government position that would require actual work. The exclusivity of the nobility was further enhanced by the obsession with “purity of the blood” – having no Muslim or Jewish ancestors – for converts included the sort of well-educated urban professionals that in other parts of Europe were becoming state bureaucrats and royal administrators. In 1609 to 1611, over 200,000 Muslims and Muslim converts were expelled to North Africa, further reducing a population that had already declined significantly because of famine and epidemic disease. Spanish nobles saw no way other than raising rents to increase their income and pay for imported luxuries, but this came at the same time as the government was increasing taxes; the peasants often had no surplus to sell and could not pay, abandoning their lands and drifting into cities or