Throughout its history, the French political landscape has been shaped and influenced by prominent personalities. In the likes of other major political leaders across the world, Charles de Gaulle’s legacy was materialised by the creation of a long-standing political movement representing key tenets advocated during his presidency. De Gaulle’s influence in French history is still being referenced and used as an example of French grandeur by contemporary political leaders on all sides of the political spectrum.

The notion of Gaullism is often used by academics and practitioners to refer to de Gaulle’s influence beyond the Appeal of 18 June. However, the Gaullist literature is marked by strong disciplinary divisions, which is exacerbated by the absence of a commonly accepted definition. Political scientists tend to focus on its impact on institutions (such as political parties, governments and leadership issues) and election results (e.g. Charlot 1970; Pickles 1972; Hoffmann and Hoffmann 1974). Historians such as Berstein (2001), Mahan (2002) or Watson (2001) have paid particular attention to events that happened under de Gaulle’s presidency, the evolution of Gaullism throughout the 1960s and its legacy beyond de Gaulle’s death. Sociologists would adopt different approaches, such as analysing the role of de Gaulle as a charismatic leader (e.g. Waldman et al. 1990) or the impact of Gaullism on the emergence of new social movements (e.g. Singer 2002). Relatively new notions such as neo-Gaullism or Sarkozysm add to such complexity.

This contribution offers a brief review of the existing literature and argues that Gaullism is best studied in two different ways: as a political doctrine and as a political movement. In the following section, a definition of Gaullism based on the existing literature is put forward; such definition attempts to reconcile diverging views over the nature of the concept. It is argued that Gaullism should not be considered as a true political ideology but rather as a French political doctrine which also had impacts beyond the national context. The third section then focuses on Gaullism as a political movement and highlights the divisions that have occurred within Gaullist parties over the past three decades regarding the issue of European integration. Following the 2012 and 2017 presidential and legislative elections defeats, the fourth and final section assesses whether the Gaullist movement (or even the Gaullist doctrine) is currently facing a crisis. It concludes that despite the semantic confusion surrounding this notion and internal divisions within the different Gaullist-inspired movements, Gaullism is one of the most successful national doctrines, and beyond its historical appeal, it is likely to continue shaping contemporary French politics.
Gaullism as a doctrine

While the notion of Gaullism has been widely used in the rich literature on French politics and society, it has been interpreted in different ways by scholars, journalists and practitioners. Most existing studies refer to Gaullism to categorise French foreign policy under de Gaulle’s presidency and his legacy, especially emphasising the importance of strong nation states and national sovereignty (see e.g. Morse 1973; Kolodziej 1974; Cerny 1980; Gordon 1993). Others, such as Williams and Harrison (1961), categorised Gaullism as a (then) modern form of moderate conservatism. Pickles (1972) argued that Gaullists were never concerned with ideological principles. Yet, Gaullism should not be categorised as ‘ideological emptiness’ (Hoffmann and Hoffmann 1974: 217). Some scholars have argued the legacy of Gaullism is solely the result of de Gaulle’s authority and is a modern form of Bonapartism (Rémond 1982). According to Watson (2003: 255) who argued that such view is an oversimplification, historians should give more credit to Gaullists as they realised that ‘Gaullism could not survive on the basis of de Gaulle’s prestige alone and gave it a doctrine and method of action which ensured its survival after the General’s departure from office in 1969.’ The fact that the notion of Gaullism itself still prevails nearly 50 years since de Gaulle’s death would support such stance.

Accordingly, much of the academic debate on Gaullism focuses on whether it should be categorised as a political ideology or as a doctrine. There is a fine line between these two notions. Based on the work of Crick (2005: 156), a political doctrine should be interpreted as ‘a coherently related set of proposals for the conciliation of differing social interests in a desirable manner,’ while an ideology is an ideal-type, a broad set of ideas and principles which ‘cannot be taken up and set down by politicians as a weapon’ (Crick 2005: 37). Yet, two questions need to be answered in order to determine what Gaullism effectively is.

Firstly, what principles does Gaullism consist of? Knapp (1994: 4–6) distinguished four key tenets. The first one is the independence of France, with a categoric refusal to submit France and French policy to the authority of supranational organizations. The second one is the authority of the State, according to which a strongly centralised state and its institutions constitute the ultimate source of power and imply the presence of a strong core executive often considered as ‘dirigiste.’ The third one is the unity of the French people, referring to de Gaulle’s willingness to ‘rally the French beyond the confines of political parties,’ beyond right and left ideologies (a claim which is nowadays used by most contemporary French leaders). The fourth and final tenet highlighted by Knapp is the leadership of de Gaulle, perceived as a charismatic leader who is the founder of a new relationship between the State and its citizens. These four tenets are further illustrated by the following statement from the Gaullist party manifesto in 1965:

What, essentially, is Gaullism composed of? Of the combination of national sentiment and the French humanist tradition, of the desire for progress and the conviction that it would not be possible without a strong state, nor would it be desirable unless it were to serve mankind. [. . .] Gaullism, the modern form of patriotism and democracy, is, in its essence, the affirmation that a certain idea of France has always shaped our destiny.

(Union pour la Nouvelle République, cited and translated in Cerny 1980: 25)

Furthermore, the relevance of cultural politics as a tool to improve France’s prestige in the world (as illustrated by the creation of a French ministry of culture under de Gaulle’s presidency) is often referenced as a fifth feature of Gaullism (see e.g. Kritzman 2006).
Secondly, if Gaullism is built around the grandeur of de Gaulle in a particular national context, does it have any significance beyond the French borders? Berstein (2001: 308), who argued that Gaullism is ‘neither a doctrine nor a political ideology,’ provides some elements of response:

'It appears unfair to liken Gaullists to national leaders such as Amintore Fanfani in Italy who are determined to advanced the parochial interests of their countries in the international community, for none has exceeded de Gaulle himself in promoting the conditions designed to accomplish his objectives or in understanding the consequences of those objectives. Gaullism appears to be a peculiarly French phenomenon, without doubt the quintessential French political phenomenon of the twentieth century.'

However, this statement needs to be nuanced, as Gaullism was often referenced by other European leaders and often had an influence over elite positions on foreign policy issues. In the context of European integration (which is further developed in a following section), Gaullists joined forces with other intergovernmentalist movements from countries such as Italy to form a relatively influential pan-European force in the European Parliament from 1965 onwards. This pan-European group, the European Progressive Democrats, committed to promote a Gaullist vision of Europe which emphasised national sovereignty, though it initially remained French centred. A subsequent neo-Gaullist pan-European movement founded in 1995, the Union for Europe, abandoned a French-centric vision and campaigned for a European Union of nation states as a response to the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (Leruth 2017; see also below). As such, some key principles of Gaullism were advocated beyond the French context at the transnational and pan-European levels.

As such, while scholars agreed over a series of key policies and tenets Gaullism stands for, there is very little consensus over what Gaullism effectively is. Some will argue that it is very close to an ideology. Others will say that it is nothing but a French vision of modern conservatism. Despite the lack of a widely accepted definition, Gaullism is best understood as a French political doctrine favouring a strong, centralised and dirigiste state, combined with a commitment to improve French prestige around the world. The societal transformation of France from the mid-1960s onwards suggested that the Gaullist movement failed to respond to key demands and concerns from the French society. Workers became increasingly concerned over the lack...
of commitment to get them involved in industry management, and the education system was in urgent need of further reforms which were not conducted by the government. The student strikes and revolts of May 1968 marked the beginning of the end of de Gaulle’s presidential era. As hypothesised by Kritzman (2006: 54), the May 1968 events may have been ‘the consequences of de Gaulle’s sacrifice of domestic issues at the expense of an international politics based on the idea of grandeur.’ He would eventually resign in 1969, following the outcome of the referendum on decentralisation and reform of the Senate.

The idea and interpretation of Gaullism as a political movement has evolved since de Gaulle’s presidency. The main Gaullist parties have undergone major ideological shifts, juggling between conservatism and liberalism as ideal-types. Most of these changes took place following disappointing election results, thus suggesting that change is driven by voters rather than by changes in the movement’s leadership (Demker 1997). Since de Gaulle’s death in 1970, several competing categorisations have emerged. Touchard (1978) identified different versions of Gaullism: the Gaullism of de Gaulle (as a political leader), the Gaullism of influential Gaullist personalities

Table 3.1 List of major Gaullist parties, presidents and prime ministers, 1959–2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Prime minister</th>
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Notes:
1 Following Charles de Gaulle’s resignation, centrist (non-Gaullist) Alain Poher became president ad interim between 28 April and 20 June 1969.
2 Following Georges Pompidou’s death, Alain Poher became president ad interim from 2 April to 27 May 1974.
3 Under Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s presidency.
4 Under François Mitterrand’s presidency (cohabitation).
5 Under François Mitterrand’s presidency (cohabitation).
6 Under Emmanuel Macron’s presidency. Édouard Philippe effectively left Les Républicains in 2018 and never effectively represented the party as prime minister.
Knapp and Wright (2006: 226) listed five movements which materialised from the 1970s onwards:

1. **Gaullisme de Résistance**: movement loyal above all to ‘the man of 18 June 1940,’ i.e. the General who played a major role during the Second World War;
2. **Gaullisme de Gauche** (or left-wing Gaullism): movement focusing on the social dimension of Gaullism, often linked to social democracy (first advocated by the Union Démocratique du Travail);
3. **Gaullisme pompidolien**: movement loyal to the legacy of Georges Pompidou, emphasising the need for France to adapt to an increasingly competitive world while preserving social peace;
4. **Gaullisme chiraquien de première génération**: movement loyal to the original populist argument advocated by Jacques Chirac in the late 1970s, characterised by a fierce opposition to European integration and the free-market;
5. **And the Gaullisme chiraquien de deuxième génération**: movement loyal to the aggressive pro-free-market and pro-European rhetoric advocated by Chirac from the mid-1980s onwards.

Other concepts have been used to categorise political transformations over the past decades. The notion of ‘neo-Gaullism’ is often used in the existing literature to describe the ideological transformations that have occurred within the Gaullist movement under Jacques Chirac’s leadership. More recently, the concept of Sarkozysm was coined as a potential successor to the traditional idea of Gaullism. Marlière (2009) linked Sarkozy with the more ‘populist’ atmosphere of Gaullism embracing its right-wing traditions and attempting to be perceived as a ‘man of the people’ despite being committed to implement neo-liberal policies before the Great Recession. One might argue that these new ‘types’ of posthumous Gaullism are the product of political contexts (see Watson 2001 for a thorough historical analysis).

**Gaullism and European integration**

Besides some ideological shifts which tended to occur following elections setbacks, the movement also suffered from a series of minor and major internal divisions. These divisions were managed differently throughout the history of the Gaullist movement, with some leaders favouring the creation of cluster movements within the party (e.g. Sarkozy), and others imposing their own approach which would ultimately lead to its fragmentation into smaller groups (e.g. Chirac). Splinter movements arose especially from the early 1990s onwards, and the Gaullist legacy was always disputed among themselves. While internal conflicts over a wide range of socio-economic issues took place over the past 50 years (most recently over welfare policy reforms such as pensions, unemployment benefits and access to services for migrants), the issue of European integration is a recurring theme which has been fuelling such divisions.

Scholars of European studies (especially in the field of Euroscepticism) have often struggled with Gaullists’ attitudes towards European integration. Even though the first aforementioned key principle of Gaullism as an ideology emphasises the reluctance to submit to supranational authority, it would be too simplistic to categorise it as Eurosceptic. During de Gaulle’s presidency, the key principle advocated by the movement was a European Community that serves the interests of nation states as demonstrated by the president’s approach to the Common Agricultural Policy (Leruth and Startin 2017). Throughout the early 1960s, France opposed a series
of proposals put forward or favoured by the other five member states, such as increasing the powers of the European Parliament and opposing the United Kingdom’s first application for Community membership in 1963. This led to the ‘empty chair crisis’ of 1965–66 during which de Gaulle opposed Qualified Majority Voting as well as a supranational approach to the Common Agricultural Policy. Yet, de Gaulle’s position on European integration can hardly be identified as a form of Euroscepticism: instead, the empty chair crisis demonstrated his commitment to promoting an intergovernmentalist vision of Europe mostly based on trade between nations, with weak supranational institutions and decision-making power.

The post-Gaullian era was marked by strong internal divisions and uncertainties over the issue of European integration. The election of the pro-European, centre right and Christian Democrat Valéry Giscard d’Estaing as president in 1974 fuelled such divisions within the movement. Giscard d’Estaing tended to favour a federalist vision of European integration, which was opposed by the Gaullist movement. Its leader, Jacques Chirac, resigned as prime minister in 1976, notably because of disagreements with the president over the introduction of European Parliament elections from 1979 onwards. In 1978, Chirac’s “Appel de Cochin” reflected Charles de Gaulle’s vision of Europe, by emphasising an opposition to supranationalism and the need for greater French influence at the international level (Chirac 1978).

This was followed by a major U-turn in 1983, due to the conversion of the majority of the Gaullist movement’s elites to economic liberalism. The Gaullist movement then moved towards a more modern, pro-European approach by advocating further supranational economic, monetary and defence cooperation. Internal divisions resurfaced in the early 1990s with the referendum regarding the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, which paved the way for the development of a political union. While the majority of the party’s elite was in favour of the Treaty, some senior members (led by Philippe Séguin and Charles Pasqua) campaigned against its ratification, claiming that Maastricht would pave the way for a federal Europe, which goes against the principle of nationalism as advocated by de Gaulle (Shields 1996). As many grass roots members shared such concerns, then Party Chairman Alain Juppé (1992: 1) felt unable to give a voting guideline: ‘[t]he Gaullist movement has decided to accept its differences in opinion. We could have chosen, like some others, to impose a party line on our supporters but we preferred to play a more open game based on transparency and truth.’

The referendum, which took place on 20 September 1992, was approved by 50.8% of voters with a turnout of 71.1%. Following the ratification and the pro-European stance advocated under Chirac’s leadership, four Gaullist splinter parties were formed throughout the 1990s: the small ‘Rassemblement pour la France,’ founded by Nicolas Stoquer in 1992; Philippe de Villiers’ ‘Mouvement pour la France,’ founded in 1994 following the success of the ‘Majorité pour l’Autre Europe’ list in the European elections; Charles Pasqua’s Rassemblement pour la France et l’indépendance de l’Europe, founded in 1999 to unite souverainistes defectors from the Rassemblement pour la République; and Debout la République (nowadays called Debout la France), an openly Eurosceptic movement founded by 2012 and 2017 presidential candidate Nicolas Dupont-Aignan. Under Jacques Chirac’s presidency, the Gaullist movement opted for a rather unified, pro-European stance and supported proposals to deepen and widen the European integration process. The foundation of the Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle in 2002 as a merger of the Rassemblement pour la République and non-Gaullist, pro-European centrist parties, strengthened the pro-European message within the centre right. Such stance was further advocated under Nicolas Sarkozy’s leadership, though he ended his presidency by vowing to reform the ‘broken’ Schengen agreements in case of re-election in 2012 (Leruth and Startin 2017).

While the main Gaullist party was able to unify its stance on European integration following the creation of Euro-Populist splinter parties throughout the 1990s, internal divisions started to
arise again following Nicolas Sarkozy’s defeat in the 2012 presidential election against François Hollande. Such divisions were first accommodated through the formal institutionalisation of courants (movements) within the party. These included La Droite Sociale, led by current party leader Laurent Wauquiez, which advocated France’s withdrawal of Schengen to the creation of a hard EU core consisting of the six founding member states within the Union (Leruth and Star tin 2017). However, following Sarkozy’s comeback as party leader in 2014 and the rebranding of the Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle as Les Républicains in 2015, these courants became dormant. Divisions over the issue of European integration re-emerged during the 2016 primary elections, which aimed at designating Les Républicain’s candidate for the 2017 presidential elections. The most striking divisions occurred between the two main contestants, Nicolas Sarkozy and Alain Juppé; the former advocated less European integration and strong reforms, while the latter favoured further developments at the supranational level especially in the areas of security and defence. This primary election was unexpectedly won by former prime minister François Fillon, who attempted to find a compromise between both visions during the 2017 presidential campaign, which was heavily dominated by this issue following the Brexit vote.

In sum, the Gaullist movement’s position over European integration fluctuated over time. As noted by Startin (2005: 65), ‘[t]he Gaullist movement’s ability or inability to react to EU wide developments in an increasingly globalised world has become fundamental to its future direction.’ Leruth and Startin (2017: 155–156) suggested that three distinct (and at times conflicting) stances were adopted by Gaullist political elites: Euro-Federalism, which advocates further transfers of political competences from the national to the supranational level without necessarily favouring the idea of a ‘United States of Europe’; Euro-Pragmatism, which is defined as ‘contingent support for the European Union combined with a certain reluctance towards the principles of closer integration’; and Euro-Populism, which can be interpreted as a form of ‘soft’ Euroscepticism under which political elites portray the European Union as the ‘corrupt elite’ acting against the sovereign state.

Conclusions. After 2017, is Gaullism in crisis?

The study of Gaullism requires scholars to make a distinction between Gaullism as a political doctrine and as a political movement. As a doctrine, it is best defined as a set of policy principles favouring a strong, centralised state and a united society. As a political movement, it has been represented by one ‘mainstream’ political party and (especially since the 1990s) smaller splinter parties, mostly located on the centre right of the traditional left–right spectrum. These parties have adopted socio-economic policies which fluctuated between modern conservatism and economic liberalism over the past six decades. Tensions over the future of European integration are common within the Gaullist movement, and these were amplified in the 1990s following the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. Yet, the key components of Gaullism identified by Knapp (i.e. a strong, independent state, the unity of the French people, and referenced to the leadership style of de Gaulle) remained prominent in each of these parties.

Charles de Gaulle’s legacy is uncontestably still prominent in French politics, even beyond mainstream Gaullist parties. During most election campaigns, candidates from all sides of the political spectrum refer to his legacy, with many attempting to appear as his ‘true successor.’ In the context of the 2017 presidential elections for instance, de Gaulle’s legacy was used by prominent candidates such as François Fillon, Benoît Hamon, Marine Le Pen, Emmanuel Macron and even Jean-Luc Mélenchon (see e.g. Le Parisien 2017).

Following the defeat of François Fillon in the first round of the French presidential election held on 23 April 2017, the Gaullist movement entered yet another period of crisis. Les
Républicains are currently sitting in opposition after having lost 93 of its 229 seats in the 2017 legislative elections due to the emergence of La République En Marche! The future of the movement became increasingly complex with the nomination of former Républicain deputy Edouard Philippe as prime minister by Emmanuel Macron in an attempt to build a cross-party coalition and break with the traditional partisan mould. If the parliament is not dissolved before the end of the current term (in 2022), the Gaullist movement will sit in opposition for at least ten years and possibly break the record set between 1976 and 1986 (see Table 3.1). The results of the (low-key) French Senate elections held on 24 September 2017 were welcomed with a sigh of relief within the party, as it managed to extend its majority by gaining a total of 146 seats. The new leader of the movement, Laurent Wauquiez, was formally elected on 10 December 2017.

At the time of writing, it is too early to determine the long-term impact of Emmanuel Macron’s victory on the Gaullist movement. However, in the first months of 2018, it looked like Les Républicains were contemplating the idea of an alliance with the Front National, thus suggesting that the Gaullist movement would move further to the right on issues such as immigration. As the main party sitting in opposition, Les Républicains initially struggled to oppose key socio-economic policies put forward by the Philippe government. The pro-European vision of Macron and his government could invigorate internal divisions over this issue within the Gaullist movement; advocates of a Euro–Populist stance could become more prominent within the party’s structure, especially in the context of the European elections of 2019.

Yet, it would be exaggerated to say that the idea of Gaullism is facing a major crisis which could ultimately lead to its demise. The history of the Gaullist movement is marked not only by strong periods of electoral success but also by periods of crises marked by internal divisions, the creation of splinter parties and various failed attempts to modernise the party. The 2012 and subsequent 2017 election results are part of such cycle. In the past, the Gaullist movement has adapted its programme following election results; the most recent election defeats are no exception to the rule. Furthermore, given the salience of the issue of European integration and as most presidential candidates referred to de Gaulle during the election campaign, Gaullism as a political doctrine will keep on playing a major role in French politics.

Note
1 The ‘empty chair crisis’ was more of an attempt to weaken France’s growing influence within the European Community rather than being the product of France’s dissatisfaction over the way European integration was moving forward, as argued by Piers Ludlow (1999).

References