France

Area

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>643,801 km²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan France¹</td>
<td>551,695 km²</td>
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Population

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<tr>
<td>Total January 2017 estimate</td>
<td>66,991,000 (20th)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan France January 2017 estimate</td>
<td>64,859,000[5] (22nd)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan France Density</td>
<td>117,6/km²</td>
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Politics of France

The Fifth Republic

The Fifth Republic was established by Charles de Gaulle under the Constitution of the Fifth Republic on 4 October 1958. It emerged from the collapse of the Fourth Republic, replacing the former parliamentary republic with a semi-presidential, or dual-executive, system that split powers between a prime minister as head of government and a president as head of state. De Gaulle, who was the first president elected under the Fifth Republic in December 1958, believed in a strong head of state, which he described as embodying "l'esprit de la nation" (the spirit of the nation).

The nation declares itself to be an "indivisible, secular, democratic, and social Republic". The constitution provides for a separation of powers and proclaims France's "attachment to the Rights of Man and the principles of national sovereignty as defined by the Declaration of 1789."

The Fifth Republic is France's third-longest political regime, after the hereditary and feudal monarchies of the Ancien Régime (15th century – 1792) and the parliamentary Third Republic (1879–1940).

Executive branch

Executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic and the Government. The Government consists of the Prime Minister and ministers. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President, and is responsible to Parliament. The government, including the Prime Minister, can be revoked by the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, through a "censure motion"; this ensures that the Prime Minister is always supported by a majority of the lower house (which, on most topics, has prominence over the upper house).

¹ Parts of France in Europe
**Presidency**

France has a semi-presidential system of government. The presidential candidate is required to obtain a nationwide majority of non-blank votes in either the first or second round of balloting, thus ensuring that the President is supported to some extent by at least half of the voting population.

As a consequence, the President is the pre-eminent figure in French politics. He appoints the Prime Minister; although he may not de jure dismiss him, if the Prime Minister is from the same political side, in practice he can force his resignation. He appoints the ministers, ministers-delegate and secretaries of state. When the President's political party or supporters control parliament, the President is the dominant player in executive action, choosing whomever he wishes for the government, and having it follow his political agenda (parliamentary disagreements do occur, though, even within the same party).
However, when the President’s political opponents control parliament, the President’s dominance can be severely limited, as he must choose a Prime Minister and government who reflect the majority in parliament, and who will implement the agenda of the parliamentary majority. When parties from opposite ends of the political spectrum control parliament and the presidency, the power-sharing arrangement is known as cohabitation.

Before 2002, Cohabitation was more common, because the term of the President was seven years and the term of the National Assembly was five years. Now that the term of the President has been shortened to five years, and the elections are separated by only a few months, this is less likely to happen.

**Government**

The government is led by the Prime Minister, and is made up of junior and senior ministers. It has at its disposal the civil service, government agencies, and the armed forces. The government is responsible to Parliament, and the National Assembly may pass a motion of censure, forcing the resignation of the government. This, in practice, forces the government to be from the same political party or coalition as the majority in the Assembly. Ministers have to answer questions from members of Parliament, both written and oral. In addition, ministers attend meetings of the houses of Parliament when laws pertaining to their areas of responsibility are being discussed.

Government ministers cannot pass legislation without parliamentary approval, though the Prime Minister may issue autonomous regulations or subordinated regulations provided they do not infringe on the parliamentary domain, as detailed in the constitution. Ministers, however, can propose legislation to Parliament; since the Assembly is usually allied politically to the ministers, such legislation is generally very likely to be passed. However, occasionally the opinion of the majority parliamentarians may differ significantly from those of the executive, resulting in a large number of amendments.

The Prime Minister can put through a bill without a vote, by a “commitment of responsibility”, as stipulated in article 49-3 of the Constitution. The law is then considered adopted unless the National Assembly introduces a motion of censure. If this is successful, the bill is rejected and the government has to resign.

**Legislative branch**

The Parliament of France, making up the legislative branch, consists of two houses: the National Assembly and the Senate; the Assembly is the pre-eminent body.

Parliament meets for one nine-month session each year: under special circumstances the President can call an additional session. Although parliamentary powers have diminished from those existing under the Fourth Republic, the National Assembly can still cause a government to fall if an absolute majority of the total Assembly membership votes to censure. However, this has never happened since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

The government has a strong influence in shaping the agenda of Parliament. The government also can link its term to a proposed piece of legislation, and unless a motion of censure is introduced (within 24 hours after the proposal) and passed (within 48 hours of introduction – thus full procedures last at most 72 hours), the text is considered adopted without a vote.

Members of Parliament enjoy parliamentary immunity. Both assemblies have committees that write reports on a variety of topics. If necessary, they can establish parliamentary enquiry commissions with broad investigative power.
National Assembly

The National Assembly is the principal legislative body. Its 577 deputies are directly elected for five-year terms in local majority votes, and all seats are voted on in each election.

The National Assembly may force the resignation of the government by introducing a motion of censure. For this reason, the Prime Minister and government are necessarily from the dominant party or coalition in the assembly. In the case of a president and assembly from opposing parties, this leads to the situation known as cohabitation. While motions of censure are periodically proposed by the opposition following government actions that it deems highly inappropriate, they are purely rhetorical; party discipline ensures that the government is never overthrown by the Assembly.

The last legislative elections, held in June 2012 resulted in the following distribution of seats:

**Political groups:**
- Socialist (280)
- Republican (194)
- UDI (30)
- Green (17)
- Social-Liberal (13)
- Left (10)
- Not registered (8)
- National Front (2)
Senate

Senators are chosen by an electoral college of about 150,000 local elected officials for six-year terms, and half of the Senate is renewed every three years. Before the law of 30 July 2004, senators were elected for nine years, renewed by thirds every three years. There are currently 348 senators.

The Senate's legislative powers are limited; on most matters of legislation, the National Assembly has the last word in the event of a disagreement between the two houses. The Senate also serves to monitor the administration's actions by publishing many reports each year on a wide variety of topics.

In 2011, the Socialist Party won control of the French Senate for the first time since the foundation of the Fifth Republic. In 2014, the centre-right Gaullists and its allies won back the control of the Senate.

Political groups:

Majority:
- Republican (144)
- Groupe Union des Démocrates et Indépendants - UC (42)

Opposition:
- Groupe socialiste et républicain (108)
- Groupe communiste, républicain et citoyen (21)
- Groupe du Rassemblement Démocratique et Social européen (17)
- Not registered (8)
- Groupe écologiste (10)
- Sénateurs ne figurant sur la liste d'aucun groupe (6)
Judicial Branch

French law provides for a separate judicial branch with an independent judiciary, which does not answer to and is not directly controlled by the other two branches of government. France has a civil law legal system, the basis of which is codified law; however, case law also plays a significant role in the courts. The most distinctive feature of the French judicial system is that it is divided into judicial and administrative branches.

Judicial courts

The judicial branch of courts adjudicates civil and criminal cases. The judicial courts consist of inferior courts, intermediate appellate courts, and the French Supreme Court.

Administrative courts

Courts of administrative law adjudicate on claims and suits against government offices and agencies. The administrative branch is made up of administrative courts, courts of administrative appeal, and the Council of State as the court of last resort.

Constitutional Council

Neither judicial nor administrative courts are empowered to rule on the constitutionality of acts of Parliament. While technically not part of the judicial branch, the Constitutional Council may examine legislation and decide whether it violates the Constitution prior to enactment, but only by referral from the French President, President of the Senate, President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, or a group of 60 opposition members from the Senate or National Assembly. After enactment, laws can be reviewed by referral from the highest administrative court, the Conseil d'Etat, or by the highest judicial court, the Cour de Cassation.

Council members are appointed for nine years (three every three years); three are appointed by the President, three by the President of the National Assembly, and three by the President of the Senate. The former presidents are also members for life of the Constitutional Council.

Financial courts

France’s main Court of Audit (Cour des Comptes) and regional audit courts audit government finances, public institutions (including other courts), and public entities. The court publishes an annual report and can refer criminal matters to public prosecutors. It can also directly fine public accountants for mishandling funds, and refer civil servants who misused funds to the Court of Financial and Budgetary Discipline.
Local government

Traditionally, decision-making in France is highly centralized, with each of France's departments headed by a prefect appointed by the central government, in addition to the conseil général, a locally elected council. However, in 1982, the national government passed legislation to decentralize authority by giving a wide range of administrative and fiscal powers to local elected officials. In March 1986, regional councils were directly elected for the first time, and the process of decentralization has continued, albeit at a slow pace. In March 2003, a constitutional reform introduced a more decentralized system, which increased the powers of local government. Nevertheless, France is still one of the most centralized major countries in Europe and the world.

Administrative units with a local government in Metropolitan France consist of:

- 36,681 communes, headed by a municipal council and a mayor, grouped in
- 96 départements, headed by a general council (conseil général) and its president, grouped in
- 13 régions, headed by a regional council and its president.

Oversea regions:

- French Guyana in South America
- Guadeloupe in the Caribbean (Americas)
- Martinique in the Caribbean (Americas)
- Mayotte in the Indian Ocean (Africa)
- La Réunion in the Indian Ocean (Africa)
The Socialist Party (French: Parti socialiste): PS) is a social-democratic political party in France, and the largest party of the French centre-left. The PS is one of the two major contemporary political parties in France, along with the Republicans. The PS first won power in 1981, when its candidate François Mitterrand was elected President of France in the 1981 presidential election. Under Mitterrand, the party achieved a governing majority in the National Assembly from 1981 to 1986 and again from 1988 to 1993. On 6 May 2012, François Hollande, the First Secretary of the Socialist Party from 1997 to 2008, was elected President of France, and the next month, the party won the majority in the National Assembly. PS candidate for the 2017 French presidential election after winning the party primary is Benoît Hamon (*1967).

The Republicans (French: Les Républicains; LR) is a centre-right political party in France and one of the two major contemporary political parties in France. The party was formed on 30 May 2015 by renaming the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party, which was founded in 2002 under the leadership of former President Jacques Chirac. In the UMP four major French political families were represented: Gaullism, republicanism, Christian democracy and radicalism. UMP-president Nicolas Sarkozy was elected President of France in the 2007 presidential election, at the 2007 legislative election, the UMP gained a majority in the National Assembly with 313 out of 577 seats. LR candidate for the 2017 presidential election after winning the party primary is former Prime Minister François Fillon (*1954).

En Marche! (English: Forward!, or On The Move), also known by its official name Association pour le renouvellement de la vie politique (Association for the Renewal of Politics), is a social liberal political party in France founded on 6 April 2016 by former Minister of the Economy, Industry and the Digital Economy, Emmanuel Macron, who is the 2017 presidential candidate. He considers En Marche! to be a progressive movement. The name of the party shares Macron's initials.

Unsubmissive France (French: La France insoumise; represented in logo as the letter phi, $\phi$) is a political movement, launched on 10 February 2016 by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, member of the European Parliament and former co-president of the Left Party. The aim of the movement is to get Mélenchon elected as President of the Republic at the presidential election of May 2017, and to get as many "unsubmitive" deputies as possible elected to the National Assembly, during the legislative elections of June 2017, in order to implement the programme L'Avenir en commun (English: The Future in common) and to summon a constituent assembly, tasked with writing the constitution of a Sixth Republic. Mélenchon won 11.10% in the first round in the 2012 presidential election as common candidate of the Left Front.
The Left Front (French: Front de gauche, FG or FDG) is a French electoral federation created for the 2009 European elections by the French Communist Party and the Left Party, which was formed when a left-wing minority faction decided to leave the Socialist Party, and the Unitarian Left (Gauche Unitaire), a group which left the New Anticapitalist Party. The alliance was subsequently extended for the 2010 regional elections and the 2012 presidential election and the subsequent parliamentary election.

The National Front (French: Front National, FN) is a right-wing populist and nationalist political party in France. Its major policies include opposition to the French membership of the European Union and the Schengen Area, economic protectionism, a hardline approach to law and order issues, and opposition to immigration. The party was founded in 1972 to unify a variety of French nationalist movements at the time. While the party struggled as a marginal force for its first ten years, since 1984 it has been the major force of French nationalism. Jean-Marie Le Pen was the party’s first leader and the undisputed centre of the party from its start until his resignation in 2011. Marine Le Pen, his daughter, was elected as the current leader. She came third in the first round in the 2012 presidential election, scoring 17.9%, the best showing ever for the FN. Marine Le Pen is FN candidate for the 2017 presidential election.

The Union of Democrats and Independents (French: Union des démocrates et indépendants, UDI) is a centre-right political party in France founded on 18 September 2012 on the basis of the parliamentary group of the same name. The party is composed of eight separate political parties who retain their independence. In 2017 presidential election UDI supports LR-candidate François Fillon.

Europe Ecology – The Greens (French: Europe Écologie Les Verts, EELV) is a green political party. The party was formed on 13 November 2010 from the merger of The Greens and Europe Ecology. In the 2012 presidential election, EELV candidate Eva Joly won 2.3% of the vote and was eliminated in the first round. In the 2012 legislative elections, EELV candidates won 5.46% nationally and elected a record 17 deputies. However, every winning EELV deputy had benefited from the endorsement of the PS, although many faced local PS dissidents. In 2017 presidential election, EELV candidate Yannick Jadot withdrew to support PS candidate Benoît Hamon.

The Democratic Movement (French: Mouvement démocrate; MoDem) is a centrist political party in France, which is characterised by a strong pro-European stance. MoDem was founded by François Bayrou, who won 18.57% in the 2007 presidential election and 9.13% in the 2012 presidential election. He was eliminated in the first round both times. On February 22, 2017, Bayrou announced that he will not contest the 2017 presidential election and would instead endorse the centrist En Marche! candidate Emmanuel Macron.

The Radical Party of the Left (French: Parti radical de gauche, PRG) is a social-liberal political party in France. It has been a close ally of the major party of the centre-left in France, the Socialist Party (PS), since 1972. Its president Sylvia Pinel participated in the left’s party primary. In the 2017 presidential election PRG supports the PS-candidate Benoît Hamon.