

Chapter 1 – Changes in Leadership and Politics (2000–2025)

A) General Information about France

1. Geography – basic facts + a map



Source: Google maps

The surface area of France is 643,801 square km.

Metropolitan France has eight border countries: Spain, Andorra, Monaco, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium.

France has overseas territories all over the world, including on the Antarctic continent.



Source: <https://www.defnat.com/e-RDN/vue-article.php?carticle=22147>

Thanks to these territories, inherited from a colonial past, France possesses the second largest E.E.Z. (Economic Exclusive Zone) in the world, after the USA.

2. System of Government



Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

The French Republic is founded on three principles, which are enshrined in its motto: 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité'.

Liberté: the importance of individual freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of conscience.

Égalité: equality before the law and equality of opportunity.

Fraternité: solidarity, public services and social protection.

The 5th Republic was founded in 1958 by general de Gaulle.

The executive branch is led by a president, with a 5 year-term since 2002. Before a president was elected for seven years. A president can only be elected twice. The French citizens choose directly their president. The president can also consult directly the people by referendum; then the citizens can answer yes or no to a question.

The legislative branch is divided into two houses – the “Assemblée Nationale” (National assembly) and a Senate.

The judicial branch is independent from the two others.

The President of the Republic is the head of State, he has several key roles:

- Guarantor of the institutions: He ensures respect for the Constitution.
- Head of the armies: He is responsible for national defense.
- Executive power: He appoints the Prime Minister and can dissolve the National Assembly.
- International representation: He embodies France abroad.

The Parliament is composed of two chambers: The National Assembly (577 deputies):

Elected by direct universal suffrage, it votes on laws and controls the government. The

Senate: elected by indirect universal suffrage by the electors, it represents local communities and can amend laws. Their role:

- Vote the laws: Bills are discussed and amended by both chambers.
- Controlling the government: Deputies and senators can question ministers and vote on motions of censure.

Local authorities (communes, departments, regions) are managed by local elected officials:

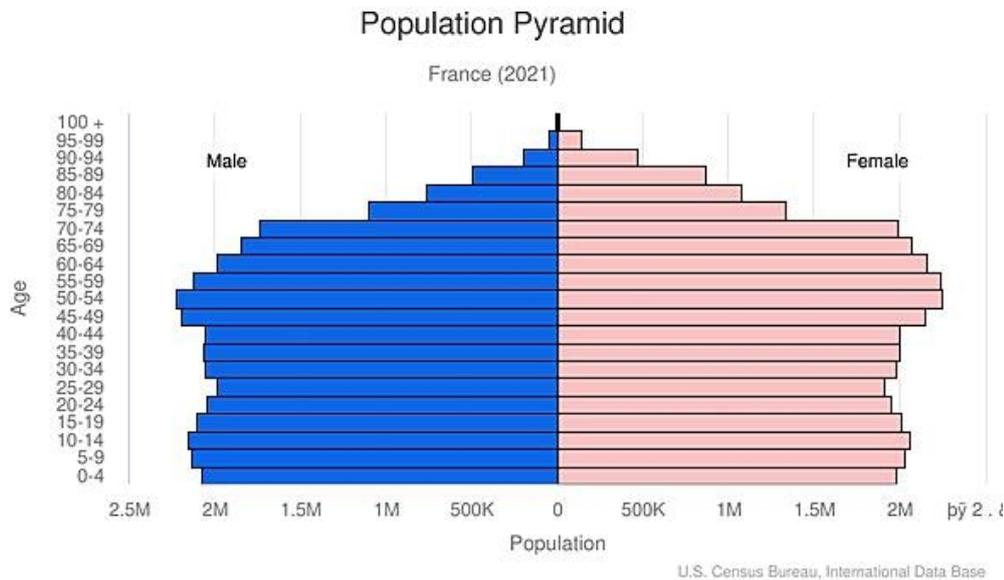
They take care of schools, roads and manage transport, or social assistance. Their role:

- Make local decisions: Facilities, budgets, projects for the city or region.
- Represent the citizens: They are the relay between the population and the State.

3. French population

The total population is about 68,374,591 Frenchmen and Frenchwomen in 2024. 82 percent of them live in a city or a town.

Life expectancy is around 82 years.

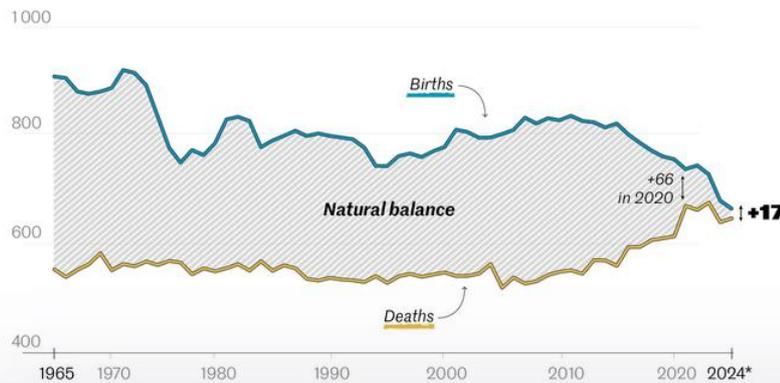


Source: CIA world factbook

The government is more and more concerned with an aging population and a drop in birth rate.

In 2024, a 2.2% drop in births compared with 2023

Number of births and deaths, in thousands



*Provisional figures
France as a whole from 2014. Figures exclude Mayotte until 2013.

Source: French newspaper *Le Monde* (https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2025/01/14/french-birth-rate-still-historically-low_6737039_7.html)

Thus, there is a fierce battle over reforms of the retiring age and the retirement pensions. A reform passed in 2023 changed the retiring age from 62 years to 64 years. Now the government wants it to progressively raise to 67 years, but the unions and opposition parties strongly oppose this reform.

4. Currency

France uses the Euro currency since January 2002.



France chose as a symbol on its euro coins the “tree of Liberty”, a symbol referring to the 1848 Revolution when the republican symbols were adopted – the motto “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”, and Marianne as an allegory for the Republique.

5. Other interesting facts

France is one of the 6 founders of the E.E.C. It still plays a major role in the European Union. It is a member of the Eurozone, of the Schengen zone, of NATO.

France is also trying to play a major role in the international affairs, being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with a right of veto, a member of the G-7, the G-20, ...



The UNESCO – United Nations Educational scientific and cultural organization - headquarters are located in Paris

B/ Presidents

Since 2000, French citizen elected 4 presidents

 A portrait of Jacques Chirac, a French politician, standing outdoors in a dark suit and tie, with a large building in the background.	<p>Jacques Chirac, elected twice in 1995 and 2002 He is a right-wing president</p>	<p>He was the Mayor of Paris during 18 years, then he held responsibilities in various governments. French cartoonists nicknamed him “super liar”. But above all French people remember him as the president who apologized for the part played by the French authorities in the Shoah (in a famous speech in 1995), in 1997 he put an end to the military service, ... IN 2002 he warned the French and the world about the consequences of our inaction regarding climate change: “Our house is burning down and we’re looking the other way.” In 2003 he refused to join the USA in the Iraq war.</p>
 A portrait of Nicolas Sarkozy, a French politician, standing in a library with bookshelves and a French flag behind him.	<p>Nicolas Sarkozy, elected in 2007</p>	<p>From 2002 to 2004 and once more in 2005 he was the Minister of Interior, in charge of security forces. His main warhorse was to reduce immigration in France. He was the first president to divorce during a mandate (a few months after being elected). In 2008 he married Carla Bruni, a former model and singer. His nickname was the “Hyper-president” (hyper for hyperactive)</p>
 A portrait of François Hollande, a French politician, standing outdoors in a dark suit and tie, with a large building in the background.	<p>François Hollande; elected in 2012 He is a socialist, a left-wing president</p>	<p>He addressed the economic problems with success; unemployment fell down but he was not popular in the French population. In 2015 and 2016 France was afflicted by a series of terrorist attacks. He proved he was a good leader during this period. He was the first unmarried president, living with a girlfriend, a journalist, and later on with an actress. His ex-wife, Segolene Royal, was a candidate in the 2007 presidential election; she was defeated by Sarkozy. He claimed he wanted to be a “normal” president. He was nicknamed “mister Flanby” (Flanby is a French dessert that’s flabby / loose and very sugary).</p>



Emmanuel Macron, elected twice in 2017 and 2022
 He created his own party, “En Marche”, renamed “Renaissance”

In reaction, Emmanuel Macron claimed he would not be normal but like “Jupiter”, a powerful president.
 He is the first president to be elected without having a great political career. He has never been elected before. He claimed he wanted to rule the country with experts rather than with politicians. He wanted to create a “new kind of politics” and led a pro-business policy.
 In 2007 he married his former literature teacher, Brigitte, who is 24 years older than him.

C) Political Affairs and Scandals

- The personal life of our politicians is not a matter for scandals. It’s mainly something French people laugh at. Except in some cases, like in 2023, when a French senator drugged a female deputy, a friend of his, in an attempt to rape her. She managed to escape and filed a complaint. The senator has not been judged yet, in 2025. Many French citizens were shocked because of the attempt but also because the senator refused to resign from his position.
- President Macron had to face a series of crises, including the “yellow vest” (“gilets jaunes”) rebellion against the state and taxes in 2018, the Covid crisis in 2020, ... But he main decision he made that created a political crisis in France is when he decided to dissolve the National Assembly after his party lost the European elections. After these elections, there no more any majority in the Assembly and from June 2024 to 2025 there is so much political unrest in the country that nearly all decisions are blocked. Experts fear this political crisis may lead to a deep economic crisis.
- In November 2025, former president Sarkozy is sentenced to jail for corruption. He was charged with receiving millions of euros from Libya’s former dictator Gadhafi to fund his presidential campaign. He is the first president ever sentenced to jail.

D) Elections and Political Parties

1. Elections in France

Presidential elections :

Every five years, the French elect their president for a five-year term by direct universal suffrage. The election takes place in two rounds: at the first, all the candidates are in line. If neither of them obtains an absolute majority, the two leaders face each other in the second round.



"Bulletins de vote J1a" by Jamain is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Legislative elections :

The legislative elections renew the 577 deputies of the National Assembly, also for five years. In each constituency, the vote is a majority with two rounds. Either a candidate is elected in the first round if he obtains an absolute majority; otherwise, a second round opposes the candidates who have won more than 12.5% of the votes and it is then the candidate with the most votes that wins.

The system is majority voting: First past the post is used for presidential, legislative, and municipal elections (in small municipalities).

The principle is simple: the candidate or list that obtains the most votes wins. In the legislative and presidential elections, if no candidate obtains an absolute majority in the first round, a second round is organized between the candidates who came out ahead.

Advantage: This system favors the most popular candidates or parties and allows for a clear majority.

Example: In the presidential election, only the two candidates leading in the first round can hold on to the second.

European Elections :

The French MEPs are elected for five years by proportional representation in one round. Voters vote for a national list because, since 2019, they form only one constituency. Seats are distributed proportionally for lists exceeding 5%.

Proportional representation is used for European and municipal elections (in large municipalities). Here, the seats are distributed proportionally to the votes obtained by each list. In France, a list must obtain at least 5% of the votes to be represented.

Advantage: This system allows for better representation of the diversity of opinions.

Example: In the European elections, if a list obtains 20% of the votes, it receives approximately 20% of the seats for deputies.

QCM ; The French Electoral System :

1. How many rounds are necessary to elect the president of the Republic in France?
 - a) 1 round
 - b) 2 rounds
 - c) 3 rounds
2. What is the voting system used for legislative elections in France?
 - a) Two-round majority system
 - b) Full proportional representation
 - c) Mixed voting (majority and proportional)
3. At what threshold can a list obtain seats in the European elections in France?
 - a) 3% of the votes
 - b) 5% of the votes
 - c) 10% of the votes
4. Who elects the senators in France?
 - a) French citizens (direct universal suffrage)
 - b) The President of the Republic
 - c) A college of grand electors (indirect universal suffrage)
5. Which electoral reform was adopted in 2000 in France?
 - a) The establishment of the septennat
 - b) The transition to five-year terms for the presidential term
 - c) The abolition of universal suffrage
6. In municipalities with more than 1,000 inhabitants, how are municipal councilors elected?
 - a) In the majority system with a mix
 - b) In the proportional list election with majority bonus
 - c) By drawing lots among registered voters

Correct answers: 1 - b) / 2 - a) / 3 - b) / 4 - c) / 5 - b) / 6 - b)

2. Overview of main political parties – only a short selection with brief characteristics

Elections play an essential role in French democracy: they allow citizens to choose their representatives and express their political views.

However, to fully understand how these elections work, it is essential to consider the role of political parties, which are the true pillars of democratic life. These organizations structure ideas, propose programs, select candidates, and strongly influence public debate. In France, the political landscape is rich, diverse, and constantly evolving, with traditional parties, new formations, and recent coalitions. Studying elections and political parties thus provides a better understanding of the dynamics of power, societal changes, and the challenges facing French democracy today.



1. The major political families

French political life is organized around several ideological families. On the left, the main parties are the Socialist Party, led by Olivier Faure, and La France Insoumise, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon with Manuel Bompard as coordinator.

Political ecology is represented by Europe Écologie Les Verts, led by Marine Tondelier. These parties advocate social justice, reducing inequality, and an important role for the state.

The center, committed to compromise and European integration, is represented by Renaissance, led by Gabriel Attal (with Emmanuel Macron as a major figure), François Bayrou's Democratic Movement, and Édouard Philippe's Horizons. These parties are generally moderate and liberal on economic issues.

The traditional right, represented by Les Républicains under the leadership of Bruno Retailleau, advocates for order, security, and individual responsibility.

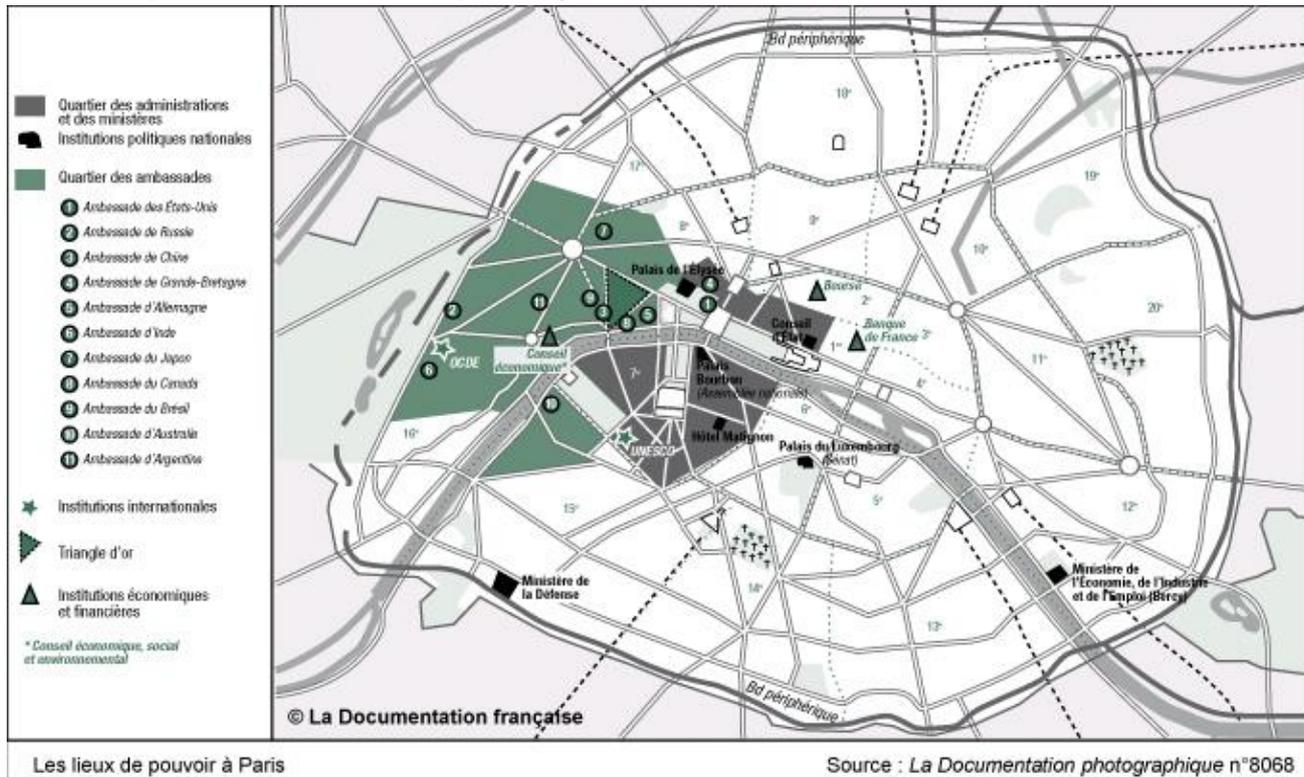
Finally, the radical or far-right parties include the National Rally, led by Jordan Bardella, and Reconquest, founded by Éric Zemmour. These groups advocate a break with certain institutions and emphasize national sovereignty and nationalism.

2. French political parties are based on several pillars: members who participate in internal decisions and primaries, a leadership that defines strategy and direction, and activists on the ground who ensure electoral mobilization. Funding is provided by membership fees, donations, and public subsidies proportional to electoral results. Some parties also rely on think tanks or networks of influence to develop their programs.

3. The French political landscape has undergone significant changes in recent years. The traditional alternation between left and right has weakened in favour of movements centred on personalities or coalitions. The traditional parties have lost influence in the face of public mistrust, while new, more flexible movements that are active on social media have emerged. Citizens are less involved in parties on a long-term basis, but they do get involved in specific campaigns, petitions, or citizen movements. This fragmentation and polarization show that, despite the changes, parties remain essential to French democracy.

E) Places and Websites Related to politics in France

Places of power in Paris, the capital city



A TRAVEL GUIDE OF **PARIS CITY VISION**



Discover our tours and guided visits.

www.pariscityvision.com

MAP OF PARIS
Plan touristique de Paris





The presidential palace, the Élysée, can only be visited once a year, during the “heritage day” (“Journée du patrimoine”) in September.

The president lives here and work here.

Every Wednesday morning, the president chairs a meeting with all the members of the government.

For a virtual visit online you can go to: <https://visite.elysee.fr/>



source: Wikipedia

The Prime Minister lives and work in the “hotel Matignon”, another palace. People can only visit it once a year, during the “Heritage day”.

Virtual visit: <https://www.info.gouv.fr/matignon-visite-virtuelle/>

People can visit the two chambers, the National Assembly and the Senate if they are invited by a representative. It's quite easy to get an invitation.



source: Wikipedia

The French National Assembly meets in a palace, the Palais Bourbon. Its semi-spherical form was adopted during the French Revolution.

For a virtual visit: <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/visite>



source: Wikipedia

The Senate meets in another palace, the Palace of Luxembourg.
Virtual visit: <https://www.senat.fr/connaitre-le-senat/patrimoine.html>



source: <https://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/estate/palace>

When the situation is exceptional, for instance when a change in the French constitution is to be passed, the president convenes the Parliament (it means the National Assembly and the Senate together) to a Congress in the Versailles Palace, near Paris. In 2024 the Parliament was convened to pass the act entering the right to abort in the Constitution.

To learn more: <https://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/estate/palace/congress-chamber#the-congress-chamber> and <https://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/history/key-dates/congress-versailles-and-fifth-republic>

The Republic is also represented in every city Hall with symbols:

- The motto
- The three colours flag
- A portrait of the president
- A statue of Marianne who represents the republic

Example: The Agde city Hall

