

How power works in the French Republic

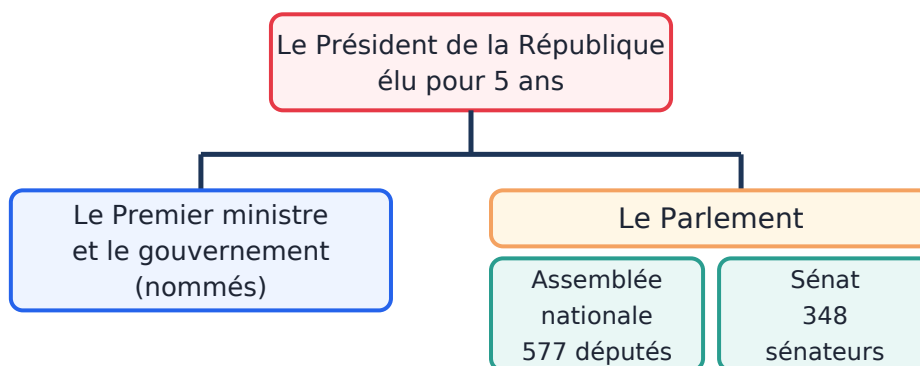
French B2 (upper intermediate) · Lesson

Quick answer: France is governed under the Fifth Republic: the President, elected for five years, names the Prime Minister, while Parliament votes laws in two chambers, the Assemblée nationale and the Sénat. Laïcité, set by the 1905 law, makes the State neutral toward all religions.

Level: French B2 (CEFR upper intermediate) · **Standards:** CEFR B2, Reading

Who holds power in the Fifth Republic?

France has been governed under the Constitution of 1958. Power is shared among the head of state, the government and two chambers of Parliament.



Le gouvernement doit avoir la confiance de l'Assemblée

The main institutions of the Fifth Republic.

Role	Chosen how?	Mandate
le Président de la République	élu au suffrage universel direct	5 years, two consecutive terms at most
le Premier ministre	nommé par le Président	no fixed term
les députés	direct vote, one seat per circonscription	5 years
les sénateurs	suffrage indirect (elected officials vote)	6 years

How do elections work?

The presidential election has two rounds, held two weeks apart: le premier tour and le second tour. If no candidate wins an absolute majority in the first round, the two leading candidates face

each other. Deputies are also chosen in two rounds, one district at a time. Voters must be 18 or older and registered on the electoral roll (la liste électorale). On election day, citizens go to the polling station (le bureau de vote), choose a ballot and slip it into the ballot box (l'urne). Results are announced the same evening.

Président		5 ans
Députés		5 ans
Sénateurs		6 ans
Conseillers municipaux		6 ans

Length of the main elected mandates.

Reading institutional texts: the passive

Press articles and official texts use *être* + past participle + *par*. The participle agrees with the subject.

- Le Premier ministre est nommé par le Président. — The Prime Minister is appointed by the President.
- Les lois sont votées par le Parlement. — Laws are passed by Parliament.
- La loi a été promulguée la semaine dernière. — The law was promulgated last week.

What does laïcité mean?

La laïcité

La laïcité is the principle that the State is neutral toward religion: it recognizes no official religion and guarantees freedom of belief. Public services must treat everyone equally.

Common mistake

In French, le gouvernement means only the Prime Minister and the ministers, not the President or Parliament. Also, a député is a member of the Assemblée nationale, never of the Sénat, and un projet de loi comes from the government while une proposition de loi comes from Parliament.

Culture note

Laïcité rests on the law of December 9, 1905, which separated the Churches and the State.

The same text protects freedom of worship.

Zoé's tip

To remember who is elected how, link the letters: député goes with direct and sénateur with indirect. Then look for par after the participle to find who acts.

Key points to remember

- The President is elected for five years in two rounds.
- The Assembly has 577 deputies elected directly; the Senate has 348 senators elected indirectly.
- Le gouvernement means the Prime Minister and the ministers only.
- La laïcité rests on the law of December 9, 1905.

How power works in the French Republic: frequently asked questions

How long does the French president serve?

Five years, a term called le quinquennat. Since a 2008 reform, a president cannot serve more than two consecutive terms.

What is the difference between the National Assembly and the Senate?

Deputies of the Assemblée nationale are elected directly by voters for five years. Senators are elected by elected officials (mayors, councillors, deputies) for six years and represent local communities.

Who appoints the Prime Minister?

The President names the Premier ministre, but the government can be overthrown by the Assembly through a motion de censure, so the choice depends on the parliamentary majority.

What does laïcité mean in simple terms?

It is the neutrality of the State toward religions, set by the 1905 law. Everyone is free to believe or not, and public services treat all citizens equally.

How is a law made in France?

A text is examined by both chambers in turn, a process called la navette parlementaire. If they disagree, the Assembly can have the last word, then the President promulgates the law.