

# France

**France**,<sup>[a]</sup> officially the **French Republic**,<sup>[b]</sup> is a country located primarily in Western Europe. It also includes overseas regions and territories in the Americas and the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans,<sup>[XI]</sup> giving it one of the largest discontinuous exclusive economic zones in the world. Metropolitan France shares borders with Belgium and Luxembourg to the north, Germany to the north east, Switzerland to the east, Italy and Monaco to the south east, Andorra and Spain to the south, and a maritime border with the United Kingdom to the north west. Its metropolitan area extends from the Rhine to the Atlantic Ocean and from the Mediterranean Sea to the English Channel and the North Sea. Its overseas territories include French Guiana in South America, Saint Pierre and Miquelon in the North Atlantic, the French West Indies, and many islands in Oceania and the Indian Ocean. Its eighteen integral regions (five of which are overseas) span a combined area of 643,801 km<sup>2</sup> (248,573 sq mi) and have a total population of 68.4 million as of January 2024.<sup>[5][8]</sup> France is a unitary semi-presidential republic with its capital in Paris, the country's largest city and main cultural and commercial centre; other major urban areas include Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, Lille, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, Nantes, and Nice.

Metropolitan France was settled during the Iron Age by Celtic tribes known as Gauls before Rome annexed the area in 51 BC, leading to a distinct Gallo-Roman culture. In the Early Middle Ages, the Germanic Franks formed the Kingdom of Francia, which became the heartland of the Carolingian Empire. The Treaty of Verdun of 843 partitioned the empire, with West Francia evolving into the Kingdom of France. In the High Middle Ages, France was a powerful but decentralized feudal kingdom, but from the mid-14th to the mid-15th centuries, France was plunged into a dynastic conflict with England known as the Hundred Years' War. In the 16th century, the French Renaissance saw culture flourish and a French colonial empire rise.<sup>[13]</sup> Internally,

## French Republic

République française (French)



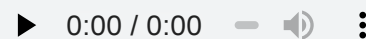
Flag



Coat of arms<sup>[1]</sup>

**Motto:** "Liberté, égalité, fraternité"  
("Liberty, Equality, Fraternity")

**Anthem:** "La Marseillaise"



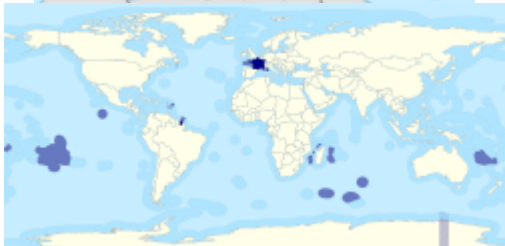
### Diplomatic emblem



France was dominated by the conflict with the House of Habsburg and the French Wars of Religion between Catholics and Huguenots. France was successful in the Thirty Years' War and further increased its influence during the reign of Louis XIV.<sup>[14]</sup>

The French Revolution of 1789 overthrew the Ancien Régime and produced the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which expresses the nation's ideals to this day. France reached its political and military zenith in the early 19th century under Napoleon Bonaparte, subjugating part of continental Europe and establishing the First French Empire. The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars significantly shaped the course of European history. The collapse of the empire initiated a period of relative decline, in which France endured the Bourbon Restoration until the founding of the French Second Republic which was succeeded by the Second French Empire upon Napoleon III's takeover. His empire collapsed during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. This led to the establishment of the Third French Republic, and subsequent decades saw a period of economic prosperity and cultural and scientific flourishing known as the Belle Époque. France was one of the major participants of World War I, from which it emerged victorious at great human and economic cost. It was among the Allied powers of World War II, but it surrendered and was occupied by the Axis in 1940. Following its liberation in 1944, the short-lived Fourth Republic was established and later dissolved in the course of the defeat in the Algerian War. The current Fifth Republic was formed in 1958 by Charles de Gaulle. Algeria and most French colonies became independent in the 1960s, with the majority retaining close economic and military ties with France.

France retains its centuries-long status as a global centre of art, science, and philosophy. It hosts the third-largest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and is the world's leading tourist destination, receiving 100 million foreign visitors in 2023.<sup>[15]</sup> France is a developed country with a high nominal per capita income globally, and its advanced economy ranks among the largest in the world. It is a great power,<sup>[16]</sup> being one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and an official nuclear-weapon state. France is a leading and founding member of the European Union



Location of France (blue or dark green)  
– in Europe (green & dark grey)  
– in the European Union (green)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Capital</b><br>and largest city                | Paris<br>48°51'N 2°21'E                                      |
| <b>Official language</b><br>and national language | French <sup>[1]</sup>  |
| <b>Nationality</b> (2021) <sup>[3]</sup>          | 92.2% French<br>7.8% other                                   |
| <b>Religion</b> (2023) <sup>[4]</sup>             | 51% no religion<br>38% Christianity<br>10% Islam<br>1% other |
| <b>Demonym(s)</b>                                 | French   |
| <b>Government</b>                                 | Unitary semi-presidential republic                           |
| • <b>President</b>                                | Emmanuel Macron  |

and the eurozone,<sup>[17]</sup> as well as a key member of the Group of Seven, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Francophonie.

## Etymology and pronunciation

Originally applied to the whole Frankish Empire, the name *France* comes from the Latin *Francia*, or "realm of the Franks".<sup>[18]</sup> Modern France is still named today *Francia* in Italian and Spanish, while *Frankreich* in German, *Frankrijk* in Dutch, and *Frankrike* in Swedish and Norwegian all mean "Land/realm of the Franks".

The name of the Franks is related to the English word *frank* ("free"): the latter stems from the Old French *franc* ("free, noble, sincere"), and ultimately from the Medieval Latin word *francus* ("free, exempt from service; freeman, Frank"), a generalisation of the tribal name that emerged as a Late Latin borrowing of the reconstructed Frankish endonym *\*Frank*.<sup>[19][20]</sup> It has been suggested that the meaning "free" was adopted because, after the conquest of Gaul, only Franks were free of taxation,<sup>[21]</sup> or more generally because they had the status of freemen in contrast to servants or slaves.<sup>[20]</sup> The etymology of *\*Frank* is uncertain. It is traditionally derived from the Proto-Germanic word *\*frankōn*, which translates as "javelin" or "lance" (the throwing axe of the Franks was known as the *francisca*),<sup>[22]</sup> although these weapons may have been named because of their use by the Franks, not the other way around.<sup>[20]</sup>

In English, 'France' is pronounced /fræns/<sup>FRANSS</sup> in American English and /frɑːns/<sup>FRAHNSS</sup> or /fræns/<sup>FRANSS</sup> in British English. The pronunciation with /ɑː/ is mostly confined to accents with the trap-bath split

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Prime Minister</u></li><li><u>President of the Senate</u></li><li><u>President of the National Assembly</u></li></ul> </div>  | <div> <div>Gabriel Attal</div> <div>G rard Larcher</div> <div>Ya l Braun-Pivet</div> </div>   |
| <b>Legislature</b>   | <u>Parliament</u>   |
| <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Upper house</u></li><li><u>Lower house</u></li></ul> </div>   | <div> <div>Senate</div> <div>National Assembly</div> </div>   |
| <b>Establishment</b>   |   |
| <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Kingdom of the West Franks – Treaty of Verdun</u></li><li><u>Kingdom of France – Capetian rulers of France</u></li><li><u>French Republic – French First Republic</u></li><li><u>Founded the EEC</u><sup>[III]</sup></li><li><u>Current constitution – French Fifth Republic</u></li></ul> </div> | <div> <div>10 August 843</div> <div>3 July 987</div> <div>22 September 1792</div> <div>1 January 1958</div> <div>4 October 1958</div> </div>  |
| <b>Area</b>  |   |
| <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Total</b></li><li><b>Water (%)</b></li><li><b>Metropolitan France (IGN)</b></li><li><b>Metropolitan France (Cadastre)</b></li></ul> </div>  | <div> <div>643,801 km<sup>2</sup> (248,573 sq mi)<sup>[5]</sup> (43rd)</div> <div>0.86<sup>[6]</sup></div> <div>551,695 km<sup>2</sup> (213,011 sq mi)<sup>[IV]</sup> (50th)</div> <div>543,940.9 km<sup>2</sup> (210,016.8 sq mi)<sup>[V][7]</sup> (50th)</div> </div> |
| <b>Population</b>  |   |
| <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>January 2024 estimate</b></li><li><b>Density</b></li><li><b>Metropolitan France, estimate as of January 2024</b></li><li><b>Density</b></li></ul> </div>  | <div> <div>▲ 68,373,433<sup>[8]</sup> (20th)</div> <div>106.20274/km<sup>2</sup> (106th)</div> <div>▲ 66,142,961<sup>[9]</sup> (23rd)</div> <div>122/km<sup>2</sup> (316.0/sq mi) (89th)</div> </div>   |
| <b>GDP (PPP)</b>   | 2024 estimate   |
| <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Total</b></li><li><b>Per capita</b></li></ul> </div>  | <div> <div>▲ \$3.988 trillion<sup>[10]</sup> (10th)</div> <div>▲ \$60,339<sup>[10]</sup> (26th)</div> </div>  |
| <b>GDP (nominal)</b>   | 2024 estimate   |

such as Received Pronunciation, though it can be also heard in some other dialects such as Cardiff English, in which /frɑːns/ is in free variation with /fræns/.<sup>[23]</sup>

# History

## Pre-6th century BC

The oldest traces of archaic humans in what is now France date from approximately 1.8 million years ago.<sup>[24]</sup> Neanderthals occupied the region into the Upper Paleolithic era but were slowly replaced by Homo sapiens around 35,000 BC.<sup>[25]</sup> This period witnessed the emergence of cave painting in the Dordogne and Pyrenees, including at Lascaux, dated to c. 18,000 BC.<sup>[24]</sup> At the end of the Last Glacial Period (10,000 BC), the climate became milder;<sup>[24]</sup> from approximately 7,000 BC, this part of Western Europe entered the Neolithic era, and its inhabitants became sedentary.

After demographic and agricultural development between the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, metallurgy appeared, initially working gold, copper and bronze, then later iron.<sup>[26]</sup> France has numerous megalithic sites from the Neolithic, including the dense Carnac stones site (approximately 3,300 BC).

## Antiquity (6th century BC – 5th century AD)

In 600 BC, Ionian Greeks from Phocaea founded the colony of Massalia (present-day Marseille).<sup>[27]</sup> Celtic tribes penetrated parts of eastern and northern France, spreading through the rest of the country between the 5th and 3rd century BC.<sup>[28]</sup> Around 390 BC, the Gallic chieftain Brennus and his troops made their way to Roman Italy, defeated the Romans in the Battle of the Allia, and besieged and ransomed Rome.<sup>[29]</sup> This left Rome weakened, and the Gauls continued to harass the region until 345 BC when they entered into a peace treaty.<sup>[30]</sup> But the Romans and the Gauls remained adversaries for centuries, and the Gauls continued to be a threat in Italy.<sup>[31]</sup>

Around 125 BC, the south of Gaul was conquered by the Romans, who called this region Provincia Nostra ("Our Province"), which evolved into Provence in French.<sup>[32]</sup> Julius Caesar conquered the remainder of Gaul and overcame a revolt by Gallic chieftain Vercingetorix in 52 BC.<sup>[33]</sup> Gaul was divided by Augustus into provinces<sup>[34]</sup> and many cities were founded during the Gallo-Roman period, including Lugdunum (present-day Lyon), the capital of the Gauls.<sup>[34]</sup> In 250-290 AD, Roman Gaul suffered a crisis with its fortified borders attacked by barbarians.<sup>[35]</sup> The situation improved in the first half of the 4th century, a period of revival and prosperity.<sup>[36]</sup> In 312, Emperor Constantine I converted to Christianity. Christians,

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| • Total              | ▲ \$3.130 trillion <sup>[10]</sup> (7th)                                      |
| • Per capita         | ▲ \$47,359 <sup>[10]</sup> (23rd)   |
| <b>Gini</b> (2022)   | ▲ 29.8 <sup>[11]</sup><br>low   |
| <b>HDI</b> (2022)    | — 0.910 <sup>[12]</sup><br>very high (28th)                                   |
| <b>Currency</b>      | <u>Euro</u> (€) (EUR) <sup>[M]</sup><br><u>CFP franc</u> (XPF) <sup>[M]</sup> |
| <b>Time zone</b>     | UTC+1 (CET) <sup>[VIII]</sup>   |
| • Summer (DST)       | UTC+2 (CEST)  |
| <b>Date format</b>   | dd/mm/yyyy (CE)   |
| <b>Driving side</b>  | right   |
| <b>Calling code</b>  | +33 <sup>[IX]</sup>   |
| <b>ISO 3166 code</b> | FR  |
| <b>Internet TLD</b>  | .fr <sup>[X]</sup>  |

Source gives area of metropolitan France as 551,500 km<sup>2</sup> (212,900 sq mi) and lists overseas regions separately, whose areas sum to 89,179 km<sup>2</sup> (34,432 sq mi). Adding these give the total shown here for the entire French Republic. The World Factbook reports the total as 643,801 km<sup>2</sup> (248,573 sq mi).



who had been persecuted, increased.<sup>[37]</sup> But from the 5th century, the Barbarian Invasions resumed.<sup>[38]</sup> Teutonic tribes invaded the region, the Visigoths settling in the southwest, the Burgundians along the Rhine River Valley, and the Franks in the north.<sup>[39]</sup>

## Early Middle Ages (5th–10th century)

In Late antiquity, ancient Gaul was divided into Germanic kingdoms and a remaining Gallo-Roman territory. Celtic Britons, fleeing the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, settled in west Armorica; the Armorican peninsula was renamed Brittany and Celtic culture was revived.

The first leader to unite all Franks was Clovis I, who began his reign as king of the Salian Franks in 481, routing the last forces of the Roman governors in 486. Clovis said he would be baptised a Christian in the event of victory against the Visigothic Kingdom, which was said to have guaranteed the battle. Clovis regained the southwest from the Visigoths and was baptised in 508. Clovis I was the first Germanic conqueror after the Fall of the Western Roman Empire to convert to Catholic Christianity; thus France was given the title "Eldest daughter of the Church" by the papacy,<sup>[40]</sup> and French kings called "the Most Christian Kings of France".

The Franks embraced the Christian Gallo-Roman culture, and ancient Gaul was renamed Francia ("Land of the Franks"). The Germanic Franks adopted Romanic languages. Clovis made Paris his capital and established the Merovingian dynasty, but his kingdom would not survive his death. The Franks treated land as a private possession and divided it among their heirs, so four kingdoms emerged from that of Clovis: Paris, Orléans, Soissons, and Rheims. The last Merovingian kings lost power to their mayors of the palace (head of household). One mayor of the palace, Charles Martel, defeated an Umayyad invasion of Gaul at the Battle of Tours (732). His son, Pepin the Short, seized the crown of Francia from the weakened Merovingians and founded the Carolingian dynasty. Pepin's son, Charlemagne, reunited the Frankish kingdoms and built an empire across Western and Central Europe.

Proclaimed Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III and thus establishing the French government's longtime historical association with the Catholic Church,<sup>[41]</sup> Charlemagne tried to revive the Western Roman Empire and its cultural grandeur. Charlemagne's son, Louis I kept the empire united, however in 843, it was divided between Louis' three sons, into East Francia, Middle Francia and West Francia. West Francia approximated the area occupied by modern France and was its precursor.<sup>[42]</sup>

During the 9th and 10th centuries, threatened by Viking invasions, France became a decentralised state: the nobility's titles and lands became hereditary, and authority of the king became more religious than secular, and so was less effective and challenged by noblemen. Thus was established feudalism in France. Some



The Maison carrée was a temple of the Gallo-Roman city of Nemausus (present-day Nîmes) and is one of the best-preserved vestiges of the Roman Empire.



With Clovis's conversion to Catholicism in 498, the Frankish monarchy, elective and secular until then, became hereditary and of divine right.

king's vassals grew so powerful they posed a threat to the king. After the Battle of Hastings in 1066, William the Conqueror added "King of England" to his titles, becoming vassal and the equal of the king of France, creating recurring tensions.

## High and Late Middle Ages (10th–15th century)

The Carolingian dynasty ruled France until 987, when Hugh Capet, Duke of France, was crowned king of the Franks.<sup>[43]</sup> His descendants unified the country through wars and inheritance. From 1190, the Capetian rulers began to be referred as "kings of France" rather than "kings of the Franks".<sup>[44]</sup> Later kings expanded their directly possessed *domaine royal* to cover over half of modern France by the 15th century. Royal authority became more assertive, centred on a hierarchically conceived society distinguishing nobility, clergy, and commoners.

The nobility played a prominent role in Crusades to restore Christian access to the Holy Land. French knights made up most reinforcements in the 200 years of the Crusades, in such a fashion that the Arabs referred to crusaders as *Franj*.<sup>[45]</sup> French Crusaders imported French into the Levant, making French the base of the *lingua franca* ("Frankish language") of the Crusader states.<sup>[45]</sup> The Albigensian Crusade was launched in 1209 to eliminate the heretical Cathars in the southwest of modern-day France.<sup>[46]</sup>

From the 11th century, the House of Plantagenet, rulers of the County of Anjou, established its dominion over the surrounding provinces of Maine and Touraine, then built an "empire" from England to the Pyrenees, covering half of modern France. Tensions between France and the Plantagenet empire would last a hundred years, until Philip II of France conquered, between 1202 and 1214, most continental possessions of the empire, leaving England and Aquitaine to the Plantagenets.

Charles IV the Fair died without an heir in 1328.<sup>[47]</sup> The crown passed to Philip of Valois, rather than Edward of Plantagenet, who became Edward III of England. During the reign of Philip, the monarchy reached the height of its medieval power.<sup>[47]</sup> However Philip's seat on the throne was contested by Edward in 1337, and England and France entered the off-and-on Hundred Years' War.<sup>[48]</sup> Boundaries changed, but landholdings inside France by English Kings remained extensive for decades. With charismatic leaders, such as Joan of Arc, French counterattacks won back most English continental territories. France was struck by the Black Death, from which half of the 17 million population died.<sup>[49]</sup>

## Early modern period (15th century–1789)

The French Renaissance saw cultural development and standardisation of French, which became the official language of France and Europe's aristocracy. French explorers claimed lands in the Americas, paving expansion of the French colonial empire. The rise of Protestantism led France to a civil war known as the French Wars of Religion.<sup>[50]</sup> This forced Huguenots to flee to Protestant regions such as the British Isles, Holy Roman Empire, Switzerland. The wars were ended by Henry IV's Edict of Nantes, which



Joan of Arc led the French Army to several important victories during the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), which paved the way for the final victory.

granted some freedom of religion to the Huguenots. Spanish troops,<sup>[51]</sup> assisted the Catholics from 1589 to 1594 and invaded France in 1597. Spain and France returned to all-out war between 1635 and 1659. The war cost France 300,000 casualties.<sup>[52]</sup>

Under Louis XIII, Cardinal Richelieu promoted centralisation of the state and reinforced royal power. He destroyed castles of defiant lords and denounced the use of private armies. By the end of the 1620s, Richelieu established "the royal monopoly of force".<sup>[53]</sup> From the 16th to the 19th century, France was responsible for about 10% of the transatlantic slave trade,<sup>[54]</sup> second only to Great Britain during the 18th century.<sup>[55]</sup>

During Louis XIV's minority, trouble known as The Fronde occurred. This rebellion was driven by feudal lords and sovereign courts as a reaction to the royal absolute power. The monarchy reached its peak during the 17th century and reign of Louis XIV. By turning lords into courtiers at the Palace of Versailles, his command of the military went unchallenged. The "Sun King" made France the leading European power. France became the most populous European country and had tremendous influence over European politics, economy, and culture. French became the most-used language in diplomacy, science, literature and remained so until the 20th century.<sup>[56]</sup> France took control of territories in the Americas, Africa and Asia. In 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, forcing thousands of Huguenots into exile and published the Code Noir providing the legal framework for slavery and expelling Jews from French colonies.<sup>[57]</sup>



Louis XIV, the "Sun King", was the absolute monarch of France and made France the leading European power.

Under the wars of Louis XV (r. 1715–74), France lost New France and most Indian possessions after its defeat in the Seven Years' War (1756–63). Its European territory kept growing, however, with acquisitions such as Lorraine and Corsica. Louis XV's weak rule, including the decadence of his court, discredited the monarchy, which in part paved the way for the French Revolution.<sup>[58]</sup>

Louis XVI (r. 1774–93) supported America with money, fleets and armies, helping them win independence from Great Britain. France gained revenge, but verged on bankruptcy—a factor that contributed to the Revolution. Some of the Enlightenment occurred in French intellectual circles, and scientific breakthroughs, such as the naming of oxygen (1778) and the first hot air balloon carrying passengers (1783), were achieved by French scientists. French explorers took part in the voyages of scientific exploration through maritime expeditions. Enlightenment philosophy, in which reason is advocated as the primary source of legitimacy, undermined the power of and support for the monarchy and was a factor in the Revolution.

## Revolutionary France (1789–1799)

The *French Revolution* was a period of political and societal change that began with the Estates General of 1789, and ended with the coup of 18 Brumaire in 1799 and the formation of the French Consulate. Many of its ideas are fundamental principles of liberal democracy,<sup>[59]</sup> while its values and institutions remain central to modern political discourse.<sup>[60]</sup>



Its causes were a combination of social, political and economic factors, which the Ancien Régime proved unable to manage. A financial crisis and social distress led in May 1789 to the convocation of the Estates General, which was converted into a National Assembly in June. The Storming of the Bastille on 14 July led to a series of radical measures by the Assembly, among them the abolition of feudalism, state control over the Catholic Church in France, and a declaration of rights.



The Storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 was the most emblematic event of the French Revolution.

The next three years were dominated by struggle for political control, exacerbated by economic depression. Military defeats following the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars in April 1792 resulted in the insurrection of 10 August 1792. The monarchy was abolished and replaced by the French First Republic in September, while Louis XVI was executed in January 1793.

After another revolt in June 1793, the constitution was suspended and power passed from the National Convention to the Committee of Public Safety. About 16,000 people were executed in a Reign of Terror, which ended in July 1794. Weakened by external threats and internal opposition, the Republic was replaced in 1795 by the Directory. Four years later in 1799, the Consulate seized power in a coup led by Napoleon.

## **Napoleon and 19th century (1799–1914)**

Napoleon became First Consul in 1799 and later Emperor of the French Empire (1804–1814; 1815). Changing sets of European coalitions declared wars on Napoleon's empire. His armies conquered most of continental Europe with swift victories such as the battles of Jena-Auerstadt and Austerlitz. Members of the Bonaparte family were appointed monarchs in some of the newly established kingdoms.<sup>[62]</sup>

These victories led to the worldwide expansion of French revolutionary ideals and reforms, such as the metric system, Napoleonic Code and Declaration of the Rights of Man. In 1812 Napoleon attacked Russia, reaching Moscow. Thereafter his army disintegrated through supply problems, disease, Russian attacks, and finally winter. After this catastrophic campaign and the ensuing uprising of European monarchies against his rule, Napoleon was defeated. About a million Frenchmen died during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>[62]</sup> After his brief return from exile, Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo, and the Bourbon monarchy was restored with new constitutional limitations.



Napoleon, Emperor of the French, built a vast empire across Europe.<sup>[61]</sup>

The discredited Bourbon dynasty was overthrown by the July Revolution of 1830, which established the constitutional July Monarchy; French troops began the conquest of Algeria. Unrest led to the French Revolution of 1848 and the end of the July Monarchy. The abolition of slavery and introduction of male universal suffrage, was re-enacted in 1848. In 1852, president of the French Republic, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, Napoleon I's nephew, was proclaimed emperor of the Second Empire, as Napoleon III. He multiplied French interventions abroad, especially in Crimea, Mexico and Italy. Napoleon



III was unseated following defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and his regime replaced by the Third Republic. By 1875, the French conquest of Algeria was complete, with approximately 825,000 Algerians killed from famine, disease, and violence.<sup>[63]</sup>

France had colonial possessions, since the beginning of the 17th century, but in the 19th and 20th centuries its empire extended greatly and became the second-largest behind the British Empire.<sup>[13]</sup> Including metropolitan France, the total area reached almost 13 million square kilometres in the 1920s and 30s, 9% of the world's land. Known as the *Belle Époque*, the turn of the century was a period characterised by optimism, regional peace, economic prosperity and technological, scientific and cultural innovations. In 1905, state secularism was officially established.



The first (light blue) and second (dark blue) French colonial empire

## Early to mid-20th century (1914–1946)

France was invaded by Germany and defended by Great Britain at the start of World War I in August 1914. A rich industrial area in the north was occupied. France and the Allies emerged victorious against the Central Powers at tremendous human cost. It left 1.4 million French soldiers dead, 4% of its population.<sup>[64][65]</sup> Interwar was marked by intense international tensions and social reforms introduced by the Popular Front government (e.g., annual leave, eight-hour workdays, women in government).



French Poilus posing with their war-torn flag in 1917, during World War I

In 1940, France was invaded and quickly defeated by Nazi Germany. France was divided into a German occupation zone in the north, an Italian occupation zone and an unoccupied territory, the rest of France, which consisted of the southern France and the French empire. The Vichy government, a new authoritarian regime collaborating with Germany, ruled the unoccupied territory. Free France, the government-in-exile led by Charles de Gaulle, was set up in London.<sup>[66]</sup>

From 1942 to 1944, about 160,000 French citizens, including around 75,000 Jews,<sup>[67]</sup> were deported to death and concentration camps.<sup>[68]</sup> On 6 June 1944, the Allies invaded Normandy, and in August they invaded Provence. The Allies and French Resistance emerged victorious, and French sovereignty was restored with the Provisional Government of the French Republic (GPRF). This interim government, established by de Gaulle, continued to wage war against Germany and to purge collaborators from office. It made important reforms e.g. suffrage extended to women and the creation of a social security system.

## 1946–present

A new constitution resulted in the Fourth Republic (1946–58), which saw strong economic growth (*les Trente Glorieuses*). France was a founding member of NATO and attempted to regain control of French Indochina, but was defeated by the Viet Minh in 1954. France faced another anti-colonialist conflict in Algeria, then part of France and home to over one million European settlers (Pied-Noir). The French systematically used torture and repression, including extrajudicial killings to keep control.<sup>[69]</sup> This conflict wracked the country and nearly led to a coup and civil war.<sup>[70]</sup>



Charles de Gaulle, a hero of World War I, leader of the Free French during World War II, and President of France

During the May 1958 crisis, the weak Fourth Republic gave way to the Fifth Republic, which included a strengthened presidency.<sup>[71]</sup> De Gaulle kept the country united while taking steps to end the Algerian War. The war concluded with the Évian Accords in 1962 which led to Algerian independence, at a high price: between half a million and one million deaths and over 2 million internally-displaced Algerians.<sup>[72]</sup> Around one million Pied-Noirs and Harkis fled from Algeria to France upon independence.<sup>[73]</sup> A vestige of empire is the French overseas departments and territories.

During the Cold War, de Gaulle pursued a policy of "national independence" towards the Western and Eastern blocs. He withdrew from NATO's military-integrated command (while remaining within the alliance), launched a nuclear development programme and made France the fourth nuclear power. He restored cordial Franco-German relations to create a European counterweight between American and Soviet spheres of influence. However, he opposed any development of a supranational Europe, favouring sovereign nations. The revolt of May 1968 had an enormous social impact; it was a watershed moment when a conservative moral ideal (religion, patriotism, respect for authority) shifted to a more liberal moral ideal (secularism, individualism, sexual revolution). Although the revolt was a political failure (the Gaullist party emerged stronger than before) it announced a split between the French and de Gaulle, who resigned.<sup>[74]</sup>

In the post-Gaullist era, France remained one of the most developed economies in the world but faced crises that resulted in high unemployment rates and increasing public debt. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, France has been at the forefront of the development of a supranational European Union, notably by signing the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, establishing the eurozone in 1999 and signing the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007.<sup>[75]</sup> France has fully reintegrated into NATO and since participated in most NATO-sponsored wars.<sup>[76]</sup> Since the 19th century, France has received many immigrants, often male foreign workers from European Catholic countries who generally returned home when not employed.<sup>[77]</sup> During the 1970s France faced an economic crisis and allowed new immigrants (mostly from the Maghreb, in northwest Africa)<sup>[77]</sup> to permanently settle in France with their families and acquire citizenship. It resulted in hundreds of thousands of Muslims living in subsidised public housing and suffering from high unemployment rates.<sup>[78]</sup> The government had a policy of assimilation of immigrants, where they were expected to adhere to French values and norms.<sup>[79]</sup>

Since the 1995 public transport bombings, France has been targeted by Islamist organisations, notably the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015 which provoked the largest public rallies in French history, gathering 4.4 million people,<sup>[80]</sup> the November 2015 Paris attacks which resulted in 130 deaths, the deadliest attack

on French soil since World War II<sup>[81]</sup> and the deadliest in the European Union since the Madrid train bombings in 2004.<sup>[82]</sup> Opération Chammal, France's military efforts to contain ISIS, killed over 1,000 ISIS troops between 2014 and 2015.<sup>[83]</sup>

## Geography

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### Location and borders

The vast majority of France's territory and population is situated in Western Europe and is called Metropolitan France, to distinguish it from the country's various overseas polities. It is bordered by the North Sea in the north, the English Channel in the northwest, the Atlantic Ocean in the west and the Mediterranean Sea in the southeast. Its land borders consist of Belgium and Luxembourg in the northeast, Germany and Switzerland in the east, Italy and Monaco in the southeast, and Andorra and Spain in the south and southwest. Except for the northeast, most of France's land borders are roughly delineated by natural boundaries and geographic features: to the south and southeast, the Pyrenees and the Alps and the Jura, respectively, and to the east, the Rhine river. Due to its shape, France is often referred to as *l'Hexagone* ("The Hexagon").

Metropolitan France includes various coastal islands, of which the largest is Corsica. Metropolitan France is situated mostly between latitudes 41° and 51° N, and longitudes 6° W and 10° E, on the western edge of Europe, and thus lies within the northern temperate zone. Its continental part covers about 1000 km from north to south and from east to west.

Metropolitan France covers 551,500 square kilometres (212,935 sq mi),<sup>[84]</sup> the largest among European Union members.<sup>[17]</sup> France's total land area, with its overseas departments and territories (excluding Adélie Land), is 643,801 km<sup>2</sup> (248,573 sq mi), 0.45% of the total land area on Earth. France possesses a wide variety of landscapes, from coastal plains in the north and west to mountain ranges of the Alps in the southeast, the Massif Central in the south-central and Pyrenees in the southwest.

Due to its numerous overseas departments and territories scattered across the planet, France possesses the second-largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the world, covering 11,035,000 km<sup>2</sup> (4,261,000 sq mi), just behind the EEZ of the United States, which covers 11,351,000 km<sup>2</sup> (4,383,000 sq mi), but ahead of the EEZ of Australia, which covers 8,148,250 km<sup>2</sup> (3,146,000 sq mi). Its EEZ covers approximately 8% of the total surface of all the EEZs of the world.

### Geology, topography and hydrography

Metropolitan France has a wide variety of topographical sets and natural landscapes. Large parts of the current territory of France were raised during several tectonic episodes, like the Hercynian uplift in the Paleozoic Era, during which the Armorican Massif, the Massif Central, the Morvan, the Vosges and Ardennes ranges and the island of Corsica were formed. These massifs delineate several sedimentary basins such as the Aquitaine Basin in the southwest and the Paris Basin in the north, the latter including several areas of particularly fertile ground such as the silt beds of Beauce and Brie. Various routes of natural



Chamonix valley with the Mont Blanc at background, the highest mountain in the Alps and Western Europe on the border with Italy

passage, such as the Rhône Valley, allow easy communication. The Alpine, Pyrenean and Jura mountains are much younger and have less eroded forms. At 4,810.45 metres (15,782 ft)<sup>[85]</sup> above sea level, Mont Blanc, located in the Alps on the France–Italy border, is the highest point in Western Europe. Although 60% of municipalities are classified as having seismic risks, these risks remain moderate.



Geological formations near  
Roussillon, Vaucluse

The coastlines offer contrasting landscapes: mountain ranges along the French Riviera, coastal cliffs such as the Côte d'Albâtre, and wide sandy plains in the Languedoc. Corsica lies off the Mediterranean coast. France has an extensive river system consisting of the four major rivers Seine, the Loire, the Garonne, the Rhône and their tributaries, whose combined catchment includes over 62% of the metropolitan territory. The Rhône divides the Massif Central from the Alps and flows into the Mediterranean Sea at the Camargue. The Garonne meets the Dordogne just after Bordeaux, forming the Gironde estuary, the largest estuary in Western Europe which after approximately 100 kilometres (62 mi) empties into the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>[86]</sup> Other water courses drain towards the Meuse and Rhine along the northeastern borders. France has 11,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> (4,200,000 sq mi) of marine waters within three oceans under its jurisdiction, of which 97% are overseas.

## Environment

France was one of the first countries to create an environment ministry, in 1971.<sup>[87]</sup> Although it is one of the most industrialised countries in the world, France is ranked only 19th by carbon dioxide emissions, behind less populous nations such as Canada or Australia. This is due to the country's heavy investment in nuclear power following the 1973 oil crisis,<sup>[88]</sup> which now accounts for 75 per cent of its electricity production<sup>[89]</sup> and results in less pollution.<sup>[90][91]</sup> According to the 2020 Environmental Performance Index conducted by Yale and Columbia, France was the fifth most environmentally conscious country in the world (behind the United Kingdom).<sup>[92][93]</sup>

Like all European Union state members, France agreed to cut carbon emissions by at least 20% of 1990 levels by 2020,<sup>[94]</sup> compared to the United States' plan to reduce emissions by 4% of 1990 levels.<sup>[95]</sup> As of 2009, French carbon dioxide emissions per capita were lower than that of China.<sup>[96]</sup> The country was set to impose a carbon tax in 2009 at 17 euros per tonne of carbon emitted,<sup>[97]</sup> which would have raised 4 billion euros of revenue annually.<sup>[98]</sup> However, the plan was abandoned due to fears of burdening French businesses.<sup>[99]</sup>

Forests account for 31 per cent of France's land area—the fourth-highest proportion in Europe—representing an increase of 7 per cent since 1990.<sup>[100][101][102]</sup> French forests are some of the most diverse in Europe, comprising more than 140 species of trees.<sup>[103]</sup> France had a 2018 Forest Landscape Integrity Index mean score of 4.52/10, ranking it 123rd globally out of 172 countries.<sup>[104]</sup> There are nine national parks<sup>[105]</sup> and 46 natural parks in France.<sup>[106]</sup> A regional nature park<sup>[107]</sup> (French: *parc naturel régional* or PNR) is a public establishment in France between local authorities and the national government covering an inhabited rural area of outstanding beauty, to protect the scenery and heritage as well as setting up sustainable economic development in the area.<sup>[108]</sup> A PNR sets goals and guidelines for managed human



habitation, sustainable economic development and protection of the natural environment based on each park's unique landscape and heritage. The parks foster ecological research programmes and public education in the natural sciences.<sup>[109]</sup> As of 2019 there are 54 PNRs in France.<sup>[110]</sup>



The Gironde estuary is classified as a marine nature park and is part of the Natura 2000 network. The left bank is part of the Médoc regional nature park. With a surface area of 635 km<sup>2</sup> (245 sq mi), it is the largest estuary in Europe.

## Government and politics

### Government

France is a representative democracy organised as a unitary, semi-presidential republic.<sup>[111]</sup> As one of the earliest republics of the modern world, democratic traditions and values are deeply rooted in French culture, identity and politics.<sup>[112]</sup> The Constitution of the Fifth Republic was approved by referendum on 28 September 1958, establishing a framework consisting of executive, legislative and judicial branches.<sup>[113]</sup> It sought to address the instability of the Third and Fourth Republics by combining elements of both parliamentary and presidential systems, while greatly strengthening the authority of the executive relative to the legislature.<sup>[112]</sup>

The executive branch has two leaders. The President of the Republic, currently Emmanuel Macron, is the head of state, elected directly by universal adult suffrage for a five-year term.<sup>[114]</sup>

The Prime Minister, currently Gabriel Attal, is the head of government, appointed by the President to lead the government. The President has the power to dissolve Parliament or circumvent it by submitting referendums directly to the people; the President also appoints judges and civil servants, negotiates and ratifies international agreements, as well as serves as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. The Prime Minister determines public policy and oversees the civil service, with an emphasis on domestic matters.<sup>[115]</sup> In the 2022 presidential election, president Macron was re-elected.<sup>[116]</sup> 2 months later, in the June 2022 legislative elections, Macron lost his parliamentary majority and had to form a minority government.<sup>[117]</sup>

The legislature consists of the French Parliament, a bicameral body made up of a lower house, the National Assembly (*Assemblée nationale*) and an upper house, the Senate.<sup>[118]</sup> Legislators in the National Assembly, known as députés, represent local constituencies and are directly elected for five-year terms.<sup>[119]</sup> The Assembly has the power to dismiss the government by majority vote. Senators are chosen by an electoral college for six-year terms, with half the seats submitted to election every three years.<sup>[120]</sup> The Senate's legislative powers are limited; in the event of disagreement between the two chambers, the National



Emmanuel Macron  
President of France  
since 14 May 2017



Gabriel Attal  
Prime Minister of France  
since 9 January 2024

Assembly has the final say.<sup>[121]</sup> The parliament is responsible for determining the rules and principles concerning most areas of law, political amnesty, and fiscal policy; however, the government may draft specific details concerning most laws.



Palais Bourbon, the meeting place of the National Assembly, the lower legislative chamber of the French Parliament

Until World War II, Radicals were a strong political force in France, embodied by the Republican, Radical and Radical-Socialist Party which was the most important party of the Third Republic. From World War II until 2017, French politics was dominated by two politically opposed groupings: one left-wing, the French Section of the Workers' International, which was succeeded by the Socialist Party (in 1969); and the other right-wing, the Gaullist Party, whose name changed over time to the Rally of the French People (1947), the Union of Democrats for the Republic (1958), the Rally for the Republic (1976), the Union for a Popular Movement (2007) and The Republicans (since 2015). In the 2017 presidential and legislative elections, the radical centrist party La République En Marche! (LREM) became the dominant force, overtaking both Socialists and Republicans. LREM's opponent in the second round of the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections was the growing far-right party National Rally (RN). Since 2020, Europe Ecology – The Greens (EELV) have performed well in mayoral elections in major cities<sup>[122]</sup> while on a national level, an alliance of Left parties (the NUPES) was the second-largest voting block elected to the lower house in 2022.<sup>[123]</sup> Additionally, right-wing populist RN became the largest opposition party in the National Assembly in 2022.<sup>[124]</sup>

The electorate is constitutionally empowered to vote on amendments passed by the Parliament and bills submitted by the president. Referendums have played a key role in shaping French politics and even foreign policy; voters have decided on such matters as Algeria's independence, the election of the president by popular vote, the formation of the EU, and the reduction of presidential term limits.<sup>[125]</sup>

## Administrative divisions

The French Republic is divided into 18 regions (located in Europe and overseas), five overseas collectivities, one overseas territory, one special collectivity—New Caledonia and one uninhabited island directly under the authority of the Minister of Overseas France—Clipperton.

## Regions

Since 2016, France is divided into 18 administrative regions: 13 regions in metropolitan France (including Corsica),<sup>[126]</sup> and five overseas.<sup>[84]</sup> The regions are further subdivided into 101 departments,<sup>[127]</sup> which are numbered mainly alphabetically. The department number is used in postal codes and was formerly used on vehicle registration plates. Among the 101 French departments, five (French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, and Réunion) are in overseas regions (ROMs) that are simultaneously overseas departments (DOMs), enjoying the same status as metropolitan departments and are thereby included in the European Union.

The 101 departments are subdivided into 335 arrondissements, which are, in turn, subdivided into 2,054 cantons.<sup>[128]</sup> These cantons are then divided into 36,658 communes, which are municipalities with an elected municipal council.<sup>[128]</sup> Three communes—Paris, Lyon and Marseille—are subdivided into 45 municipal arrondissements.

## Overseas territories and collectivities

In addition to the 18 regions and 101 departments, the French Republic has five overseas collectivities (French Polynesia, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, and Wallis and Futuna), one *sui generis* collectivity (New Caledonia), one overseas territory (French Southern and Antarctic Lands), and one island possession in the Pacific Ocean (Clipperton Island). Overseas collectivities and territories form part of the French Republic, but do not form part of the European Union or its fiscal area (except for Saint Barthélemy, which seceded from Guadeloupe in 2007). The Pacific Collectivities (COMs) of French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, and New Caledonia continue to use the CFP franc<sup>[129]</sup> whose value is strictly linked to that of the euro. In contrast, the five overseas regions used the French franc and now use the euro.<sup>[130]</sup>



## Foreign relations

France is a founding member of the United Nations and serves as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council with veto rights.<sup>[131]</sup> In 2015, it was described as "the best networked state in the world" due to its membership in more international institutions than any other country;<sup>[132]</sup> these include the G7, World Trade Organization (WTO),<sup>[133]</sup> the Pacific Community (SPC)<sup>[134]</sup> and the Indian Ocean Commission (COI).<sup>[135]</sup> It is an associate member of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS)<sup>[136]</sup> and a leading member of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) of 84 French-speaking countries.<sup>[137]</sup>

As a significant hub for international relations, France has the third-largest assembly of diplomatic missions, second only to China and the United States, which are far more populous. It also hosts the headquarters of several international organisations, including the OECD, UNESCO, Interpol, the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, and the OIF.<sup>[140]</sup>

French foreign policy after World War II has been largely shaped by membership in the European Union, of which it was a founding member. Since the 1960s, France has developed close ties with reunified Germany to become the most influential driving force of the EU.<sup>[141]</sup> In the 1960s, France sought to exclude the

British from the European unification process,<sup>[142]</sup> seeking to build its standing in continental Europe. However, since 1904, France has maintained an "Entente cordiale" with the United Kingdom, and there has been a strengthening of links between the countries, especially militarily.

France is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but under President de Gaulle excluded itself from the joint military command, in protest of the Special Relationship between the United States and Britain, and to preserve the independence of French foreign and security policies. Under Nicolas Sarkozy, France rejoined the NATO joint military command on 4 April 2009.<sup>[143][144][145]</sup>

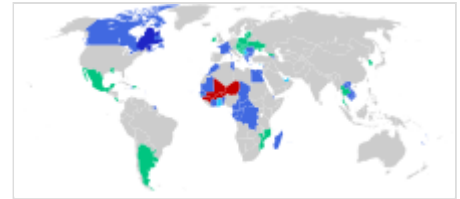
France retains strong political and economic influence in its former African colonies (*Françafrique*)<sup>[146]</sup> and has supplied economic aid and troops for peacekeeping missions in Ivory Coast and Chad.<sup>[147]</sup> From 2012 to 2021, France and other African states intervened in support of the Malian government in the Northern Mali conflict.

In 2017, France was the world's fourth-largest donor of development aid in absolute terms, behind the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom.<sup>[148]</sup> This represents 0.43% of its GNP, the 12th highest among the OECD.<sup>[149]</sup> Aid is provided by the governmental French Development Agency, which finances primarily humanitarian projects in sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>[150]</sup> with an emphasis on "developing infrastructure, access to health care and education, the implementation of appropriate economic policies and the consolidation of the rule of law and democracy".<sup>[150]</sup>

## Military

The French Armed Forces (*Forces armées françaises*) are the military and paramilitary forces of France, under the President of the Republic as supreme commander. They consist of the French Army (*Armée de Terre*), the French Navy (*Marine Nationale*, formerly called *Armée de Mer*), the French Air and Space Force (*Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace*), and the National Gendarmerie (*Gendarmerie nationale*), which serves as both military police and civil police in rural areas. Together they are among the largest armed forces in the world and the largest in the EU. According to a 2018 study by Crédit Suisse, the French Armed Forces ranked as the world's sixth-most powerful military, and the second most powerful in Europe after Russia.<sup>[151]</sup> France's annual military expenditure in 2022 was US\$53.6 billion, or 1.9% of its GDP, making it the eighth biggest military spender in the world.<sup>[152]</sup> There has been no national conscription since 1997.<sup>[153]</sup>

France has been a recognised nuclear state since 1960. It is a party to both the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)<sup>[154]</sup> and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The French nuclear force (formerly known as "*Force de Frappe*") consists of four *Triomphant* class submarines equipped with submarine-launched ballistic missiles. In addition to the submarine fleet, it is estimated that France has about 60 ASMP medium-range air-to-ground missiles with nuclear warheads,<sup>[155]</sup> 50 are deployed by the Air and Space



88 states and governments are part of La Francophonie,<sup>[138]</sup> which promotes values of democracy, multilingualism and cultural diversity.<sup>[139]</sup> France has been a key member of this global organisation since its inception in 1970.



The European Parliament in Strasbourg (near the border with Germany). France is a founding member of all EU institutions.



Force using the Mirage 2000N long-range nuclear strike aircraft, while around 10 are deployed by the French Navy's Super Étendard Modernisé (SEM) attack aircraft, which operate from the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle.

France has major military industries and one of the largest aerospace sectors in the world.<sup>[156]</sup> The country has produced such equipment as the Rafale fighter, the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier, the Exocet missile and the Leclerc tank among others. France is a major arms seller,<sup>[157][158]</sup> with most of its arsenal's designs available for the export market, except for nuclear-powered devices.

One French intelligence unit, the Directorate-General for External Security (*Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure*), is considered to be a component of the Armed Forces under the authority of the Ministry of Defense. The other, the Directorate-General for Internal Security (*Direction générale de la Sécurité intérieure*) operates under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>[159]</sup> France's cybersecurity capabilities are regularly ranked as some of the most robust of any nation in the world.<sup>[160][161]</sup>

French weapons exported totaled 27 billion euros in 2022, up from 11.7 billion euros the previous year 2021. Additionally, the UAE alone contributed more than 16 billion euros arms to the French total.<sup>[162]</sup> Among the largest French defence companies are Dassault, Thales and Safran.<sup>[163]</sup>



Dassault Rafale of the Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace

Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier of the Marine nationale

AMX Leclerc tank of the Armée de terre

## Law

France uses a civil legal system, wherein law arises primarily from written statutes,<sup>[84]</sup> judges are not to make law, but merely to interpret it (though the amount of judicial interpretation in certain areas makes it equivalent to case law in a common law system). Basic principles of the rule of law were laid in the Napoleonic Code (which was, in turn, largely based on the royal law codified under Louis XIV). In agreement with the principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the law should only prohibit actions detrimental to society. As Guy Canivet, first president of the Court of Cassation wrote about the management of prisons: "Freedom is the rule, and its restriction is the exception; any restriction of Freedom must be provided for by Law and must follow the principles of necessity and proportionality." That is, Law should lay out prohibitions only if they are needed, and if the inconveniences caused by this restriction do not exceed the inconveniences that the prohibition is supposed to remedy.

French law is divided into two principal areas: private law and public law. Private law includes, in particular, civil law and criminal law. Public law includes, in particular, administrative law and constitutional law. However, in practical terms, French law comprises three principal areas of law: civil law, criminal law, and administrative law. Criminal laws can only address the future and not the past (criminal *ex post facto* laws are prohibited).<sup>[164]</sup> While administrative law is often a subcategory of civil law in many countries, it is completely separated in France and each body of law is headed by a specific supreme court: ordinary



The basic principles that the French Republic must respect are found in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

courts (which handle criminal and civil litigation) are headed by the Court of Cassation and administrative courts are headed by the Council of State. To be applicable, every law must be officially published in the *Journal officiel de la République française*.

France does not recognise religious law as a motivation for the enactment of prohibitions; it has long abolished blasphemy laws and sodomy laws (the latter in 1791). However, "offences against public decency" (*contraires aux bonnes mœurs*) or disturbing public order (*trouble à l'ordre public*) have been used to repress public expressions of homosexuality or street prostitution.

France generally has a positive reputation regarding LGBT rights.<sup>[165]</sup> Since 1999, civil unions for homosexual couples have been permitted, and since 2013, same-sex marriage and LGBT adoption are legal.<sup>[166]</sup> Laws prohibiting discriminatory speech in the press are as old as 1881. Some consider hate speech laws in France to be too broad or severe, undermining freedom of speech.<sup>[167]</sup> France has laws against racism and antisemitism,<sup>[168]</sup> while the 1990 Gayssot Act prohibits Holocaust denial. In 2024, France became the first nation in the European Union to explicitly protect abortion in its constitution.<sup>[169]</sup>

Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed by the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. The 1905 French law on the Separation of the Churches and the State is the basis for *laïcité* (state secularism): the state does not formally recognise any religion, except in Alsace-Moselle, which was part of Germany in 1905, and continues to subsidize education and clergy of Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Judaism. Nonetheless, France does recognise religious associations. The Parliament has listed many religious movements as dangerous cults since 1995 and has banned wearing conspicuous religious symbols in schools since 2004. In 2010, it banned the wearing of face-covering Islamic veils in public; human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch described the law as discriminatory towards Muslims.<sup>[170][171]</sup> However, it is supported by most of the population.<sup>[172]</sup>

## Economy

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### Overview

France has a mixed market economy, characterised by sizeable government involvement, and economic diversity. For roughly two centuries, the French economy has consistently ranked among the ten largest globally; it is currently the world's ninth-largest by purchasing power parity, the seventh-largest by nominal GDP, and the second-largest in the European Union by both metrics.<sup>[174]</sup> France is considered an economic power, with membership in the Group of Seven leading industrialised countries, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Group of Twenty largest economies.

France's economy is highly diversified; services represent two-thirds of both the workforce and GDP,<sup>[175]</sup> while the industrial sector accounts for a fifth of GDP and a similar proportion of employment. France is the third-biggest manufacturing country in Europe, behind Germany and Italy, and ranks eighth in the world by

share of global manufacturing output, at 1.9 per cent.<sup>[176]</sup> Less than 2 per cent of GDP is generated by the primary sector, namely agriculture;<sup>[177]</sup> however, France's agricultural sector is among the largest in value and leads the EU in terms of overall production.<sup>[178]</sup>



La Défense was in 2017 ranked by Ernst & Young as the leading central business district in continental Europe, and the fourth in the world.<sup>[173]</sup>

In 2018, France was the fifth-largest trading nation in the world and the second-largest in Europe, with the value of exports representing over a fifth of GDP.<sup>[179]</sup> Its membership in the eurozone and the broader European single market facilitates access to capital, goods, services, and skilled labour.<sup>[180]</sup> Despite protectionist policies over certain industries, particularly in agriculture, France has generally played a leading role in fostering free trade and commercial integration in Europe to enhance its economy.<sup>[181][182]</sup> In 2019, it ranked first in Europe and 13th in the world in foreign direct investment, with European countries and the United States being leading sources.<sup>[183]</sup> According to the Bank of France (founded in 1800),<sup>[184]</sup> the leading recipients of FDI were manufacturing, real estate, finance and insurance.<sup>[185]</sup> The Paris Region has the highest concentration of multinational firms in mainland Europe.<sup>[185]</sup>

Under the doctrine of *Dirigisme*, the government historically played a major role in the economy; policies such as indicative planning and nationalisation are credited for contributing to three decades of unprecedented postwar economic growth known as *Trente Glorieuses*. At its peak in 1982, the public sector accounted for one-fifth of industrial employment and over four-fifths of the credit market. Beginning in the late 20th century, France loosened regulations and state involvement in the economy, with most leading companies now being privately owned; state ownership now dominates only transportation, defence and broadcasting.<sup>[186]</sup> Policies aimed at promoting economic dynamism and privatisation have improved France's economic standing globally: it is among the world's 10 most innovative countries in the 2020 Bloomberg Innovation Index,<sup>[187]</sup> and the 15th most competitive, according to the 2019 Global Competitiveness Report (up two places from 2018).<sup>[188]</sup>

The Paris stock exchange (French: *La Bourse de Paris*) is one of the oldest in the world, created by Louis XV in 1724.<sup>[189]</sup> In 2000, it merged with counterparts in Amsterdam and Brussels to form Euronext,<sup>[190]</sup> which in 2007 merged with the New York stock exchange to form NYSE Euronext, the world's largest stock exchange.<sup>[190]</sup> Euronext Paris, the French branch of NYSE Euronext, is Europe's second-largest stock exchange market, behind the London Stock Exchange. Some examples of the most valuable French companies include LVMH, L'Oréal and Société Générale.<sup>[191]</sup>

France has historically been one of the world's major agricultural centres and remains a "global agricultural powerhouse"; France is the world's sixth-biggest exporter of agricultural products, generating a trade surplus of over €7.4 billion.<sup>[192][193]</sup> Nicknamed "the granary of the old continent",<sup>[194]</sup> over half its total land area is farmland, of which 45 per cent is devoted to permanent field crops such as cereals. The country's diverse climate, extensive arable land, modern farming technology, and EU subsidies have made it Europe's leading agricultural producer and exporter.<sup>[195]</sup>

## Tourism

With 100 million international tourist arrivals in 2023,<sup>[196]</sup> France is the world's top tourist destination, ahead of Spain (85 million) and the United States (66 million). However, it ranks third in tourism-derived income due to the shorter duration of visits.<sup>[197]</sup> The most popular tourist sites include (annual visitors): Eiffel Tower (6.2 million), Château de Versailles (2.8 million), Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (2 million), Pont du Gard (1.5 million), Arc de Triomphe (1.2 million), Mont Saint-Michel (1 million), Sainte-Chapelle (683,000), Château du Haut-Kœnigsbourg (549,000), Puy de Dôme (500,000), Musée Picasso (441,000), and Carcassonne (362,000).<sup>[198]</sup>

France, especially Paris, has some of the world's largest and most renowned museums, including the Louvre, which is the most visited art museum in the world (7.7 million visitors in 2022), the Musée d'Orsay (3.3 million), mostly devoted to Impressionism, the Musée de l'Orangerie (1.02 million), which is home to eight large Water Lily murals by Claude Monet, as well as the Centre Georges Pompidou (3 million), dedicated to contemporary art. Disneyland Paris is Europe's most popular theme park, with 15 million combined visitors to the resort's Disneyland Park and Walt Disney Studios Park in 2009.<sup>[199]</sup>

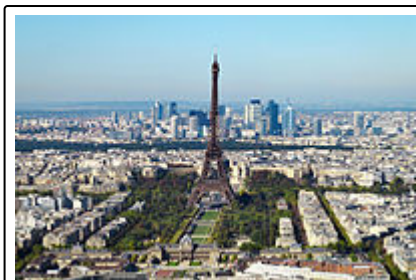
With more than 10 million tourists a year, the French Riviera (French: *Côte d'Azur*), in Southeast France, is the second leading tourist destination in the country, after the Paris Region.<sup>[200]</sup> It benefits from 300 days of sunshine per year, 115 kilometres (71 mi) of coastline and beaches, 18 golf courses, 14 ski resorts and 3,000 restaurants.<sup>[201]:31</sup> Each year the *Côte d'Azur* hosts 50% of the world's superyacht fleet.<sup>[201]:66</sup>

With 6 million tourists a year, the castles of the Loire Valley (French: *châteaux*) and the Loire Valley itself are the third leading tourist destination in France;<sup>[202][203]</sup> this World Heritage Site is noteworthy for its architectural heritage, in its historic towns but in particular its castles, such as the Châteaux d'Amboise, de Chambord, d'Ussé, de Villandry, Chenonceau and Montsoreau. The Château de Chantilly, Versailles and Vaux-le-Vicomte, all three located near Paris, are also visitor attractions.

France has 52 sites inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List and features cities of high cultural interest, beaches and seaside resorts, ski resorts, as well as rural regions that many enjoy for their beauty and tranquillity (green tourism). Small and picturesque French villages are promoted through the association Les Plus Beaux Villages de France (literally "The Most Beautiful Villages of France"). The "Remarkable Gardens" label is a list of the over 200 gardens classified by the Ministry of Culture. This label is intended to protect and promote remarkable gardens and parks. France attracts many religious pilgrims on their way to St. James, or to Lourdes, a town in the Hautes-Pyrénées that hosts several million visitors a year.

## Energy

France is the world's tenth-largest producer of electricity.<sup>[204]</sup> Électricité de France (EDF), which is majority-owned by the French government, is the country's main producer and distributor of electricity, and one of the world's largest electric utility companies, ranking third in revenue globally.<sup>[205]</sup> In 2018, EDF



The Eiffel Tower is the world's most-visited paid monument, an icon of both Paris and France.



Nice on the French Riviera



Mont-Saint-Michel and its bay were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1979.





Belleville Nuclear Power Plant.

France derives most of its electricity from nuclear power, the highest percentage in the world.

produced around one-fifth of the European Union's electricity, primarily from nuclear power.<sup>[206]</sup> As of 2021, France was the biggest energy exporter in Europe, mostly to the U.K. and Italy,<sup>[207]</sup> and the largest net exporter of electricity in the world.<sup>[207]</sup>

Since the 1973 oil crisis, France has pursued a strong policy of energy security,<sup>[207]</sup> namely through heavy investment in nuclear energy. It is one of 32 countries with nuclear power plants, ranking second in the world by the number of operational nuclear reactors, at 56.<sup>[208]</sup> Consequently, 70% of France's electricity is generated by nuclear power, the highest proportion in the world by a wide margin;<sup>[209]</sup> only Slovakia and Ukraine also derive a majority of electricity from nuclear power, at roughly 53% and 51%,

respectively.<sup>[210]</sup> France is considered a world leader in nuclear technology, with reactors and fuel products being major exports.<sup>[207]</sup>

France's significant reliance on nuclear power has resulted in comparatively slower development of renewable energy sources than in other Western nations. Nevertheless, between 2008 and 2019, France's production capacity from renewable energies rose consistently and nearly doubled.<sup>[211]</sup> Hydropower is by far the leading source, accounting for over half the country's renewable energy sources<sup>[212]</sup> and contributing 13% of its electricity,<sup>[211]</sup> the highest proportion in Europe after Norway and Turkey.<sup>[212]</sup> As with nuclear power, most hydroelectric plants, such as Eguzon, Étang de Soulcem, and Lac de Vouglans, are managed by EDF.<sup>[212]</sup> France aims to further expand hydropower into 2040.<sup>[211]</sup>

## Transport

France's railway network, which stretches 29,473 kilometres (18,314 mi) as of 2008,<sup>[214]</sup> is the second most extensive in Western Europe after Germany.<sup>[215]</sup> It is operated by the SNCF, and high-speed trains include the Thalys, the Eurostar and TGV, which travels at 320 km/h (199 mph).<sup>[216]</sup> The Eurostar, along with the Eurotunnel Shuttle, connects with the United Kingdom through the Channel Tunnel. Rail connections exist to all other neighbouring countries in Europe except Andorra. Intra-urban connections are also well developed, with most major cities having underground or tramway services complementing bus services.



Millau Viaduct is the tallest bridge in the world.<sup>[213]</sup>

There are approximately 1,027,183 kilometres (638,262 mi) of serviceable roadway in France, ranking it the most extensive network of the European continent.<sup>[217]</sup> The Paris Region is enveloped with the densest network of roads and highways, which connect it with virtually all parts of the country. French roads also handle substantial international traffic, connecting with cities in neighbouring Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Andorra and Monaco. There is no annual registration fee or road tax; however, usage of the mostly privately owned motorways is through tolls except in the vicinity of large communes. The new car market is dominated by domestic brands such as Renault, Peugeot and

Citroën.<sup>[218]</sup> France possesses the Millau Viaduct, the world's tallest bridge,<sup>[219]</sup> and has built many important bridges such as the Pont de Normandie. Diesel and petrol-driven cars and lorries cause a large part of the country's air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>[220][221]</sup>

There are 464 airports in France.<sup>[84]</sup> Charles de Gaulle Airport, located in the vicinity of Paris, is the largest and busiest airport in the country, handling the vast majority of popular and commercial traffic and connecting Paris with virtually all major cities across the world. Air France is the national carrier airline, although numerous private airline companies provide domestic and international travel services. There are ten major ports in France, the largest of which is in Marseille,<sup>[222]</sup> which also is the largest bordering the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>[223]</sup> 12,261 kilometres (7,619 mi) of waterways traverse France including the Canal du Midi, which connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean through the Garonne river.<sup>[84]</sup>

## Science and technology



France is in 2020 the biggest national financial contributor to the European Space Agency,<sup>[224]</sup> which conceived the Ariane rocket family, launched from French Guiana (Ariane 5 pictured).

Since the Middle Ages, France has contributed to scientific and technological achievement. In the early 11th century, the French-born Pope Sylvester II reintroduced the abacus and armillary sphere and introduced Arabic numerals and clocks to much of Europe.<sup>[225]</sup> The University of Paris, founded in the mid-12th century, is still one of the most important academic institutions in the Western world.<sup>[226]</sup> In the 17th century, mathematician and philosopher René Descartes pioneered rationalism as a method for acquiring scientific knowledge, while Blaise Pascal became famous for his work on probability and fluid mechanics; both were key figures of the Scientific Revolution, which blossomed in Europe during this period. The French Academy of Sciences, founded in the mid-17th century by Louis XIV to encourage and protect French scientific research, was one of the earliest national scientific institutions in history.

The Age of Enlightenment was marked by the work of biologist Buffon, one of the first naturalists to recognize ecological succession, and chemist Lavoisier, who discovered the role of oxygen in combustion. Diderot and D'Alembert published the Encyclopédie, which aimed to give the public access to "useful knowledge" that could be applied to everyday life.<sup>[227]</sup>

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century saw spectacular scientific developments in France, with Augustin Fresnel founding modern optics, Sadi Carnot laying the foundations of thermodynamics, and Louis Pasteur pioneering microbiology. Other eminent French scientists of the period have their names inscribed on the Eiffel Tower.

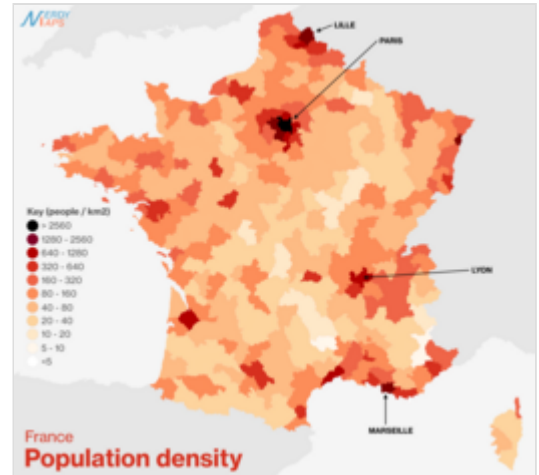
Famous French scientists of the 20th century include the mathematician and physicist Henri Poincaré; physicists Henri Becquerel, Pierre and Marie Curie, who remain famous for their work on radioactivity; physicist Paul Langevin; and virologist Luc Montagnier, co-discoverer of HIV AIDS. Hand transplantation was developed in Lyon in 1998 by an international team that included Jean-Michel Dubernard, who afterward performed the first successful double hand transplant.<sup>[228]</sup> Telesurgery was first performed by

French surgeons led by Jacques Marescaux on 7 September 2001 across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>[229]</sup> A face transplant was first done on 27 November 2005 by Bernard Devauchelle.<sup>[230][231]</sup> France ranked 11th in the 2023 Global Innovation Index, compared to 16th in 2019.<sup>[232][233][234][235]</sup>

## Demographics

With an estimated January 2024 population of 68,373,433 people,<sup>[8]</sup> France is the 20th most populous country in the world, the third-most populous in Europe (after Russia and Germany), and the second most populous in the European Union (after Germany).

France is an outlier among developed countries, particularly in Europe, for its relatively high rate of natural population growth: By birth rates alone, it was responsible for almost all natural population growth in the European Union in 2006.<sup>[236]</sup> Between 2006 and 2016, France saw the second-highest overall increase in population in the EU and was one of only four EU countries where natural births accounted for the most population growth.<sup>[237]</sup> This was the highest rate since the end of the baby boom in 1973 and coincides with the rise of the total fertility rate from a nadir of 1.7 in 1994 to 2.0 in 2010.



Population density in France by arrondissement

As of January 2021, the fertility rate declined slightly to 1.84 children per woman, below the replacement rate of 2.1, and considerably below the high of 4.41 in 1800.<sup>[238][239][240][241]</sup> France's fertility rate and crude birth rate nonetheless remain among the highest in the EU. However, like many developed nations, the French population is aging; the average age is 41.7 years, while about a fifth of French people are 65 or over.<sup>[242]</sup> The life expectancy at birth is 82.7 years, the 12th highest in the world.



From 2006 to 2011, population growth averaged 0.6 per cent per year;<sup>[243]</sup> since 2011, annual growth has been between 0.4 and 0.5 per cent annually.<sup>[244]</sup> Immigrants are major contributors to this trend; in 2010, 27 per cent of newborns in metropolitan France had at least one foreign-born parent and another 24 per cent had at least one parent born outside Europe (excluding French overseas territories).<sup>[245]</sup>

## Major cities

France is a highly urbanised country, with its largest cities (in terms of metropolitan area population in 2021<sup>[246]</sup>) being Paris (13,171,056 inh.), Lyon (2,308,818), Marseille (1,888,788), Lille (1,521,660), Toulouse (1,490,640), Bordeaux (1,393,764), Nantes (1,031,953), Strasbourg (864,993), Montpellier (823,120), and Rennes (771,320). (Note: since its 2020 revision of metropolitan area borders, INSEE considers that Nice is a metropolitan area separate from the Cannes-Antibes metropolitan area; these two combined would have a population of 1,019,905, as of the 2021 census). Rural flight was a perennial political issue throughout most of the 20th century.

## Largest metropolitan areas in France

2021 census

|  | Rank | Name               | Region                            | Pop.       | Rank | Name                    | Region                            | Pop.    |
|--|------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|
|  <p>Paris</p>  <p>Lyon</p> | 1    | <u>Paris</u>       | <u>Île-de-France</u>              | 13,171,056 | 11   | <u>Grenoble</u>         | <u>Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes</u>       | 722,904 |
|  | 2    | <u>Lyon</u>        | <u>Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes</u>       | 2,308,818  | 12   | <u>Rouen</u>            | <u>Normandy</u>                   | 709,065 |
|  | 3    | <u>Marseille</u>   | <u>Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur</u> | 1,888,788  | 13   | <u>Nice</u>             | <u>Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur</u> | 626,218 |
|  | 4    | <u>Lille</u>       | <u>Hauts-de-France</u>            | 1,521,660  | 14   | <u>Toulon</u>           | <u>Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur</u> | 581,948 |
|  | 5    | <u>Toulouse</u>    | <u>Occitania</u>                  | 1,490,640  | 15   | <u>Tours</u>            | <u>Centre-Val de Loire</u>        | 522,597 |
|  | 6    | <u>Bordeaux</u>    | <u>Nouvelle-Aquitaine</u>         | 1,393,764  | 16   | <u>Nancy</u>            | <u>Grand Est</u>                  | 508,793 |
|  | 7    | <u>Nantes</u>      | <u>Pays de la Loire</u>           | 1,031,953  | 17   | <u>Clermont-Ferrand</u> | <u>Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes</u>       | 508,699 |
|  | 8    | <u>Strasbourg</u>  | <u>Grand Est</u>                  | 864,993    | 18   | <u>Saint-Étienne</u>    | <u>Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes</u>       | 500,562 |
|  | 9    | <u>Montpellier</u> | <u>Occitania</u>                  | 823,120    | 19   | <u>Caen</u>             | <u>Normandy</u>                   | 478,105 |
|  | 10   | <u>Rennes</u>      | <u>Brittany</u>                   | 771,320    | 20   | <u>Orléans</u>          | <u>Centre-Val de Loire</u>        | 456,452 |

## Ethnic groups

Historically, French people were mainly of Celtic-Gallic origin, with a significant admixture of Italic (Romans) and Germanic (Franks) groups reflecting centuries of respective migration and settlement.<sup>[247]</sup> Through the course of the Middle Ages, France incorporated various neighbouring ethnic and linguistic groups, as evidenced by Breton elements in the west, Aquitanian in the southwest, Scandinavian in the northwest, Alemannic in the northeast, and Ligurian in the southeast.

Large-scale immigration over the last century and a half have led to a more multicultural society; beginning with the French Revolution, and further codified in the French Constitution of 1958, the government is prohibited from collecting data on ethnicity and ancestry; most demographic information is drawn from private sector organisations or academic institutions. In 2004, the *Institut Montaigne* estimated that within Metropolitan France, 51 million people were White (85% of the population), 6 million were Northwest African (10%), 2 million were Black (3.3%), and 1 million were Asian (1.7%).<sup>[248][249]</sup>

A 2008 poll conducted jointly by the Institut national d'études démographiques and the French National Institute of Statistics<sup>[250][251]</sup> estimated that the largest minority ancestry groups were Italian (5 million), followed by Northwest African (3–6 million),<sup>[252][253][254]</sup> Sub-Saharan African (2.5 million), Armenian (500,000), and Turkish (200,000).<sup>[255]</sup> There are also sizeable minorities of other European ethnic groups, namely Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, and Greek.<sup>[252][256][257]</sup> France has a significant Gitan (Romani) population, numbering between 20,000 and 400,000;<sup>[258]</sup> many foreign Roma are expelled back to Bulgaria and Romania frequently.<sup>[259]</sup>

## Immigration



It is currently estimated that 40% of the French population is descended at least partially from the different waves of immigration since the early 20th century;<sup>[260]</sup> between 1921 and 1935 alone, about 1.1 million net immigrants came to France.<sup>[261]</sup> The next largest wave came in the 1960s when around 1.6 million  *pieds noirs*  returned to France following the independence of its Northwest African possessions, Algeria and Morocco.<sup>[262][263]</sup> They were joined by numerous former colonial subjects from North and West Africa, as well as numerous European immigrants from Spain and Portugal.

France remains a major destination for immigrants, accepting about 200,000 legal immigrants annually.<sup>[264]</sup> In 2005, it was Western Europe's leading recipient of asylum seekers, with an estimated 50,000 applications (albeit a 15% decrease from 2004).<sup>[265]</sup> In 2010, France received about 48,100 asylum applications—placing it among the top five asylum recipients in the world.<sup>[266]</sup> In subsequent years it saw the number of applications increase, ultimately doubling to 100,412 in 2017.<sup>[267]</sup> The European Union allows free movement between the member states, although France established controls to curb Eastern European migration. Foreigners' rights are established in the Code of Entry and Residence of Foreigners and of the Right to Asylum. Immigration remains a contentious political issue.<sup>[268]</sup>



The Calais Jungle was a refugee and illegal migrant encampment in the vicinity of Calais, France, that existed from January 2015 to October 2016.

In 2008, the INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) estimated that the total number of foreign-born immigrants was around 5 million (8% of the population), while their French-born descendants numbered 6.5 million, or 11% of the population. Thus, nearly a fifth of the country's population were either first or second-generation immigrants, of which more than 5 million were of European origin and 4 million of Maghrebi ancestry.<sup>[269][270][271]</sup> In 2008, France granted citizenship to 137,000 persons, mostly from Morocco, Algeria and Turkey.<sup>[272]</sup> In 2022, more than 320,000 migrants came to France, with the majority coming from Africa.<sup>[273]</sup>

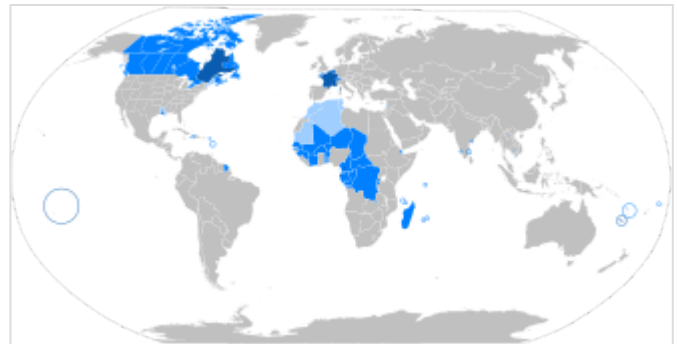
In 2014, the INSEE reported a significant increase in the number of immigrants coming from Spain, Portugal and Italy between 2009 and 2012. According to the institute, this increase resulted from the financial crisis that hit several European countries in that period.<sup>[274]</sup> Statistics on Spanish immigrants in France show a growth of 107 per cent between 2009 and 2012, with the population growing from 5,300 to 11,000.<sup>[274]</sup> Of the total of 229,000 foreigners coming to France in 2012, nearly 8% were Portuguese, 5% British, 5% Spanish, 4% Italian, 4% German, 3% Romanian, and 3% Belgian.<sup>[274]</sup>

## Language

The official language of France is French,<sup>[275]</sup> a Romance language derived from Latin. Since 1635, the Académie française has been France's official authority on the French language, although its recommendations carry no legal weight. There are also regional languages spoken in France, such as Occitan, Breton, Catalan, Flemish (Dutch dialect), Alsatian (German dialect), Basque, and Corsican (Italian dialect). Italian was the official language of Corsica until 9 May 1859.<sup>[276]</sup>

The Government of France does not regulate the choice of language in publications by individuals, but the use of French is required by law in commercial and workplace communications. In addition to mandating the use of French in the territory of the Republic, the French government tries to promote French in the

European Union and globally through institutions such as the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. The perceived threat from anglicisation has prompted efforts to safeguard the position of the French language in France. Besides French, there exist 77 vernacular minority languages of France, eight spoken in French metropolitan territory and 69 in the French overseas territories. It is estimated that between 300 million<sup>[277]</sup> and 500 million<sup>[278]</sup> people worldwide can speak French, either as a mother tongue or as a second language.



Map of the Francophone world:

- Native language
- Administrative language
- Secondary or cultural language

According to the 2007 Adult Education survey, part of a project by the European Union and carried out in France by the INSEE and based on a sample of 15,350 persons, French was the native language of 87.2% of the total population, or roughly 55.81 million people, followed by Arabic (3.6%, 2.3 million), Portuguese (1.5%, 960,000), Spanish (1.2%, 770,000) and Italian (1.0%, 640,000). Native speakers of other languages made up the remaining 5.2% of the population.<sup>[279]</sup>

## Religion

France is a secular country in which freedom of religion is a constitutional right. The French policy on religion is based on the concept of *laïcité*, a strict separation of church and state under which the government and public life are kept completely secular, detached from any religion. The region of Alsace and Moselle is an exception to the general French norm since the local law stipulates official status and state funding for Lutheranism, Catholicism, and Judaism. According to the national survey of 2020 held by the INSEE,<sup>[XIII]</sup> 34-38% of the French population adhered to Christianity, of whom approximately 25-29% were Catholics and 9% other Christians (without further specification); at the same time, 10-11% of the French population adhered to Islam, 0.5% to Buddhism, 0.5% to Judaism, and 1% to other religions.<sup>[4]</sup> 51-53% of the population declared that they had no religion.<sup>[4]</sup>



Notre-Dame de Reims is the Roman Catholic cathedral where the Kings of France were crowned until 1825.<sup>[XII]</sup>

Catholicism was the main religion in France for more than a millennium, and it was once the country's state religion. Its role nowadays, however, has been greatly reduced, although, as of 2012, among the 47,000 religious buildings in France 94% were still Catholic churches.<sup>[280]</sup> During the French Revolution, activists conducted a brutal campaign of de-Christianisation, which put an end to the role of the Catholic Church as the state religion. In some cases, clergy and churches were attacked, with iconoclasm stripping the churches of statues and ornaments. After alternating between royal and secular republican governments during the 19th century, in 1905 France passed the 1905 law on the Separation of the Churches and the State, which established the aforementioned principle of *laïcité*.<sup>[281]</sup>

The government is prohibited from recognising specific rights to any religious community (with the exception of legacy statutes like those of military chaplains and the aforementioned local law in Alsace-Moselle). It recognises religious organisations according to formal legal criteria that do not address religious doctrine, and religious organisations are expected to refrain from intervening in policymaking.<sup>[282]</sup> Some religious groups, such as Scientology, the Children of God, the Unification Church, and the Order of the Solar Temple, are considered cults (*sectes* in French, which is considered a pejorative term<sup>[283]</sup>) in France, and therefore they are not granted the same status as recognised religions.<sup>[284]</sup>

## Health

The French health care system is one of universal health care largely financed by government national health insurance. In its 2000 assessment of world health care systems, the World Health Organization found that France provided the "close to best overall health care" in the world.<sup>[286]</sup> The French health care system was ranked first worldwide by the World Health Organization in 1997.<sup>[287][288]</sup> In 2011, France spent 11.6% of its GDP on health care, or US\$4,086 per capita,<sup>[289]</sup> a figure much higher than the average spent by countries in Europe but less than in the United States. Approximately 77% of health expenditures are covered by government-funded agencies.<sup>[290]</sup>



The Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, a teaching hospital in Paris, is one of Europe's largest hospitals.<sup>[285]</sup>

Care is generally free for people affected by chronic diseases (*affections de longues durées*) such as cancer, AIDS or cystic fibrosis. The life expectancy at birth is 78 years for men and 85 years for women, one of the highest in the European Union and the World.<sup>[291][292]</sup> There are 3.22 physicians for every 1000 inhabitants in France,<sup>[293]</sup> and average health care spending per capita was US\$4,719 in 2008.<sup>[294]</sup> As of 2007, approximately 140,000 inhabitants (0.4%) of France are living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>[84]</sup>

## Education

In 1802, Napoleon created the lycée, the second and final stage of secondary education that prepares students for higher education studies or a profession.<sup>[296]</sup> Nevertheless, Jules Ferry is considered the father of the French modern school, leading reforms in the late 19th century that established free, secular and compulsory education (currently mandatory until the age of 16).<sup>[297][298]</sup>

French education is centralised and divided into three stages: primary, secondary, and higher education. The Programme for International Student Assessment, coordinated by the OECD, ranked France's education as near the OECD average in 2018.<sup>[299][300]</sup> France was one of the PISA-participating countries where school children perceived some of the lowest levels of support and feedback from their teachers.<sup>[300]</sup> Schoolchildren in France reported greater concern about the disciplinary climate and behaviour in classrooms compared to other OECD countries.<sup>[300]</sup>



The ENS produces among the most Nobel Prize laureates per capita in the world.<sup>[295]</sup>

Higher education is divided between public universities and the prestigious and selective *Grandes écoles*, such as Sciences Po Paris for political studies, HEC Paris for economics, Polytechnique, the École des hautes études en sciences sociales for social studies and the École nationale supérieure des mines de Paris that produce high-profile engineers, or the École nationale d'administration for careers in the Grands Corps of the state. The *Grandes écoles* have been criticised for alleged elitism, producing many if not most of France's high-ranking civil servants, CEOs and politicians.<sup>[301]</sup>

## Culture

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### Art

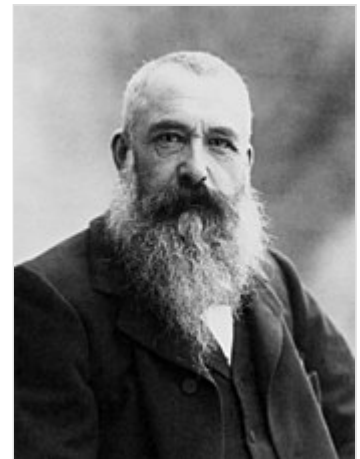
The origins of French art were very much influenced by Flemish art and by Italian art at the time of the Renaissance. Jean Fouquet, the most famous medieval French painter, is said to have been the first to travel to Italy and experience the Early Renaissance firsthand. The Renaissance painting School of Fontainebleau was directly inspired by Italian painters such as Primaticcio and Rosso Fiorentino, who both worked in France. Two of the most famous French artists of the time of the Baroque era, Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain, lived in Italy.

French artists developed the rococo style in the 18th century, as a more intimate imitation of the old baroque style, the works of the court-endorsed artists Antoine Watteau, François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard being the most representative in the country. The French Revolution brought great changes, as Napoleon favoured artists of neoclassic style such as Jacques-Louis David and the highly influential Académie des Beaux-Arts defined the style known as Academism.

In the second part of the 19th century, France's influence over painting grew, with the development of new styles of painting such as Impressionism and Symbolism. The most famous impressionist painters of the period were Camille Pissarro, Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir.<sup>[302]</sup> The second generation of impressionist-style painters, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec and Georges Seurat, were also at the avant-garde of artistic evolutions,<sup>[303]</sup> as well as the fauvist artists Henri Matisse, André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck.<sup>[304][305]</sup>

At the beginning of the 20th century, Cubism was developed by Georges Braque and the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso, living in Paris. Other foreign artists also settled and worked in or near Paris, such as Vincent van Gogh, Marc Chagall, Amedeo Modigliani and Wassily Kandinsky.

There are many art museums in France, the most famous of which being the state-owned Musée du Louvre, which collects artwork from the 18th century and earlier. The Musée d'Orsay was inaugurated in 1986 in the old railway station Gare d'Orsay, in a major reorganisation of national art collections, to gather French paintings from the second part of the 19th century (mainly Impressionism and Fauvism



Claude Monet, founder of the Impressionist movement



movements).<sup>[306][307]</sup> It was voted the best museum in the world in 2018.<sup>[308]</sup> Modern works are presented in the Musée National d'Art Moderne, which moved in 1976 to the Centre Georges Pompidou. These three state-owned museums are visited by close to 17 million people a year.<sup>[309]</sup>

## Architecture

During the Middle Ages, many fortified castles were built by feudal nobles to mark their powers. Some French castles that survived are Chinon, Château d'Angers, the massive Château de Vincennes and the so-called Cathar castles. During this era, France had been using Romanesque architecture like most of Western Europe.

Gothic architecture, originally named *Opus Francigenum* meaning "French work",<sup>[310]</sup> was born in Île-de-France and was the first French style of architecture to be imitated throughout Europe.<sup>[311]</sup> Northern France is the home of some of the most important Gothic cathedrals and basilicas, the first of these being the Saint Denis Basilica (used as the royal necropolis); other important French Gothic cathedrals are Notre-Dame de Chartres and Notre-Dame d'Amiens. The kings were crowned in another important Gothic church: Notre-Dame de Reims.<sup>[312]</sup>

The final victory in the Hundred Years' War marked an important stage in the evolution of French architecture. It was the time of the French Renaissance and several artists from Italy were invited to the French court; many residential palaces were built in the Loire Valley, from 1450 as a first reference the Château de Montsoreau.<sup>[313]</sup> Examples of such residential castles include the Château de Chambord, the Château de Chenonceau, or the Château d'Amboise.

Following the Renaissance and the end of the Middle Ages, Baroque architecture replaced the traditional Gothic style. However, in France, Baroque architecture found greater success in the secular domain than in the religious one.<sup>[314]</sup> In the secular domain, the Palace of Versailles has many Baroque features. Jules Hardouin Mansart, who designed the extensions to Versailles, was one of the most influential French architects of the Baroque era; he is famous for his dome at Les Invalides.<sup>[315]</sup> Some of the most impressive provincial Baroque architecture is found in places that were not yet French such as Place Stanislas in Nancy. On the military architectural side, Vauban designed some of the most efficient fortresses in Europe and became an influential military architect; as a result, imitations of his works can be found all over Europe, the Americas, Russia and Turkey.<sup>[316][317]</sup>

After the Revolution, the Republicans favoured Neoclassicism although it was introduced in France before the revolution with such buildings as the Parisian Pantheon or the Capitole de Toulouse. Built during the first French Empire, the Arc de Triomphe and Sainte Marie-Madeleine represent the best example of Empire-style architecture.<sup>[318]</sup> Under Napoleon III, a new wave of urbanism and architecture was given birth; extravagant buildings such as the neo-Baroque Palais Garnier were built. The urban planning of the time was very organised and rigorous; most notably, Haussmann's renovation of Paris. The architecture associated with this era is named Second Empire in English, the term being taken from the Second French Empire. At this time there was a strong Gothic resurgence across Europe and in France; the associated



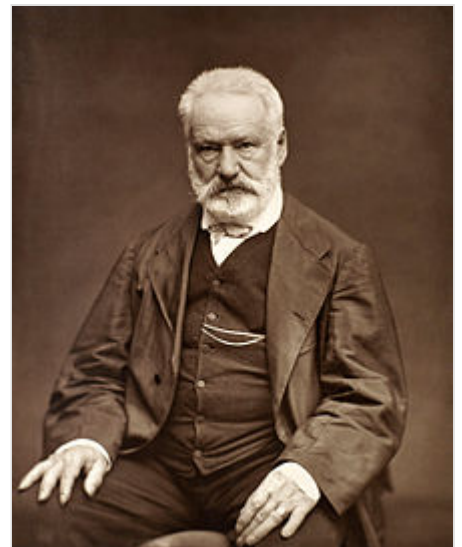
Saint Louis's Sainte-Chapelle represents the French impact on religious architecture.

architect was Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. In the late 19th century, Gustave Eiffel designed many bridges, such as the Garabit viaduct, and remains one of the most influential bridge designers of his time, although he is best remembered for the Eiffel Tower.

In the 20th century, French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier designed several buildings in France. More recently, French architects have combined both modern and old architectural styles. The Louvre Pyramid is an example of modern architecture added to an older building. The most difficult buildings to integrate within French cities are skyscrapers, as they are visible from afar. For instance, in Paris, since 1977, new buildings had to be under 37 metres (121 ft).<sup>[319]</sup> France's largest financial district is La Défense, where a significant number of skyscrapers are located.<sup>[320]</sup> Other massive buildings that are a challenge to integrate into their environment are large bridges; an example of the way this has been done is the Millau Viaduct. Some famous modern French architects include Jean Nouvel, Dominique Perrault, Christian de Portzamparc and Paul Andreu.

## Literature and philosophy

The earliest French literature dates from the Middle Ages when what is now known as modern France did not have a single, uniform language. There were several languages and dialects, and writers used their own spelling and grammar. Some authors of French medieval texts, such as *Tristan and Iseult* and *Lancelot-Grail* are unknown. Three famous medieval authors are Chrétien de Troyes, Christine de Pizan (langue d'oïl), and Duke William IX of Aquitaine (langue d'oc). Much medieval French poetry and literature was inspired by the legends of the Carolingian cycle, such as the *Song of Roland* and the *chansons de geste*. The *Roman de Renart*, written in 1175 by PerROUT de Saint Cloude, tells the story of the medieval character Reynard ('the Fox') and is another example of early French writing. An important 16th-century writer was François Rabelais, who wrote five popular early picaresque novels. Rabelais was also in regular communication with Marguerite de Navarre, author of the *Heptameron*.<sup>[321]</sup> Another 16th-century author was Michel de Montaigne, whose most famous work, *Essais*, started a literary genre.<sup>[322]</sup>



Victor Hugo, a French Romantic writer and politician

French literature and poetry flourished during the 18th and 19th centuries. Denis Diderot's best-known works are *Jacques the Fatalist* and *Rameau's Nephew*. He is best known, however, as the main editor of the *Encyclopédie*, whose aim was to sum up all the knowledge of his century (in fields such as arts, sciences, languages, and philosophy) and to fight ignorance and obscurantism. During that same century, Charles Perrault was a prolific writer of children's fairy tales including *Puss in Boots*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Bluebeard*. At the start of the 19th century, symbolist poetry was an important movement in French literature, with poets such as Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>[323]</sup>

The 19th century saw the writings of many renowned French authors. Victor Hugo is sometimes seen as "the greatest French writer of all time"<sup>[324]</sup> for excelling in all literary genres. The preface of his play *Cromwell* is considered to be the manifesto of the Romantic movement. *Les Contemplations* and *La Légende des siècles* are considered "poetic masterpieces",<sup>[325]</sup> Hugo's verse has been compared to that of

Shakespeare, Dante and Homer.<sup>[325]</sup> His novel Les Misérables is widely seen as one of the greatest novels ever written<sup>[326]</sup> and The Hunchback of Notre Dame has remained immensely popular. Other major authors of that century include Alexandre Dumas (The Three Musketeers and The Count of Monte-Cristo), Jules Verne (Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas), Émile Zola (Les Rougon-Macquart), Honoré de Balzac (La Comédie humaine), Guy de Maupassant, Théophile Gautier and Stendhal (The Red and the Black, The Charterhouse of Parma), whose works are among the most well known in France and the world.

In the early 20th century France was a haven for literary freedom.<sup>[327]</sup> Works banned for obscenity in the US, the UK and other Anglophone nations were published in France decades before they were available in the respective authors' home countries.<sup>[327]</sup> The French were disinclined to punish literary figures for their writing, and prosecutions were rare.<sup>[327]</sup> Important writers of the 20th century include Marcel Proust, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Jean Cocteau, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote The Little Prince, which has remained popular for decades and is one of the best selling books in history.<sup>[328][329]</sup>

Medieval philosophy was dominated by Scholasticism until the emergence of Humanism in the Renaissance. Modern philosophy began in France in the 17th century with the philosophy of René Descartes, Blaise Pascal and Nicolas Malebranche. Descartes was the first Western philosopher since ancient times to attempt to build a philosophical system from the ground up rather than building on the work of predecessors.<sup>[330][331]</sup> France in the 18th century saw major philosophical contributions from Voltaire who came to embody the Enlightenment and Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose work highly influenced the French Revolution.<sup>[332][333]</sup> French philosophers made major contributions to the field in the 20th century including the existentialist works of Simone de Beauvoir, Camus, and Sartre.<sup>[334]</sup> Other influential contributions during this time include the moral and political works of Simone Weil, contributions to structuralism including from Claude Lévi-Strauss and the post-structuralist works by Michel Foucault.<sup>[335][336]</sup>

## Music



Claude Debussy, a French composer

France has a long and varied musical history. It experienced a golden age in the 17th century thanks to Louis XIV, who employed talented musicians and composers in the royal court. The most renowned composers of this period include Marc-Antoine Charpentier, François Couperin, Michel-Richard Delalande, Jean-Baptiste Lully and Marin Marais, all of them composers at the court. After the death of the "Roi Soleil", French musical creation lost dynamism, but in the next century the music of Jean-Philippe Rameau reached some prestige, and he is still one of the most renowned French composers. Rameau became the dominant composer of French opera and the leading French composer of the harpsichord.<sup>[337]</sup>

In the field of classical music, France has produced a number of notable composers such as Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Hector Berlioz. Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel are the most prominent figures associated with Impressionist music. The two composers invented new musical forms<sup>[338][339][340][341]</sup> and new sounds. Debussy was among the most influential composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and his use of non-traditional scales and chromaticism influenced many composers who followed.<sup>[342]</sup> His music is noted for its sensory content and frequent usage of

atonality. Ravel's piano compositions, such as *Jeux d'eau*, *Miroirs*, *Le tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit*, demand considerable virtuosity. His mastery of orchestration is evident in the *Rapsodie espagnole*, *Daphnis et Chloé*, his arrangement of Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and his orchestral work *Boléro* (1928). Erik Satie was a key member of the early-20th-century Parisian avant-garde. Francis Poulenc's best-known works are his piano suite *Trois mouvements perpétuels* (1919), the ballet *Les biches* (1923), the *Concert champêtre* (1928) for harpsichord and orchestra, the opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957) and the *Gloria* (1959) for soprano, choir and orchestra. More recently, in the middle of the 20th century, Maurice Ohana, Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Boulez contributed to the evolution of contemporary classical music.<sup>[343]</sup>

French music then followed the rapid emergence of pop and rock music in the middle of the 20th century. Although English-speaking creations achieved popularity in the country, French pop music, known as *chanson française*, has also remained very popular. Among the most important French artists of the century are Édith Piaf, Georges Brassens, Léo Ferré, Charles Aznavour and Serge Gainsbourg.<sup>[344]</sup> Modern pop music has seen the rise of popular French hip hop, French rock, techno/funk, and turntablists/DJs. Although there are very few rock bands in France compared to English-speaking countries,<sup>[345]</sup> bands such as Noir Désir, Mano Negra, Niagara, Les Rita Mitsouko and more recently Superbus, Phoenix and Gojira,<sup>[346]</sup> or Shaka Ponk, have reached worldwide popularity.

## Cinema

France has historical and strong links with cinema, with two Frenchmen, Auguste and Louis Lumière (known as the Lumière Brothers) credited with creating cinema in 1895.<sup>[350]</sup> The world's first female filmmaker, Alice Guy-Blaché, was also from France.<sup>[351]</sup> Several important cinematic movements, including the late 1950s and 1960s Nouvelle Vague, began in the country. It is noted for having a strong film industry, due in part to protections afforded by the Government of France. France remains a leader in filmmaking, as of 2015 producing more films than any other European country.<sup>[352][353]</sup> The nation also hosts the Cannes Festival, one of the most important and famous film festivals in the world.<sup>[354][355]</sup>



A *Palme d'Or* from the Cannes Film Festival, one of the "Big Three" film festivals alongside the Venice Film Festival and Berlin International Film Festival.<sup>[347][348][349]</sup>

Apart from its strong and innovative film tradition, France has also been a gathering spot for artists from across Europe and the world. For this reason, French cinema is sometimes intertwined with the cinema of foreign nations. Directors from nations such as Poland (Roman Polanski, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Andrzej Żuławski), Argentina (Gaspar Noé, Edgardo Cozarinsky), Russia (Alexandre Alexeieff, Anatole Litvak), Austria (Michael Haneke) and Georgia (Géla Babluani, Otar Iosseliani) are prominent in the ranks of French cinema. Conversely, French directors have had prolific and influential careers in other countries, such as Luc Besson, Jacques Tourneur or Francis Veber in the United States. Although the French film market is dominated by Hollywood, France is the only nation in the world where American films make up the smallest share of total film revenues, at 50%, compared with 77% in Germany and 69% in Japan.<sup>[356]</sup> French films account for 35% of the total film revenues of France, which is the highest percentage of national film revenues in the developed world outside the United States, compared to 14% in Spain and 8% in the UK.<sup>[356]</sup> In 2013 France was the second greatest exporter of films in the world, after the United States.<sup>[357]</sup>



As part of its advocacy of cultural exception, a political concept of treating culture differently from other commercial products,<sup>[358]</sup> France succeeded in convincing all EU members to refuse to include culture and audiovisuals in the list of liberalised sectors of the WTO in 1993.<sup>[359]</sup> Moreover, this decision was confirmed in a vote by UNESCO in 2005: the principle of "cultural exception" won an overwhelming victory with 198 countries voting for it and only 2 countries, the United States and Israel, voting against it.<sup>[360]</sup>

## Fashion



Chanel's headquarters on  
Place Vendôme, Paris

Fashion has been an important industry and cultural export of France since the 17th century, and modern "haute couture" originated in Paris in the 1860s. Today, Paris, along with London, Milan, and New York City, is considered one of the world's fashion capitals, and the city is home or headquarters to many of the premier fashion houses. The expression *Haute couture* is, in France, a legally protected name, guaranteeing certain quality standards.

The association of France with fashion and style (French: *la mode*) dates largely to the reign of Louis XIV<sup>[361]</sup> when the luxury goods industries in France came increasingly under royal control and the French royal court became, arguably, the arbiter of taste and style in Europe. But France renewed its dominance of the high fashion (French: *couture* or *haute couture*) industry in the years 1860–1960 through the establishment of the great couturier houses such as Chanel, Dior, and Givenchy. The French perfume industry is the world leader in its sector and is centred on the town of Grasse.<sup>[362]</sup>

According to 2017 data compiled by Deloitte, Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessey (LVMH), a French brand, is the largest luxury company in the world by sales, selling more than twice the amount of its nearest competitor.<sup>[363]</sup> Moreover, France also possesses 3 of the top 10 luxury goods companies by sales (LVMH, Kering SA, L'Oréal), more than any other country in the world.<sup>[363]</sup>

## Media

In 2021, regional daily newspapers, such as Ouest-France, Sud Ouest, La Voix du Nord, Dauphiné Libéré, Le Télégramme, and Le Progrès, more than doubled the sales of national newspapers, such as Le Monde, Le Figaro, L'Équipe (sports), Le Parisien, and Les Echos (finance). Free dailies, distributed in metropolitan centers, continue to increase their market share.<sup>[365]</sup> The sector of weekly magazines includes more than 400 specialised weekly magazines published in the country.<sup>[366]</sup>

The most influential news magazines are the left-wing Le Nouvel Observateur, centrist L'Express and right-wing Le Point (in 2009 more than 400,000 copies),<sup>[367]</sup> but the highest circulation numbers for weeklies are attained by TV magazines and by women's magazines, among them Marie Claire and ELLE, which have foreign versions. Influential weeklies also include investigative and satirical papers Le Canard Enchaîné and Charlie Hebdo, as well as Paris Match. As in most industrialised nations, the print media have been affected by a severe crisis with the rise of the internet. In 2008, the government launched a major initiative to help the sector reform and become financially independent,<sup>[368][369]</sup> but in 2009 it had to give 600,000 euros to help the print media cope with the economic crisis, in addition to existing subsidies.<sup>[370]</sup>

In 1974, after years of centralised monopoly on radio and television, the governmental agency ORTF was split into several national institutions, but the three already-existing TV channels and four national radio stations<sup>[371][372]</sup> remained under state control. It was only in 1981 that the government allowed free broadcasting in the territory, ending the state monopoly on radio.<sup>[372]</sup>

## Cuisine

French cuisine is renowned for being one of the finest in the world.<sup>[373][374]</sup> Different regions have different styles. In the North, butter and cream are common ingredients, whereas olive oil is more commonly used in the South.<sup>[375]</sup> Each region of France has traditional specialties: cassoulet in the Southwest, choucroute in Alsace, quiche in the Lorraine region, beef bourguignon in Burgundy, provençal tapenade, etc. France is most famous for its wines,<sup>[376]</sup> and cheeses, which are often named for the territory where they are produced (AOC).<sup>[377][378]</sup> A meal typically consists of three courses, *entrée* (starter), *plat principal* (main course), and *fromage* (cheese) or *dessert*, sometimes with a salad served before the cheese or dessert.

French cuisine is also regarded as a key element of the quality of life and the attractiveness of France. A French publication, the Michelin guide, awards Michelin stars for excellence to a select few establishments.<sup>[379][380]</sup> The acquisition or loss of a star can have dramatic effects on the success of a restaurant. By 2006, the Michelin Guide had awarded 620 stars to French restaurants.<sup>[381]</sup>

In addition to its wine tradition, France is also a major producer of beer and rum. The three main French brewing regions are Alsace (60% of national production), Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Lorraine. French rum is made in distilleries located on islands in the Atlantic and Indian oceans.<sup>[382][383]</sup>

## Sports

France hosts "the world's biggest annual sporting event", the annual cycling race Tour de France.<sup>[385]</sup> Other popular sports played in France include: football, judo, tennis,<sup>[386]</sup> rugby union<sup>[387]</sup> and pétanque. France has hosted events such as the 1938 and 1998 FIFA World Cups,<sup>[388]</sup> the 2007 Rugby World Cup,<sup>[389]</sup> and the 2023 Rugby World Cup.<sup>[390]</sup> The country also hosted the 1960 European Nations' Cup, UEFA Euro 1984, UEFA Euro 2016 and 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. The Stade de France in Saint-Denis is France's largest stadium and was the venue for the 1998 FIFA World Cup and 2007 Rugby World Cup finals. Since 1923, France is famous for its 24 Hours of Le Mans sports car endurance



Le Figaro was founded in 1826 and it is still considered a newspaper of record.<sup>[364]</sup>



French wines are usually made to accompany French cuisine.



Starting in 1903, the Tour de France is the most prestigious of Grands Tours, and the world's most famous cycling race.<sup>[384]</sup>

race.<sup>[391]</sup> Several major tennis tournaments take place in France, including the Paris Masters and the French Open, one of the four Grand Slam tournaments. French martial arts include Savate and Fencing.

France has a close association with the Modern Olympic Games; it was a French aristocrat, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who suggested the Games' revival, at the end of the 19th century.<sup>[392][393]</sup> After Athens was awarded the first Games, in reference to the Olympics' Greek origins, Paris hosted the second Games in 1900.<sup>[394]</sup> Paris was the first home of the International Olympic Committee, before it moved to Lausanne.<sup>[395]</sup> Since 1900, France has hosted the Olympics on 4 further occasions: the 1924 Summer Olympics, again in Paris<sup>[393]</sup> and three Winter Games (1924 in Chamonix, 1968 in Grenoble and 1992 in Albertville).<sup>[393]</sup> Similar to the Olympics, France introduced Olympics for deaf people (Deaflympics) in 1924 with the idea of a French deaf car mechanic, Eugène Rubens-Alcais who paved the way to organise the inaugural edition of the Summer Deaflympics in Paris.<sup>[396]</sup>



Zidane is regarded as one of the greatest footballers of all time

Both the national football team and the national rugby union team are nicknamed "*Les Bleus*" in reference to the team's shirt colour as well as the national French tricolour flag. Football is the most popular sport in France, with over 1,800,000 registered players and over 18,000 registered clubs.<sup>[397]</sup>

The French Open, also called Roland-Garros, is a major tennis tournament held over two weeks between late May and early June at the Stade Roland-Garros in Paris. It is the premier clay court tennis championship event in the world and the second of four annual Grand Slam tournaments.<sup>[398]</sup>

Rugby union is popular, particularly in Paris and the southwest of France.<sup>[399]</sup> The national rugby union team has competed at every Rugby World Cup; it takes part in the annual Six Nations Championship.

## See also

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- Outline of France

## Notes

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a. French: [fʁɑ̃s]

b. French: *République française* [ʁepyblik fʁɑ̃sɛːz]

- The current Constitution of France does not specify a national emblem.<sup>[1]</sup> The lictor's fasces is very often used to represent the French Republic, although today it holds no official status.<sup>[2]</sup> In addition to the coat of arms, France also uses a different emblem for diplomatic and consular purposes.
- For information about regional languages, see Languages of France.
- European Union since 1993

- IV. French National Geographic Institute data, which includes bodies of water
- V. French Land Register data, which exclude lakes, ponds and glaciers larger than 1 km<sup>2</sup> (0.386 sq mi or 247 acres) as well as the estuaries of rivers
- VI. Whole of the except the overseas territories in the Pacific Ocean
- VII. French overseas territories in the Pacific Ocean only
- VIII. Various other time zones are used in overseas France, from UTC−10 (French Polynesia) to UTC+12 (Wallis and Futana). For further information, view Time in France.
- IX. The overseas regions and collectivities form part of the French telephone numbering plan, but have their own country calling codes: Guadeloupe +590; Martinique +596; French Guiana +594; Réunion and Mayotte +262; Saint Pierre and Miquelon +508. The overseas territories are not part of the French telephone numbering plan; their country calling codes are: New Caledonia +687; French Polynesia +689; Wallis and Futuna +681.
- X. In addition to .fr, several other Internet TLDs are used in French overseas *départements* and territories: .re, .mq, .gp, .tf, .nc, .pf, .wf, .pm, .gf and .yt. France also uses .eu, shared with other members of the European Union. The .cat domain is used in Catalan-speaking territories.
- XI. French Guiana is in South America; Guadeloupe and Martinique are in the Caribbean Sea; and Réunion and Mayotte are in the Indian Ocean, off the coast of Africa. All five are considered integral parts of the French Republic. France also comprises Saint Pierre and Miquelon in North America; Saint Barthélemy and Saint Martin in the Caribbean; French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and Clipperton Island in the Pacific Ocean; and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands.
- XII. The last sacre was that of Charles X, 29 May 1825.
- XIII. The 2020 survey of religion by INSEE was conducted on a nationally representative large sample ( $\approx 28,000$ ) of people aged 18–49 and 18–59. It is reputed to be representative of the whole population of Metropolitan France, comprising French people without immigrant background, French people with immigrant background since various generations, as well as first-generation immigrant citizens.<sup>[4]</sup> Drouhout et al. p. 48.

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## Further reading

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## External links

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- France (<http://www.oecd.org/france>) at *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*
- France (<https://web.archive.org/web/20090207004853/http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/govpubs/for/france.htm>) at *UCB Libraries GovPubs*
- France (<https://curlie.org/Regional/Europe/France>) at *Curlie*
- France ([http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/member-countries/france/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/member-countries/france/index_en.htm)) at the EU
-  Wikimedia Atlas of France
-  Geographic data related to France (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/1403916>) at *OpenStreetMap*

- Key Development Forecasts for France ([http://www.ifs.du.edu/ifs/frm\\_CountryProfile.aspx?Country=FR](http://www.ifs.du.edu/ifs/frm_CountryProfile.aspx?Country=FR)) from International Futures

## Economy

- INSEE (<https://www.insee.fr/en/accueil>)
- OECD France statistics (<http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=14594>)

## Government

- France.fr (<http://www.france.fr/en>) – official French tourism site (in English)
- Gouvernement.fr (<http://www.gouvernement.fr>) – official site of the government (in French)
- Official site of the French public service (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120103101721/http://service-public.fr/langue/english>) – links to various administrations and institutions
- Official site of the National Assembly (<http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/english/index.asp>)

## Culture

- *Contemporary French Civilization* (<http://www.french.uiuc.edu/cfc>). Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070827194815/http://www.french.uiuc.edu/CFC/>) 27 August 2007 at the Wayback Machine. Journal, University of Illinois.
- FranceGuide (<http://us.franceguide.com>) – official site of the French Government Tourist Office

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