– in Europe (green & dark grey)– in the European Union (green)

France,[IX] officially the French Republic,[X] is a country located primarily in Western Europe. Its overseas regions and 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, giving it one of the largest discontiguous exclusive economic zones in the world. Metropolitan France shares borders with Belgium and Luxembourg to the north, Germany to the northeast, Switzerland to the east, Italy and Monaco to the southeast, Andorra and Spain to the south, and a maritime border with the United Kingdom to the northwest. 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 eighteen integral regions—five of which are overseas—span a combined area of 632,702 km2 (244,288 sq mi) and have an estimated total population of over 68.6 million as of January 2025[update]. France is a semi-presidential republic and its capital, largest city and main cultural and economic centre is Paris.

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 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, French culture flourished during the French Renaissance and a French colonial empire emerged. Internally, 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.

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 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 Allies of World War II, but it surrendered and was occupied 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 fourth-largest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and is the world's leading tourist destination, having received 100 million foreign visitors in 2023. A developed country, France has a high nominal per capita income globally, and its advanced economy ranks among the largest in the world by both nominal GDP and PPP-adjusted GDP. It is a great power, being one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and an official nuclear-weapon state. The country is part of multiple international organizations and forums.

Originally applied to the whole Frankish Empire, the name France comes from the Latin Francia, or 'realm of the Franks'.[13] 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.[14][15] It has been suggested that the meaning 'free' was adopted because, after the conquest of Gaul, only Franks were free of taxation,[16] or more generally because they had the status of freemen in contrast to servants or slaves.[15] 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),[17] although these weapons may have been named because of their use by the Franks, not the other way around.[15]

In English, 'France' is pronounced /fræns/ FRANSS in American English and /frɑːns/ FRAHNSS or /fræns/ FRANSS in British English. The pronunciation with /ɑː/ is mostly confined to accents with the trap-bath split such as Received Pronunciation, though it can be also heard in some other dialects such as Cardiff English.[18]

The oldest traces of archaic humans in what is now France date from approximately 1.8 million years ago.[19] Neanderthals occupied the region into the Upper Paleolithic era but were slowly replaced by Homo sapiens around 35,000 BC.[20] This period witnessed the emergence of cave painting in the Dordogne and Pyrenees, including at Lascaux, dated to c. 18,000 BC.[19] At the end of the Last Glacial Period (10,000 BC), the climate became milder;[19] 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.[21] France has numerous megalithic sites from the Neolithic, including the Carnac stones site (approximately 3,300 BC).