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.[70]

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[71] and signing the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007.[72] France has fully reintegrated into NATO and since participated in most NATO-sponsored wars.[73] Since the 19th century, France has received many immigrants, often male foreign workers from European Catholic countries who generally returned home when not employed.[74] During the 1970s France faced an economic crisis and allowed new immigrants (mostly from the Maghreb, in northwest Africa)[74] 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.[75] The government had a policy of assimilation of immigrants, where they were expected to adhere to French values and norms.[76]

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,[77] the November 2015 Paris attacks which resulted in 130 deaths, the deadliest attack on French soil since World War II[78] and the deadliest in the European Union since the Madrid train bombings in 2004.[79] Opération Chammal, France's military efforts to contain ISIS, killed over 1,000 ISIS troops between 2014 and 2015.[80]

The vast majority of France's territory and population is situated in Western Europe and is called Metropolitan France. 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. 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),[81] the largest among European Union members.[71] France's total land area, with its overseas departments and territories (excluding Adélie Land), is 643,801 km2 (248,573 sq mi),[82] 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 km2 (4,261,000 sq mi). Its EEZ covers approximately 8% of the total surface of all the EEZs of the world.

Metropolitan France has a wide variety of topographical sets and natural landscapes. During the Hercynian uplift in the Paleozoic Era, 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. Various routes of natural 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)[83] 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 (though moderate).

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.[84] Other water courses drain towards the Meuse and Rhine along the northeastern borders. France has 11,000,000 km2 (4,200,000 sq mi) of marine waters within three oceans under its jurisdiction, of which 97% are overseas.