France was one of the first countries to create an environment ministry, in 1971.[85] France is ranked 19th by carbon dioxide emissions due to the country's heavy investment in nuclear power following the 1973 oil crisis,[86] which now accounts for 75 per cent of its electricity production[87] and results in less pollution.[88][89] According to the 2020 Environmental Performance Index conducted by Yale and Columbia, France was the fifth most environmentally conscious country in the world.[90][91]

Like all European Union state members, France agreed to cut carbon emissions by at least 20% of 1990 levels by 2020.[92] As of 2009[update], French carbon dioxide emissions per capita are lower than that of China.[93] The country was set to impose a carbon tax in 2009;[94] however, the plan was abandoned due to fears of burdening French businesses.[95]

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.[96][97][98] French forests are some of the most diverse in Europe, comprising more than 140 species of trees.[99] France had a 2018 Forest Landscape Integrity Index mean score of 4.52/10, ranking it 123rd globally.[100] There are nine national parks[101] and 46 natural parks in France.[102] A regional nature park[103] (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.[104][105] As of 2019[update] there are 54 PNRs in France.[106]

France is a representative democracy organised as a unitary semi-presidential republic.[107] Democratic traditions and values are deeply rooted in French culture, identity and politics.[108] The Constitution of the Fifth Republic was approved by referendum in 1958, establishing a framework consisting of executive, legislative and judicial branches.[109] 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.[108]

The executive branch has two leaders. The president, currently Emmanuel Macron, is the head of state, elected directly by universal adult suffrage for a five-year term.[110] The prime minister, currently François Bayrou, 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.[111] In the 2022 presidential election, Macron was re-elected.[112] Two months later, in the legislative elections, Macron lost his parliamentary majority and had to form a minority government.[113]

The legislature consists of the French Parliament, a bicameral body made up of a lower house, the National Assembly and an upper house, the Senate.[114] Legislators in the National Assembly, known as députés, represent local constituencies and are directly elected for five-year terms.[115] 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.[116] The Senate's legislative powers are limited; in the event of disagreement between the two chambers, the National Assembly has the final say.[117] 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.

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[118] 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.[119] Right-wing populist RN became the largest opposition party in the National Assembly in 2022.[120]

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.[121]

France 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.

Since 2016, France is divided into 18 administrative regions: 13 regions in metropolitan France (including Corsica),[122] and five overseas.[81] The regions are further subdivided into 101 departments,[123] 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.