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Your guide to the  
**french elections**

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French-American  
Foundation

## EXECUTIVE BRANCH

France's political system is organized as a semi-presidential republic, meaning that its executive branch is led both by a President and a Prime Minister. Current President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin both belong to the Union for a Popular Movement political party. Unlike the U.S.

President who is elected indirectly by the Electoral College, the French President is elected directly by universal suffrage for a five-year term and serves as the Head of State. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President and leads the Government.

### DIVISION OF POWERS

The President names the Prime Minister, presides over the Cabinet, serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and concludes treaties. He may also dissolve the National Assembly, the more prominent of the two chambers of Parliament. Most of the President's powers are subject to countersignature by the Prime Minister; one notable exception is the power to dissolve the National Assembly. Most recently, in 1997, President Chirac dissolved the National Assembly, resulting in early legislative elections that lost his party's majority in the National Assembly. In the event of a national emergency, the

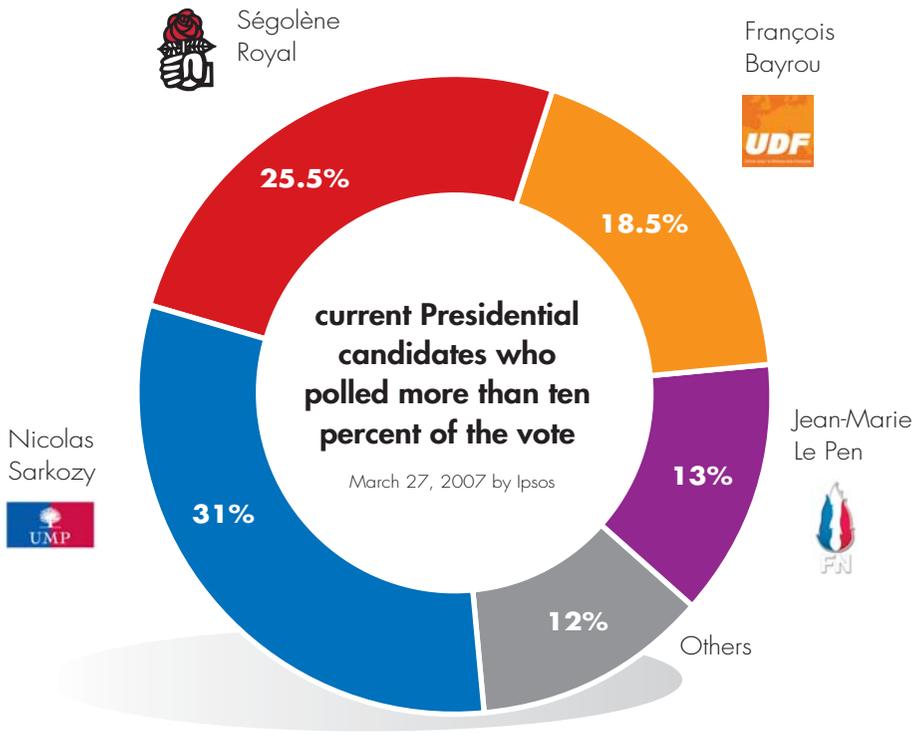
President may assume comprehensive powers. Normally, however, the President may not introduce legislation or regulations but may instead only make suggestions to both Parliament and the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister directs the operations of the Government, and while not the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, he is responsible for the overall management of defense policy and coordinates the defense-related activities of government ministries. The Prime Minister is also responsible for the implementation of laws and, unlike the President, has the right to introduce bills in Parliament.

### "COHABITATION"

When the President's political party controls the National Assembly, he is the dominant player and can appoint a Prime Minister of his own choosing. However, if an opposing party controls

the National Assembly, the President must choose a Prime Minister and a Cabinet who reflect the majority party. This power sharing arrangement is known as "cohabitation."





# PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PROCESS

The President is elected directly to a five-year term (reduced from the previous seven-year term) in a two-round system of elections. If none of the candidates receives a majority of votes, i.e. more than 50% of votes, in the first round of voting, a second round of elections is held between the two top candidates from the first round. This system of run-off voting encourages the candidates to

appeal to a wider cross-section of voters because candidates in the second round must win the support of voters whose candidate has been eliminated. There is no limit to the number of terms a President can serve, although previous Presidents have not exceeded two terms. The next Presidential elections will be held in two rounds on April 22, 2007 and on May 6, 2007.

## PARTY SYSTEM

Unlike the United States with its two-party political system, France has a multi-party political system. Currently, the four main parties represented in the National Assembly are: the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Socialist Party (PS), the Union for French Democracy (UDF) and the Communist Party.

According to a poll conducted on March 27, 2007 by Ipsos, current Presidential candidates who polled more than ten percent of the vote were: Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP) at 31%, Ségolène Royal (PS) at 25.5%, François Bayrou (UDF) at 18.5% and Jean-Marie Le Pen (National Front) at 13%. Included below are brief biographies of these candidates and an overview of their political platforms.