



6 questions about the President

I - Who is eligible to become president of France?

Any French citizen having reached the age of 23 and having satisfied the requirements of French law concerning military service.

A person wishing to become a candidate must be sponsored by 500 elected officials from at least 30 different departments or overseas territories, no more than one-tenth of them elected within a single department or overseas territory. The list of these sponsors (names and qualifications) is published by the Constitutional Council. No candidature is acceptable without these "500 signatures."

II - What is the length of the President's term of office?

Five years. The President may stand for re-election at the conclusion of his five-year term.

François Mitterrand is the only President since 1875 to have served two terms (consecutively from 1981 to 1995).

III - May the president of the Republic exercise any other function?

He is not eligible to exercise any other public or private function.

IV - How is the president elected?

The French President is elected by direct universal suffrage. This procedure was introduced on October 28, 1962 by a referendum held at the initiative of General de Gaulle. In practice, this means that all French citizens having reached their majority are entitled to vote. Previously, the French President was elected by an electoral college made up of elected officials. A candidate must win an absolute majority of votes cast in order to be elected President of the Republic. If no such majority is obtained on the first round of voting, a second round is held on the second Sunday following the first round. Only the two candidates having won the most votes in the first round are entitled to run in the second round.

The election must be held no less than 20 days and no more than 35 days prior to the expiration of the powers of the President-in-office. The Government is responsible for calling the voters to take part in the election.

The Constitutional Council is responsible for ensuring the proper conduct of



the election and for proclaiming the final results within ten days following the ballot in which one of the candidates secures an absolute majority of the votes cast.

If, in either the first or the second round, one of the candidates dies or becomes incapacitated, the Constitutional Council must organize new elections..

V - How is the selection campaign organized?

The election campaign opens on the day of publication of the list of candidates in the Journal Officiel. It ends at midnight on the Friday prior to the date of voting; this applies to both the first and the second rounds.

The State provides assistance to each candidate. It guarantees a minimum amount of space to display posters, the mailing of their manifesto, and radio and television air time. The National Election Campaign Control Commission, made up of senior judicial and administrative judges, ensures equal treatment for all candidates.

The Acts of March 11, 1988, May 10, 1990 and January 19, 1995 instituted rules governing campaign financing.

Within 60 days following the election, each candidate must communicate his or her campaign accounts to the Constitutional Council for publication in the Journal Officiel. These accounts must record receipts and expenditures for the 12 months preceding the election.

A candidate may not exceed a campaign spending ceiling of 90 million francs for the first round, and 120 million francs for the second round.

Since 1995, corporate entities, with the exception of political parties or groups, have been prohibited from contributing to the financing of election campaigns.

Financial and criminal sanctions may be applied in the event of a breach of these rules.

The publication of opinion polls is prohibited in the week preceding polling.

VI - What happens if the President dies in office, or resigns?

The President of the Senate becomes the acting President until a new President of the Republic can be elected. Polling for the new election must take place - except when prevented by absolute necessity, which must be duly certified by the Constitutional Council - not less than 20 days and not more than 35 days after the beginning of the vacancy or after the President has been declared to be permanently incapacitated. Under Article 7 of the Constitution, the Constitutional Council, acting after referral by the Government, is responsible for certifying the incapacitation of the President. (>> [art.7](#)).

The acting President of the Republic may not exercise the full extent of Presidential powers. He may neither call a referendum as provided under >> Article 11 of the Constitution, nor dissolve the National Assembly as provided under (>> [art.12](#)).

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