The Essentials
Welcome to the Senate

You are in the Palais du Luxembourg, the seat of the Senate. The Senate is one of the two chambers of the French Parliament, along with the National Assembly.

This building, whose foundations were laid by Marie de Médicis in 1615, was first a royal residence, then a revolutionary prison. Following the French Revolution, it was briefly the seat of the executive branch and has been home to the Senate of the Republic since 1879.

We hope you will enjoy your visit.
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What is the role of the Senate?

Senators review bills that are submitted by the Government or by a member of Parliament.

Senators also scrutinise the action of the Government and ensure that enacted laws are implemented accordingly. Senators also can create temporary ad hoc information and consultation bodies (a fact-finding mission, a commission of inquiry...) to study a particular issue and to propose reforms.

The Senate is a guarantee of institutional stability: unlike the National Assembly, it cannot be dissolved. Additionally, the President, or Speaker, of the Senate takes over as Acting President of the Republic in the event of vacancy or incapacity.
Under Article 24 paragraph 6 of the Constitution, the Senate « shall ensure the representation of the territorial communities of the Republic. »
How are the Senators elected?

The Senate represents the authorities of Metropolitan France and its overseas territories as well as French citizens living abroad.

The 348 Senators are elected through indirect and universal suffrage by 162,000 officials, among which municipal, departmental and regional delegates. A Senator is elected for a term of 6 years.

The number of Senators elected for each constituency is in proportion to the population: for example, 1 Senator for the département of Lozère, 5 for the département of Bas-Rhin and 12 for Paris.

Every three years, half the sieges are submitted to election. Therefore, the sieges are divided into two series. 178 seats in series 2 were partially renewed in elections of September 2020. 172 out of 178 Senators were concerned. The seats of the 6 Senators representing French citizens living abroad will be the subject of a subsequent complementary election. The 170 seats in series 1 should be renewed in September 2023.

**Voting method**

Depending on the number of seats to be filled, Senators are elected by a two-round first-past-the-post system (constituencies designating 1 or 2 Senators) or by proportional representation lists (constituencies designating 3 or more Senators).

24 The minimum age to run in Senatorial elections is 24
6 Senators are elected for a term of office of 6 years. Half of the Senate is renewed every 3 years.
Constituency map

Authorities, overseas départements and New Caledonia

Serie 1 - 170 seats
Serie 2 - 178 seats

Number of Senators per constituency

French citizens living abroad

Serie 1 - 170 seats
Serie 2 - 178 seats

Number of Senators per constituency

French citizens living abroad

Authorities, overseas départements and New Caledonia

3 2 1 4 2 2 2 2 1 1 2
Who are the Senators?

PROPORTION OF SENATORS BY:
(AS OF 1ST OCTOBER 2020)

- **Authority (number of Senators)**
- **Socio-professional category**
- **Sex**

**Women** 33%

**Men** 67%

**Employees** 28.1%

**Civil servants (excl. teachers)** 13.5%

**60**

Average age of Senators at the beginning of their term
Means of action

Each Senator has an office in the premises of the Palais du Luxembourg or nearby. Almost 1,200 civil servants and contracted employees assist the Senators to carry out their office. Senators may hire up to 5 staff, whose combined gross monthly salaries cannot exceed €8,402 (as of November 1st, 2018).

Whether elected in metropolitan France, overseas or representing French citizens living abroad, Senators using public transportation have their travel expenses covered for trips between Paris and their department. They indeed have a constituency office in their electoral district.

In order to properly perform their duties, Senators are provided with different means of action.
Financial holdback

Since October 1st, 2015, a financial deduction has been adopted towards Senators who fall below the attendance time thresholds introduced by the Standing Orders of the Senate (article 23 bis).

Allowances

As of 1st January 2020, a Senator receives a net monthly Parliamentary allowance of €5,623.23 and a residential allowance of €168.70. He also receives a service allowance of €1,447.98.

The total amount of parliamentary allowances and other elective offices allowances cannot exceed once a half the amount of the basic parliamentary allowance.

Since January 1st, 2018, Senators receive a general monthly advance of € 5,900 to cover expenses related to their mandate. All expenses must be justified and compared to the amount of the general advance previously paid. The surplus is returned to the Senate. The comparison and repayment take place at the end of each year.

* Under the amended finance law for 1992, the basic parliamentary allowance and the residential allowance are subject to personal income tax.

** Law n°2017-1339 of September 15th, 2017 on confidence in political life provides that Senators must justify their mandate fees.
The role of the President of the Senate

He chairs two key bodies: the Bureau of the Senate (the Board*) and the Chairperson’s Conference. He has important constitutional prerogatives. He is entitled to appoint members of the Constitutional Council and may refer to it if provisions of enacted laws or treaties appear to be contrary to the Constitution. He can temporarily exercise the functions of President of the Republic in the event of vacancy or incapacity of office.

Thus, the Presidency of the Senate is considered as the second highest office of the Republic.

* See glossary page 28
Senator of Yvelines, Gérard Larcher has been re-elected President of the Senate after the senatorial elections of September 2020.
In plenary sessions of the Chamber, Senators debate and vote legislation; they also control the Government.

Senators decide on the guidelines of the bill and then examine it in detail, article by article. They modify it by tabling amendments.*

Ministers must answer the questions asked by Senators during specific sessions.

Breakdown of political groups in the chamber
(by number of seats, as of 24 November 2020)

* See glossary page 28

- **42** Bills passed (not including international conventions)
- **22 %** of the legislation starts in the Senate (not including international conventions)
- **10 398** amendments tabled
- **2 719** amendments adopted
The President of the session is represented by the Minister in charge for the matter.

The Government is represented by the Minister in charge for the matter.

the Speaker of the Senate, or one of the 8 Deputy Speakers, leads the debates.
The Senators are placed in the Chamber by political group. The Senators are the members of the Chamber. The orator talks from the rostrum. He may also use the microphones in the rows.

The Committee: a Rapporteur, appointed among its members, is tasked with defending the Committee's position to his or her colleagues.
Before the plenary sitting, bills are first considered by the relevant Committee on the subject.

Members of the Committee appoint a Rapporteur for the bill, who analyzes the draft and proposes amendments: for example, delete, add or modify an article.

The Committees regularly hold hearings of Ministers, public officials, ambassadors, foreign ministers, European Commissioners and representatives of civil society or of the private sector.

In addition, the European Affairs Committee is in charge of informing the members about EU issues and checking the activities of the European Union.
The standing Committees

- Economic Affairs
- Foreign Affairs, Defense and Armed Force
- Social Affairs
- Constitutional Laws, Legislation, Universal Suffrage, Standing Orders and General Administration
- Culture, Education and Communication
- Country Planning and Sustainable Development
- Finance
- European Affairs

Each Senator is a member of one of the 7 Standing Committees.

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An overview of the legislative process

Introducing legislation
Bills (tabled by the Government or by Parliament)

1st reading

2nd reading

Senate
Committee + plenary session

National Assembly
Committee + plenary session

Accelerated procedure

Disagreement

Agreement
A bill is considered several times by Members of Parliament before becoming law: find out about the legislative process.

**Joint Committee**
- 7 Senators
- 7 Députés (members of the National Assembly)

In the event of disagreement following the Joint Committee, the Government can ask the National Assembly to vote on the bill (final reading).

**National Assembly**
- Committee + plenary session

**Senate**
- Committee + plenary session

**CMP**

**Disagreement**

**Promulgation of the law**
- by the President of the Republic
The Senate examines the work of the Government through debates in plenary sessions and, permanently, through the work of Committees and delegations. The principal methods are questioning ministers, Committees of investigation, fact-finding missions, hearings and debates.


- 133 information reports
- 176 hours dedicated to supervision
Supervisory tools

government question time (QAG)
Every week, Senators question Ministers. After the minister’s response, they have a right of reply.

oral questions
Regular oral question times take place in plenary sitting on Tuesday mornings once a month.

written questions
A Senator may address such questions to ministers whose answers must be made within one month (exceptionally two).

committees of inquiry and joint fact-finding missions
Specific subjects are scrutinized and considered in depth, providing reforms proposals.

budgetary control
Members of the Finance Committee and the Social Affairs Committee can travel in order to carry out document-based, on-the-spot checks. This prerogative may be granted to other Senators by decision of the Senate.

delegations and duty
7 delegations oversees the activity of a specific area. Among them, the bicameral Parliamentary Office for the Evaluation of Scientific and Technological Options (OPECST), provides expertise and information.

written questions tabled 5 571
Government Question Time (QAG) sessions 38
1795 / 1799
The Council of Ancients of the Constitution of 1795

1799 / 1814
The Senate of the Consulate and the Empire

1814 / 1830
The Chamber of Peers of the Restauration

1830 / 1848
The Chamber of Peers of the July Monarchy

1836 / 1841
Construction of the current Chamber

1848
The Second Republic is unicameral

1795
The beginnings of bicameralism in France: the Council of Ancients sits at the Tuileries

A session at the Imperial Senate

The Chamber of Peers meeting in the Upper House
Senators’ term of office is reduced to 6 years

1875
The Senate in Versailles

1879
The Senate returns to Paris

1870
The Second Empire

1875/1940
The Senate of the Third Republic

1944/1945
The Provisional Consultative Assembly

1879
The Senate returns to Paris

1875
The Senate in Versailles

1879
The Senate returns to Paris

1940
The Senate is adjourned to Vichy

1875/1940
The Senate of the Third Republic

1940
The Senate is adjourned to Vichy

1859
A fire in the Chamber

1946/1958
The Council of the Republic

1946
The failure of the referendum on the draft Constitution of 19 April 1946 proposing a unicameral regime

1959
The first elections of the Senate of the Fifth Republic

1946
The failure of the referendum on the draft Constitution of 19 April 1946 proposing a unicameral regime

1948
The councillors of the Republic take back the title of “Senators”

Since 1958
The Senate of the Fifth Republic

1969
The failure of a referendum intending to reform the Senate
Senate-related terminology

**Amendment**
Modification of a bill.

**Bicameralism**
Organization of Parliament in two separate chambers.

**Bureau of the Senate (Board)**
It heads the Senate and includes the Speaker, the 8 Deputy Speakers who conduct the debates, the 3 Questeurs who manage the finances and the 14 Secretaries who ensure fairness in voting.

**Chairpersons’ Conference**
Composed of the Speaker, the Deputy Speakers, the chairpersons of the political groups, the Presidents of the committees and the 2 General Rapporteurs. This conference, attended by the Minister of Relations with Parliament sets the agenda of plenary sessions.

**Ethics Committee**
Advisory body placed under the aegis of the Bureau of the Senate (executive committee) and the President of the Senate, the Ethics Committee is qualified to provide advice on ethical issues regarding the conditions governing the exercise of the parliamentary mandate of the Senators and the functioning of the Senate. The Ethics Committee may be sent the declarations of activities and interests as well as the interest arising from the acceptance of gifts, donations, services, advantages and other favours.

**Formal Ballot**
When voting on a bill, the Conference of Presidents may decide to organize a solemn public ballot in the Conference Room.

**General Rapporteur**
The General Rapporteurs of the Finance Committee and of the Social Affairs Committees have extensive powers to control the Government and public administrations.

**Joint Committee (CMP)**
Composed of 7 Senators and 7 Members of the National Assembly (députés), its mission is to reach agreement of both assemblies on a bill.
Political groups
Senators are divided by political affinities into groups which must include at least 10 members. A Senator may be a member of a group, be related to it, or simply be attached to it administratively.

Parliamentary immunity
To protect their independence, Senators have parliamentary immunity allowing them to express themselves with complete freedom in the course of the performance of their official duties and shall not be subjected to arrest or any other privative or restrictive measures without the prior approval of the Bureau of the Senate.

Parliamentary shuttle
This is the process through which each government or parliamentary bill is examined successively by the National Assembly and the Senate in order to reach an agreement on each article (article 45-1 of the Constitution).

Questeur
The 3 Questeurs manage the functionning
The Senate on social media

**Senat.fr**
- Legislative matters, reports, briefs, questions to the Government
- Biographical information on Senators
- Live sessions, analysis of texts, and many debates available via VOD

**Twitter**
- Keep up to date with real-time news from the Senate and Senators
- Follow the great parliamentary moments in real time and take part in the debates

**Facebook**
- Senate news delivered in all formats: articles, videos, photos, infographics, dossiers
- A space for information, conversation and debate

**LinkedIn**
- Legislative information for all professionals

**Instagram**
- Discover and share the finest photos of the Senate

**YouTube**
- «Chats» and main videos covering senatorial news

**Snapchat**
- The Senate’s news and activities in “stories”
Every year, the Senate welcomes over 250,000 people.

Attend sessions in the chamber

Debates in the Senate, most often on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, are open to the public.

Individuals

Individuals must obtain an invitation from a Senator (www.senat.fr/elus.html). Bearing this invitation and some identification, they must then report to the Senate reception at 15 rue de Vaugirard in Paris. Access to sessions is granted subject to availability.

Visit the Palais du Luxembourg

Groups (maximum of 40 people)

Groups must obtain sponsorship from a Senator in order to visit (www.senat.fr/elus.html).

Visits are provided free of charge by staff from the Reception and Security Department.

In the health care context of the pandemic (COVID-19), the possibilities of attending Senate sessions are likely to be restricted, or even delayed. We invite you to consult the Senate website for the effective conditions:

http://www.senat.fr/visite/visiter.html

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twitter.com/Senat_Direct

Dailymotion dailymotion.com/Senat

YouTube youtube.com/user/senatfr

Website www.senat.fr

Online agenda www.senat.fr/agenda.html

Date of publication: November 2020