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La France à la loupe

The National Assembly

Under the Fifth Republic, the National Assembly constitutes with the Senate the legislative power. It comprises 577 deputies elected by direct universal suffrage and is housed in the Bourbon Palace.

The term of office for deputies

Deputies are elected **for five years by direct universal suffrage using a two-ballot majority system in 577 constituencies**. The candidate who obtains the absolute majority of votes is elected in the first ballot, if they represent a minimum of 25% of the voters registered in the electoral lists. If no one fulfils these requirements, there is a second ballot held on the following Sunday. Only those who obtain a minimum of 12.5% of the votes of registered voters are allowed to stand in the second ballot. The candidate who with the most votes is declared the winner. If the number of votes are the same, the oldest candidate wins.

To stand in legislative elections, candidates are required to be 23 years of age and of French nationality, have the right to vote and fulfil the eligibility conditions. The conditions that make a person illegible to stand for election or to be elected are related to the person (if they are placed under supervision, deprived of civic rights, or have declared personal bankruptcy) or the office (Ombudsman, prefects, magistrates, officers and directors are not allowed to stand for elections in the Department in which they exercise their duties).

During their term of office, deputies enjoy special protection, i.e., **immunity**:

- **Parliamentary non-liability** prohibits any legal action to be taken against deputies with regard to opinions expressed or votes cast in the performance of their duties,
- **Parliamentary inviolability** makes it impossible for deputies to be prosecuted or arrested for acts they commit outside the performance of their duties and that would constitute felonies and misdemeanours (except when they are found in the act of committing an offence).

The role of deputies

The main role of deputies is to **take part in drafting legislation instigated by the Prime Minister (government bill) or Members of Parliament (parliamentary bill)**.

Deputies likewise have the power to monitor the Government's action. This power is exercised in debates on the Government's statements, oral or written questions, commissions of inquiry and information measures that Standing Committees carry out. Deputies can **bring the Government's political responsibility into play** (Article 49 of the Constitution): they can force the Government to resign with a majority vote for a motion of censure (Articles 49 and 50 of the Constitution).

How the National Assembly works

The National Assembly works on the **principle of single sessions**. The ordinary session is held from the beginning of October to the end of June. The extraordinary session can convene at the request of the Prime Minister or the majority of the deputies on a specific agenda.

There are **six specialised Standing Committees** in the following areas of activity: foreign affairs, defence, production and exchanges, finance, cultural and family affairs, and law. They meet to prepare the review of law texts on the National Assembly's agenda. Each of the 577 deputies can only be a member of one commission.

To find out more

WEBSITES

- **The National Assembly:** Legislative work of the 21st legislature (1997-2002) can be consulted on this website. Oral and written questions and ministerial responses are available as from 1988. There is also a register, with photographs, of French deputies available on the website.
<http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/>
- **Public life:** The Parliament - Questions / Responses
<http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/institutions/fonctionnement/parlement/definition/>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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