

Poincaré, Raymond

By [Anne-Laure Anizan](#)

Poincaré, *Raymond*

President of the French Republic

Born 20 August 1860 in Bar-le-Duc, France

Died 15 October 1934 in Paris, France

Raymond Poincaré, the president of the French Republic, asserted his authority as early as 1914, in a manner contrary to institutional practices that had prevailed since 1877. After his August 1914 call for a political truce or “*union sacrée*”, Poincaré remained a major actor in governmental decisions until the autumn of 1917.

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Introduction

Born in Bar-le-duc in Lorraine, Raymond Poincaré (1860-1934) was a lawyer, deputy, and senator. He then became President of the Council before being elected President of the Republic in February 1913. Although the terms of the “Grévy constitution” had initially limited his powers, the war context enabled him to assert himself as the head of state.

Union Sacrée

Raymond Poincaré made a long-lasting impression when, on 4 August 1914, in his message read to the chambers by the President of the Council, he urged French people to form a [sacred union](#) or “*union sacrée*”. The expression was a great success and was commonly used, for instance to prevent quarrels between political parties. Thanks to his moral authority, Poincaré strengthened his hold on executive power. He did this by gathering information during his interviews with members of the [government](#), senior civil servants, and deputies who had just returned from the front, as well as military leaders; by appointing presidents of the council and intervening in the composition of the cabinets; and by presiding over the war committee and the council of ministers. He did not, for instance, hesitate to challenge the war minister who objected to the launching of General [Robert Nivelle's \(1856-1924\)](#) offensive in April 1917. When [Georges Clemenceau \(1841-1929\)](#) was appointed President of the Council in the autumn of 1917, his methods led Poincaré to resume a more discreet role, following the practices prevailing in times of peace.

Post-war

When [peace talks](#) started, Poincaré, who had always favoured a victorious peace enabling [France](#) not only to recover [Alsace and Lorraine](#) but also to secure important territorial guarantees (annexing the left bank of the Rhine), had to give up on imposing

his views. After 1920, Poincaré pursued his career successively as a senator, as President of the Council and as a minister known for his determination to enforce the [Treaty of Versailles](#) and to restore public finances. His memoirs, *Au Service de la France*, are an invaluable source of information about the functioning of the French executive branch in wartime.

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