

FRANCE VOTES LOCAL, THINKS NATIONAL: MUNICIPAL 1st ROUND SETS THE TONE FOR 2027

SPECIAL MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS REPORT

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USPA NEWS - Polls have closed in the local elections in France that will see voters across the country's 35,000-plus communes choose new mayors and city councilors for the 1st time in six years. The f1st round of Sunday 15th march, has already produced a series of high profile outsiders who could reshape national politics in the coming years. In Paris, socialist deputy mayor Emmanuel Gregoire (Socialist MP) leads the race but will face not only right wing challenger Rachida Dati, a former culture minister and figurehead of Les Republicains (LR The Republicans French classic Right) allied with President Macron's camp (Renaissance), but also two polarising candidates from the extremes: Sarah Knafo, close partner (Girlfriend) of far right polemicist Eric Zemmour and standard bearer of his Reconquete party, and Sophia Chikirou, LFI MP and long time companion of Jean Luc Melenchon, both qualify for the second round after crossing the 10% threshold. In Marseille, socialist mayor Benoit Payan finishes almost tied with RN candidate Franck Allisio, while in Nice, LR leader Eric Ciotti confirms his status as a key figure of the hard right by dominating on his home turf dominating Mayor Christian Estrosi

This article is written from the field by our accredited senior political reporter, with part of the election results gathered on site at several party headquarters and the remaining figures drawn from official sources, including the French Interior Ministry and Public Senat, and it draws on her experience and expertise as a senior political correspondent to examine the political implications of the local election results.

SOCIALISTS REGAIN GROUND AS FAR RIGHT & RADICAL LEFT SIGNIFICANTLY ADVANCE BEFORE A HIGH STAKES RUN OFF

The f1st round of Sunday 15th march, has already produced a series of high profile outsiders who could reshape national politics in the coming years. In Paris, socialist deputy mayor Emmanuel Gregoire (Socialist MP) leads the race but will face not only right wing challenger Rachida Dati, a former culture minister and figurehead of Les Republicains (LR The Republicans French classic Right) allied with President Macron's camp (Renaissance), but also two polarising candidates from the extremes: Sarah Knafo, close partner (Girlfriend) of far right polemicist Eric Zemmour and standard bearer of his Reconquete party, and Sophia Chikirou, LFI MP and long time companion of Jean Luc Melenchon, both qualify for the second round after crossing the 10% threshold.

In Marseille, socialist mayor Benoit Payan finishes almost tied with RN candidate Franck Allisio, while in Nice, LR leader Eric Ciotti confirms his status as a key figure of the hard right by dominating the first round on his home turf dominating Mayor of Nice Christian Estrosi, Former LR Republican who joined Horizon (Centrist, merged with Renaissance Emmanuel Macron's party). One year before the presidential race of 2027, these municipal results therefore do more than decide who will run town halls: they reveal who is best placed to shape France's next political chapter.

INTERCOMMUNALITIES SYSTEM OF VOTING IN FRANCE

France has around 36,000 communes, and this year their mayors and councils are being chosen in a two round municipal election held on Sunday 15 March and Sunday 22 March. Beyond the town halls themselves, a key but often invisible issue is inter municipal cooperation: "intercommunalities", groupings of communes into wider entities such as communautés de communes, urban communities and metropolitan areas, now manage many of the services that structure everyday life, from transport to waste and planning. Mayors remain the most trusted political figures in France because of their proximity to citizens, but the way these intercommunal bodies are formed has become a major democratic question. In communes with more than 1,000 inhabitants, voters actually cast two ballots: one for the municipal council, and a second for those councillors who will sit in the intercommunal structure, meaning that intercommunal representatives are, contrary to popular belief, elected by direct universal suffrage

ELECTION SYSTEM AND DEMOCRATIC TENSIONS

NO CANDIDATE COMMUNES AND THE POLITICO TECHNICAL GAME OF ALLIANCES

Anecdotally, it is worth noting that this year 68 communes did not manage to field a single candidate for mayor. It will be interesting to see who ends up administering them and how these municipalities will function in practice. In this first article and in the ones that will

follow we will not only give you the results, but also analyse the game of alliances and politico technical arrangements in towns where local barons have lost, or almost lost, their stronghold and are now ready to do whatever it takes to keep it. Voters are supposed to be crowning their mayors with the satisfaction of having genuinely chosen their preferred candidate, and not grudgingly endorsing someone simply because that person has struck a deal afterwards for instance, a France Unbowed (La France Insoumise, LFI, Far Left) list suddenly joining forces with a Socialist Party (Parti socialiste, PS) candidate, or National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN Far Right) figures making agreements with other right wing lists even though, outside election time, they “cannot stand each other”.

SOCIALISTS BACK ON THE MAP IN MAJOR CITIES , OUTSIDERS & SYMBOLIC BATTLEFIELDS: PARIS, MARSEILLE AND NICE ?

Politically, three forces emerge from the night with new momentum. The Socialist Party (Parti socialiste, PS) led by Olivier Faure finishes ahead in a long list of major cities and medium sized towns, from Paris and Marseille to Nantes, Rennes and Saint Etienne, and insists that “the march of the far right towards the Elysee is not inevitable”. The National Rally (Rassemblement national, RN), led nationally by Jordan Bardella, consolidates its southern strongholds, with Louis Aliot re elected mayor of Perpignan in the first round with just over 50% of the vote and RN candidates leading or strongly placed in cities such as Toulon. At the same time, Jean Luc Melenchon’s movement France Unbowed (La France Insoumise, LFI), whose municipal campaign is coordinated by Manuel Bompard, boasts a “remarkable progression”, with scores close to or above 40% in cities like Roubaix, Limoges or Lille and a claim to lead “antifascist fronts” in the second round.

SOCIALISTS BACK ON THE MAP IN MAJOR CITIES

LOCAL ANCHOR, STRONG 1st PLACES, YET UNDER TENSE RELATIONS WITH THE RADICAL LEFT

Across the country, the Socialist Party (Parti socialiste, PS) uses its dense local networks and incumbent mayors to stage a visible comeback in many large and medium sized cities. According to figures compiled on election night by Public Senat and LCP, PS led or PS anchored lists come first in a long list of major urban centres: in Paris, Emmanuel Gregoire’s left green coalition is credited with around one third of the vote, ahead of right wing challenger Rachida Dati and with radical candidates from Reconquête and La France insoumise (France Unbowed, LFI,) both around or just above the 10% mark;

LEFT MAYORS LEAD IN KEY CITIES, TOULOUSE STILL IN PLAY

- In Marseille, mayor Benoît Payan (PS) leads with about 35.4%, virtually tied with Rassemblement national (National Rally, RN) candidate Franck Allisio;
- In Rennes, Nathalie Appere (PS) tops the poll with roughly 34.1% against 22% for the centrist right bloc and just over 19% for LFI;
- In Montpellier, PS mayor Michael Delafosse reaches 32.8% while his LFI rival is around 16%;
- In Nancy, socialist Mathieu Klein wins about 43.1% against 33.4% for his centrist predecessor;
- In Toulouse, the left’s dream of reconquest remains alive with the LFI list at 28.3% and the PS backed list at 24.1%, behind the outgoing right wing mayor at 36.9%.paste.txtlemonde

Shortly before 21:00, Socialist party leader Olivier Faure took the floor to list these successes one by one and to remind viewers that “the Socialist Party is still a major local force”, while saluting “the victory of 350 socialist mayors re elected from Saint Denis de La Réunion to Lens”. He also sought to frame the result as a political message for the national level: “The march of the far right towards the Elysee is not inevitable.

Only resignation is fatal,” he declared, clearly hinting at the 2027 presidential race. At the same time, Faure maintained a firm line against La France Insoumise (France Unbowed, LFI, Far Left): “On the left, Jean Luc Melenchon’s strategy of permanent confrontation has shown its limits. He does not have the capacity to lead the left to victory and to block the far right.” He confirmed that “there will be no national agreement between the Socialist Party and France Unbowed in either the first or the second round”, even though, on the ground, many socialist candidates are already exploring local alliances or technical fusions with LFI lists in places like Toulouse, Nantes or Besançon to prevent right wing or RN victories.

FAR RIGHT STRONGHOLDS & RN’S SOUTHERN FRONT

LOUIS ALIOT’S PERPIGNAN, LAURE LAVALETTE’S TOULON AND A DENSE BLUE BELT IN THE SOUTH

For the Rassemblement national (RN), led nationally by Jordan Bardella, the first round is less about conquering new territory than about consolidating its status as the first party of France in votes and confirming a solid southern and Mediterranean base. In Perpignan, far right mayor Louis Aliot is re elected outright with around 51–52% of the vote, according to Ipsos estimates cited by France Televisions and Public Senat, turning a symbolic breakthrough in 2020 into an entrenched bastion in 2026. In Toulon, RN MP

Laure Lavalette tops the poll with about 41.7%, more than ten points ahead of the main right wing rival and far ahead of the left wing lists, which are excluded from the second round.

The party also scores between 14% and 20% in a string of other cities, Metz, Limoges, Saint Etienne, Bastia (Corsica Island) or several towns in the south east often qualifying for run offs and forcing other parties to choose between triangular contests or withdrawals. In some places, such as Perpignan or Calais, RN candidates face only weak left wing opposition after crushing first round victories by long standing right wing or centre right mayors, illustrating how the far right has become part of the normal local landscape. For Jordan Bardella and Marine Le Pen, these municipals are a test of their ability to present RN as a governing party, capable of managing cities and delivering services, while keeping the mobilisation high enough to transform local presence into presidential momentum in 2027.

RADICAL LEFT BREAKTHROUGH AND LFI'S "FRONT ANTIFASCISTE" REMARKABLE PROGRESSION, URBAN FOOTHOLDS AND CALLS FOR ALLIANCES AGAINST THE FAR RIGHT

On the radical left, Jean Luc Melenchon's movement La France insoumise (LFI) claims a clear step forward compared with the 2020 municipal elections. Speaking in front of activists, LFI national coordinator Manuel Bompard declared that "our lists have doubled, tripled or even sometimes quadrupled their score compared with 2020" and hailed a "progression remarquable" for his party. In Roubaix, insoumise MP David Guiraud comes out far ahead with about 46–47% of the vote in the first round, leaving the outgoing right wing mayor more than twenty points behind and making a second round victory highly likely. LFI also posts strong scores in Limoges, where its candidate is just behind the leading right of centre list, and in Lille and Rennes, where insoumise lists cross or approach the 20% mark.

Politically, Bompard uses these numbers to push for broader alliances on the left. He calls for "mobilisation against the danger of far right victories" and "tends the hand" to other left wing forces to build "fronts antifascistes" in second round contests where the right or RN are in a position to capture city halls. This strategy is already visible in Nantes, where the LFI list led by William Aucant, credited with just over 11% of the vote, publicly proposes a "technical fusion" with socialist mayor Johanna Rolland, who leads with around 35%, to block a strong challenger from the centre right and presidential majority at roughly 33%. Rolland, without naming LFI, appeals to "all left, ecologist and humanist forces" to avoid a scenario in which "the right wins despite a left wing majority in the city". In practice, many local PS and LFI teams now face a dilemma: obey their national leaderships or adapt to local realities where only an alliance can prevent the right or the far right from winning.

FRAGMENTATION, TRIANGULAIRES AND RARE CONFIGURATIONS FROM A 6 WAY RUN OFF IN MULHOUSE TO QUADRANGULAIRES IN BASTIA AND ANNECY

Beyond the performance of individual parties, the 2026 municipal first round is marked by a high level of fragmentation, producing some of the most complex second round configurations seen in recent years. In Mulhouse, six different lists cross the 10% threshold, opening the way to a rare six way run off or sexangulaire on 22 March if no candidate withdraws. The outgoing mayor Michele Lutz (DVD) leads with just 17.6%, followed closely by joint, centre right and left wing contenders between 14% and 16%, while the RN list around 13.6% and another centrist list at 13.25% also qualify, making the outcome almost impossible to predict.

- In Bastia, Corsican nationalist figure Gilles Simeoni tops the poll with roughly 35.1%, but three other lists the union of the left on around 25.4%, the RN at 16.9% and another right of centre candidate at just over 11% can also stay in the race, pointing to a likely quadrangulaire unless a last minute deal is struck.
- In Annecy, a city symbolically captured by the ecologists in 2020, former economy minister Antoine Armand, now supported by Renaissance and Les Republicains, comes first with about 34.8%, ahead of a large left alliance at 24.7%, former mayor Jean Luc Rigaut at 21.3%
- An RN list at 13.6%, again making a four way second round possible. Many other towns, from Bordeaux and Clermont Ferrand to Besançon and Toulon, face classic three way run offs where the division of the left or the centre can weigh as heavily as the relative strength of individual candidates.
- In all these cases, mayors may end up elected with relatively modest first round scores and will then have to govern with fragile majorities, exposing them to constant pressure from both their allies and their opponents.

OUTSIDERS AND SYMBOLIC BATTLEFIELDS: PARIS, MARSEILLE AND NICE SURPRISE QUALIFICATIONS AND HIGH

PROFILE FIGURES THAT COULD SHAPE NATIONAL POLITICS

In the country's most scrutinised cities, the first round has confirmed that several outsiders and emblematic personalities are now at the heart of the political story. In Paris, socialist candidate Emmanuel Gregoire, long time deputy and heir to outgoing mayor Anne Hidalgo, leads the race, benefiting from a united left green coalition. His main challenger is Rachida Dati, a former justice minister and current culture minister who embodies the alliance between the traditional right Les Republicains and President Emmanuel Macron's centrist camp

BUT THE REAL SHCOCK COMES FROM THE EXTREMES RIGHT & LEFT

- SARAH KNAFO : On the far right, Sarah Knafo political strategist and close partner of Reconquete founder Eric Zemmour runs a highly personalised (A.I based) campaign and moves from around 4% in early polls to nearly 10% on election night, just at or above the 10% threshold needed to qualify for the second round and potentially secure seats on the Paris council.
- SOPHIA CHIKIROU: On the radical left, Sophia Chikirou, LFI MP and long time companion of Jean Luc Melenchon, also passes the 10% mark and qualifies, ensuring that both extremes will be represented in the run off against Gregoire and Dati. Their presence forces the two main contenders to think not only in terms of left right balance but also about how to speak to voters tempted by harder ideological messages in a city long dominated by centrist and moderate left coalitions.

- BENOIT PAYAN : Elsewhere, other local heavyweights shape the narrative. In Marseille, socialist mayor Benoit Payan finishes the first round with roughly 35.4% of the vote, neck and neck with RN candidate Franck Allisio, who achieves a similar score according to Ipsos estimates, while LFI and LR candidates hover around 12-13%. Payan frames the second round as a binary choice: "Either the Printemps Marseillais wins, or the RN wins.

- ERIC CIOTTI: Any other option helps the far right," he tells supporters, ruling out "back room deals" and warning against "a brown wave" on the Mediterranean. In Nice, LR leader Eric Ciotti, a central figure of the hard right at national level, consolidates his control of the city by arriving well ahead in the first round, giving the traditional right one of its few undisputed strongholds.

WHAT'S AT STAKE ON 22 MARCH AND FOR 2027

MUNICIPAL RUN OFFS AS A DRESS REHEARSAL FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL BATTLE

The second round on Sunday 22 March will therefore decide much more than the composition of local councils. It will determine whether the Socialist Party can convert its first round leads into a genuine urban map of power, whether the Rassemblement national can move from symbolic bastions to a network of functioning city halls, and whether La France Insoumise can transform its "remarkable progression" into real executive responsibilities through fusions or local coalitions. The choices made in key cities Paris, Marseille, Nice, Lyon, Toulouse, Nantes, Roubaix or Perpignan will feed directly into national narratives about who is up, who is down and who embodies "the alternative" in the run up to the 2027 presidential race.

At the same time, this municipal cycle has already revealed a generation of figures who may weigh far beyond their town halls: from far right mayor Louis Aliot and hard right boss Eric Ciotti to insoumise deputies David Guiraud and Sophia Chikirou, not to mention outsiders like Sarah Knafo in Paris or Laure Lavalette in Toulon. Their trajectories between now and 2027 will tell us whether France is heading towards a stable three bloc system, a sharper polarisation between centre and extremes, or yet another political realignment. The 22 March run off will be the next step in that story and, for many parties, a last chance to correct the course set by voters in this first round before the presidential campaign begins in earnest....To be continued (Source: Ministry of Interior, Public Senat, France TV, Le Monde, Figaro, La Provence)

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