

Beat: Politics

A SPLIT VERDICT SOCIALISTS DOMINATE METROPOLISES BUT THE RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT WIN

MORE MAYORALTIES

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USPA NEWS - According to the Interior Ministry, the 2026 municipal elections were marked by three major reforms of the voting system, including the extension of parity lists to communes with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, new rules for Paris, Lyon and Marseille and changes to postal voting rights. Nearly 45% of the electorate some 25 million voters were directly affected by these new arrangements, which reshaped how councillors and arrondissement representatives are elected. Turnout was significantly higher than in 2020: 57.1% in the first round on 15 March and 57.03% in the second round on 22 March, compared with 44.66% and 41.86% respectively six years earlier. The Interior Ministry reports that more than 48.7 million voters were called to the polls in the first round and over 17 million in the second, with proxy voting increasingly used and largely dematerialised through France's MaProcuration and France Identité systems.

This article is written from the field by our accredited wheelchair using 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.

PARIS LYON AND MARSEILLE THE LEFT HOLDS THE BIG CITIES

In Paris, Lyon, Rennes, Nantes and Marseille, the main metropolitan centres remain under left wing leadership, confirming the strength of the broad left and environmental bloc in the largest urban areas. In Marseille, outgoing socialist mayor Benoît Payan was re elected with around 54% of the vote against 41% for National Rally candidate Franck Allisio and around 5% for LR's Martine Vassal, after a highly contested campaign.

In Lyon, the ecologist mayor Gregory Doucet narrowly held on to power despite a strong challenge from former Olympique Lyonnais president Jean Michel Aulas, who campaigned on a message of "appeasement, protection and recovery" for a city he described as being in poor shape and announced a legal challenge with only about 1,500 votes separating the candidates. Paris remains in the hands of the left, even though Rachida Dati, running with support from Renaissance, failed to take the city, denouncing what she called "below the belt attacks" and a "poison of division" after finishing with around 40.7% in the second round.

CITIES WON BY THE RIGHT AND CENTRE RIGHT

On the right, (Classic Right LR) Les Republicains and their allies stress that they remain a major territorial force, consolidating control over numerous medium sized towns and several historic bastions. Figures such as Édouard Philippe, re elected mayor with about 47.7% for a third term, and LR president Eric Ciotti, re elected with roughly 48.5% as Christian Estrosi withdraws from local politics, are held up as symbols of this resilience.

Bruno Retailleau (former Minister of Interior), LR's boss insists that LR is "more than ever the first territorial political force", citing cities such as Cherbourg, Besançon, Limoges, Tulle and Clermont Ferrand, while emphasising that the party refused any formal alliance with the National Rally. In several places, LR lists win despite complex three way contests, particularly in the South and in traditional strongholds like Toulon and Colombes, where the right's local roots remain strong.

CITIES WON BY THE SOCIALISTS AND THE BROADER LEFT

The Socialist Party stresses that, despite setbacks in some regions, it still counts around 1,000 mayors across France and retains or wins key cities such as Paris, Marseille and other major left leaning strongholds. Socialist leaders highlight the existence of a robust "municipal socialism" in cities like Clermont Ferrand, Brest and Limoges, even where national dynamics have not favoured the PS.

Pierre Jovet, PS secretary general and MEP, argues that the results show the potential of a non Melenchonist (Jean Luc Melenchon, Leader of LFI, La France Insoumise, far left) left to win when socialists, greens and communists manage to build coalitions, while warning that broken alliances with LFI in some areas cost the left control of several town halls. In cities such as Grenoble, Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Montpellier, large urban centres remain governed by various shades of the left and ecologists, even as the political map outside the metropolises becomes more fragmented.

CITIES WON BY THE NATIONAL RALLY

For the National Rally, the second round is described as an “immense victory”, with the party capturing around 75 town halls and making breakthroughs in several sub prefectures and medium sized towns. Symbolic gains include places like La Fleche, historically social democratic, and Carcassonne, traditionally on the left, where the RN capitalises on discontent with traditional parties.

RN representatives such as Julien Odoul criticise the right for maintaining their own candidates instead of endorsing RN lists in three way races, arguing that this stance often benefits the left in large cities while still allowing the RN to progress “by the dozens” of municipalities elsewhere. Despite this momentum, party leaders acknowledge the persistence of a “glass ceiling” in the biggest metropolitan areas, where the RN continues to fall short.

CITIES WON BY FRANCE UNBOWED AND THE RADICAL LEFT

France Unbowed (LFI) and its allies record a series of notable local victories, particularly in historically working class territories. In Roubaix, LFI candidate David Guiraud wins with about 51.3% of the vote, symbolising the ability of the radical left to take control of major urban centres in former industrial regions when local dynamics and alliances work in its favour.

Yet the picture remains mixed. In Toulouse and other large cities, left wing alliances have proved difficult to maintain, sometimes allowing the right to hold on or the RN to progress. LFI deputy Jean François Ruffin warns of a potential “shipwreck not only for the left but for the Republic” if the different components of the left fail to overcome their divisions, while figures such as Sophia Chikirou note that in Paris “voters have expressed a strong rejection of the right”, even if her own candidacy only came third with around 10%.

KEY FIGURES, REFORMS AND PROXIES, IN PARIS, LYO AND MARSEILLE

The 2026 municipal cycle is also shaped by three major legal reforms: harmonisation of the voting system and parity lists, a new electoral framework for Paris, Lyon and Marseille, and changes to postal voting for detainees, affecting tens of thousands of prisoners and more than two million voters in the three largest cities. Out of 1,590 constituencies where a second round was required, the Interior Ministry registered 4,404 lists and over 129,000 candidates, with women representing 49.24% of second round candidacies.

Proxy voting reached record levels, with more than 960,000 active proxies in the first round and over 827,000 in the second, and over 70% of all proxies established partly or fully online via MaProcuration, including a growing share validated through France Identité’s certified digital identity system. These figures underline how both electoral law and voting practices have evolved since the Covid 19 pandemic, in a context of renewed interest in local democracy and intense national political competition. Sources: Ministry of Interior, Public Senat,

Ultimately, these developments raise a simple but pressing question: will those in power rise to their responsibilities, or will they allow short term calculations to outweigh long term cultural, democratic and strategic interests? To be continued../

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