

Beat: Politics

PARIS AT A CROSSROADS: BETWEEN DREAM AND REALITY AHEAD OF A PIVOTAL ELECTION

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USPA NEWS - Polls have closed in the 1st round of 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 6 years.

The contests, many of which will require a runoff vote next Sunday, are expected to be an important indicator of voter sentiment heading into next year's high-stakes presidential election, though plenty of races will be driven by local issues and personalities, such as Rachida Dati 25 % (Republican/Macronist), Emmanuel Gregoire 37% (Socialist+ Ecologist+ Communist), Sarah Knafo, 10% (Reconquete, Far Right) Sophia Chikirou, 13% (La France Insoumise, Far Left), elected for the 2nd round in Paris.

Paris remains, undeniably, the city of love, a magical destination, and one of the most beloved capitals in the world. Every year, between 30 to 40 million tourists visit the French capital, drawn by its history, culture, gastronomy, and unique atmosphere. With approximately 2.1 million inhabitants within Paris intramuros, and nearly 1.4 million registered voters, the stakes of the upcoming municipal election are exceptionally high. Traditionally, Paris has leaned so far to the left for over 25 years

PARIS RESULTS: A HISTORIC FOUR WAY RUN OFF

According to estimates based on Ipsos BVA CESI data for France Televisions, Radio France and the parliamentary channels Public Senat/LCP AN, the Socialist led list headed by Emmanuel Gregoire comes first in Paris with around 36–37% of the vote, backed by the Greens, Communists and the L'Après movement. In second place, Rachida Dati, the mayor of the 7th arrondissement and a key figure of the traditional right Les Republicains (LR, Right + Macronist) now allied with President Macron's camp, gathers about 25% of the vote. Two other candidates cross the 10% threshold and qualify for the second round: centre right MP Pierre Yves Bournazel, running under the Horizons–Renaissance (Macronist) banner, with roughly 11–12%, and Sophia Chikirou from France Unbowed (La France insoumise, LFI, Far Left), with estimates ranging between 12% and 13.7% depending on the time of the evening. Reconquete (Far Right) candidate Sarah Knafo, long seen as a major outsider, comes close to the bar with around 9.9%; some projections suggest she may ultimately be included in what would be a historic four or even five way run off in the capital.

PARIS, CITY OF DREAMS UNDER ELECTORAL SCRUTINY

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A CAPITAL LONG ANCHORED ON THE LEFT, NOW UNDER PRESSURE

Traditionally, Paris has leaned to the left for over 25 years, with a majority of left wing arrondissements, particularly in the east of the city (10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 18th, 19th, 20th). The central and western districts (6th, 7th, 8th, 15th, 16th) tend to favor the right, while some areas such as the 2nd, 3rd, 9th, and parts of the 10th and 11th have seen a rise in Green (ecologist) influence in recent years. Yet behind the postcard image, Paris has faced growing challenges. In recent years, concerns have increased regarding insecurity, urban cleanliness, and quality of life. Informal migrant encampments have emerged, particularly in the 10th, 18th, and 19th arrondissements, raising humanitarian as well as security debates. Public discourse has intensified around issues such as crime involving individuals under OQTF (orders to leave French territory), as well as violence and harassment against women, which remain major concerns in public spaces. Residents also frequently point to the deterioration of urban cleanliness, with complaints about waste management and the visible presence of rats, contributing to a perception that

A HIGH STAKES CHOICE BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Will the city continue its long standing left wing leadership, represented by Socialist Emmanuel Gregoire (MP, and Former deputy of Anne Hidalgo Mayor of Paris), who came first in the first round with about 36–38% of the vote? Or will Paris experience a significant

political shift toward the right with Republican icon (former Minister for Culture) Rachida Dati, who placed second with roughly 25%, if manages to make smart alliances for the center to the far right? Other candidates are also reshaping the political landscape: Sarah Knafo (Reconquête, associated with Eric Zemmour, Far Right) reached around 10%, representing the far right; Pierre Yves Bournazel (Horizons Party, aligned with President Macron's centrist movement) gathered approximately 11%; and Sophia Chikirou, from France Unbowed (La France insoumise, LFI, far left), obtained around 13%. This election is more than a local vote. It is a symbolic battle for the future of one of the most influential cities in the world, a city torn between its timeless aura and the pressing realities of modern urban challenges. Paris is not just a city. It is a mirror of France itself.

PARIS LYON MARSEILLE VOTING REFORM IS APPLIED THIS YEAR This year also brings an important novelty: a reform of the so called "PLM" law governing Paris, Lyon and Marseille. The reform was adopted by Parliament in 2025 and applied for the first time in the March 2026 municipal elections, profoundly changing the electoral logic in these three cities. The culture minister, who is also mayor of Paris's 7th arrondissement, has even suggested that this new system might have allowed her to win the 2020 municipal race against the left led by Anne Hidalgo, had it been in force at the time

THE PARIS SYSTEM BEFORE AND AFTER 2025 SEPARATE BALLOTS FOR ARRONDISSEMENTS AND THE CITY WIDE COUNCIL

To understand what is at stake, one has to go back to how the Paris system used to work. Since 1982, Parisians did not vote directly for the mayor of Paris. The election took place only at arrondissement level: residents chose arrondissement councillors, some of whom also became councillors of Paris. Those councillors then formed the Council of Paris, which in turn elected the city's mayor. The reform that came into force in 2025 breaks with that model. From now on, voters cast two distinct ballots: one, as before, for arrondissement councillors; and a separate one for councillors of Paris, who sit at City Hall and then elect the mayor. In practice, a voter can now support their local arrondissement mayor while choosing a different political list for the city wide council. A resident might, for example, re elect their arrondissement mayor and at the same time opt for a very different political direction for the central city hall. Before the reform, these two choices were automatically linked and could not be separated.

A BATTLE FOR "THE MOST COVETED CITY IN THE WORLD"

In the end, the prize at stake could hardly be higher: becoming mayor of what many still call "the most beautiful and most coveted city in the world". The race is set to be extremely tight. From a purely mathematical point of view, Rachida Dati starts with a significant gap to close against Emmanuel Grégoire's roughly 38% first round score, but given her tough, combative and never give up political style, it would be surprising to see her lower her guard now. Already re elected in the first round in the 7th arrondissement, one of the wealthiest parts of Paris, home to the Eiffel Tower, many embassies and grand hotels particuliers (french mansions), where she has been mayor since 2008, she will need both Sarah Knafo's Reconquête voters and Pierre Yves Bournazel's centrist supporters if she wants to catch up.

On the other side, Emmanuel Gregoire, despite his impressive lead, cannot win on his own either: without the votes of the far left, especially France Unbowed (La France insoumise, LFI) supporters behind Sophia Chikirou, his path to a majority looks fragile. Chikirou has clearly extended a hand, calling for an "antifascist front", but Grégoire has already stated that he will never enter into an alliance with LFI. Rachida Dati, for her part, has been just as categorical in saying she will never formally fuse her list with Reconquête, even if she courts Sarah Knafo's electorate. The suspense is therefore at its maximum, and the political bets are already open: in a city that mirrors all of France's contradictions, the second round will tell us whether Paris chooses continuity, a sharp turn to the right, or yet another fragile compromise between incompatible allies.

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