

# Large neo-fascist vote expected in French municipal elections

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Next March's municipal elections will be the first nationwide elections since President François Hollande and the Socialist Party (PS) came to power in 2012. The media are predicting a defeat for the PS at the hands of the right, benefitting the neo-fascist National Front (FN)—a devastating commentary on the unpopular policies of austerity and war carried out by Hollande with the backing of petty-bourgeois, pseudo-left parties.

A BVA opinion poll for *Les Echos* carried out in mid-January found that 32 percent of voters want a right or centre-right list to win in their commune in the municipal elections, against 31 percent for a left list and 14 percent a win for the National Front.

In November, the same BVA polling agency had found that an equal number of voters hope for a win for the right as for the bourgeois “left”—29 percent for each—while the FN was at 17 percent.

These elections will be taking place in a tense social and economic context. The government is establishing a so-called Responsibility Pact handing over billions of euros to the employers. The consequent loss of revenue for the state is to be compensated through a rise in direct and indirect taxation of workers, while sackings are increasing with the aid of the trade unions and the parties of the “left.”

The abstention rate in the elections is predicted to be 55 percent, expressing workers' rejection of austerity policies as well as of the French political establishment, going from the FN to the pseudo-left NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party). The corrupt nature of the “left” organisations—which are discredited in the eyes of workers, who quite correctly see them as allied to the PS—enables the FN to monopolise the expression of opposition to the political elite.

The FN has 14 percent of voting intentions, three

percent down from November's poll, though polling agencies often underestimate FN scores. Nevertheless, even 14 percent is higher than the FN's result in the 2008 municipal elections, when the party faced financial problems.

In most of France's larger cities of over 200,000 inhabitants—such as Paris, Lyons, Nantes, Strasbourg and Lille—the PS is likely to win the first round of the elections. Anne Hidalgo, the PS candidate for mayor of Paris, is predicted to lead the first round with 39.5 percent of the vote, in front of Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, a minister under the former conservative president Nicolas Sarkozy, who is credited with 36.6 percent. The FN would get 8 percent, the Left Party 6 percent and the EELV (Greens) list 5.5 percent.

In Nantes, where Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault was the mayor, the PS candidate would lead the first round—but with a lower score than Ayrault in 2008, when he was directly elected in the first round.

The UMP is not benefitting significantly from the president's unpopularity in these towns, as it also faces significant popular hostility since it was in power between 1995 and 2012, with presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. Another weakness of the UMP in these towns is its ongoing faction struggles, which affect local-level officials and which the PS can exploit.

Nonetheless, the UMP is set to win from the first round in Bordeaux and Marseille, which they run already.

The PS's losses in favour of the UMP and the FN are expected to be clearer in the small and medium-sized towns. By-elections that took place in 2013 presage a probable overall defeat for the PS in the municipal elections.

In the by-elections in Villeneuve-sur-Lot in southwest France and in the Oise department north of Paris, the

PS did not reach the second round. These elections favoured the UMP and the FN. In the southeastern town of Brignoles the FN won the election in the second round against the UMP.

The Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) is a party of elected officials. In order to preserve its positions, it has made agreements with the PS in several towns, notably Paris, which have caused tensions within the Left Front, the alliance between the PCF and the Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. In protest against the alliance between the PCF and the PS, Mélenchon, a Euro MP, withdrew symbolically from the Party of the European Left after the re-election of Pierre Laurent as PCF national secretary.

The Left Party will nevertheless present joint lists with the PCF in several towns, which shows that Mélenchon's position is a masquerade. Mélenchon, himself a former PS minister who proposed himself as a potential prime minister for Hollande in May, has no political independence from the PS. He is also trying to effect a rapprochement with the Greens, who are in government and support its austerity policies.

The Left Party will also present lists with the NPA, deepening the NPA's integration into the political establishment via the Left Front and strengthening its close links with the PS. The NPA supported Hollande in the second round of the presidential elections in 2012 and is now cynically calling for united demonstrations against the PS with all "left" organisations.

This means allying with parties such as the Left Party and the PCF to attempt to channel the growing discontent of the workers behind organisations in alliance with the government.



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