Beat: Politics

RENAISSANCE LEADER GABRIEL ATTAL & THE CENTRIST BLOCK: ONE HUNDRED CITIES WON

FORMER PRIME MINISTER TURNED PARTY BOSS

Paros, Washington DC, 22.03.2026, 22:05 Time

USPA NEWS - For Emmanuel Macron's camp, the 2026 municipal elections are as much about survival as about renewal. At the centre of this bet stands Gabriel Attal, former prime minister and long time protégé of the head of state, who now leads Renaissance as party secretary general while chairing its group in the National Assembly as MP for the Hauts de Seine. Unlike many of his predecessors at Matignon, Attal has chosen to stay in frontline partisan politics, positioning himself as the main organiser and future face of the "bloc central" once Macron leaves the Elysee in 2027. Speaking from his home base in Vanves on the evening of the first round, Attal claimed a modest but symbolically important success: "We have crossed the threshold of 100 Renaissance mayors elected in the first round," he declared, citing the re election of Franck Riester in Coulommiers, Nathalie Nieson in Bourg de Péage and Jean Charles Orsucci in Bonifacio as examples. "It is an unprecedented result when we compare it to what we achieved in 2020 at the previous municipal elections. We are continuing to build our anchorage and our territorial implantation," he added.

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.

GABRIEL ATTAL: FROM GOLDEN BOY TO PARTY BOSS
SEVEN YEARS AFTER HIS RISE, A FORMER "WUNDERKIND" TESTS WHETHER 100 MAYORS CAN REVIVE HIS 2027 CHANCES
For a long time, Gabriel Attal (Former Prime Minister) was the favourite child of Macronism: the young prodigy who climbed faster and higher than anyone else, until he reached Matignon and became the youngest prime minister of the Fifth Republic. Today, he appears more fragile. Replaced by veteran Michel Barnier, now in his seventies, Attal has left the front line of government to take charge of Renaissance as party leader and group chair in the National Assembly, just as the centre and the right are fragmenting into a crowd of presidential hopefuls. In this increasingly crowded field with no official primary yet organised and no "natural candidate" formally designated by either the traditional right or the historic left, Gabriel Attal is trying to prove that he is still the central bloc's best bet for 2027, using the election of one hundred Renaissance mayors in the municipal first round as his main political asset.

"AN UNPRECEDENTED RESULT": 100 RENAISSANCE MAYORS
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NO PACT WITH "EITHER EXTREME"
At the same time, Attal used election night to draw a sharp line around his party. Denouncing a "remarkable progression of both the far right and the far left", he warned that the period between the two rounds would be "a kind of moment of truth". "Will the republican left be very clear vis à vis the far left of France Unbowed? Unfortunately, some initial statements tonight give us reasons to doubt it. Will the republican right be very clear vis à vis the far right of the National Rally, of Mr Ciotti or Mr Zemmour? Unfortunately, here again, some declarations suggest the opposite," he argued.
Renaissance, he insisted, will take a different path: "We will not take part in any direct or indirect alliance either with the far left of France Unbowed or with the far right of the National Rally (RN), of Reconquete (Far right) or of Eric Ciotti's UDR (Union of the Rights).

We will do what is necessary to prevent the extremes from winning. Wherever a hand is extended to us, we will seize it." In a landscape where local PS and LR branches often negotiate case by case alliances with LFI or the RN to keep or win city halls, this refusal is meant to brand Renaissance as the last clearly anti extreme pole, even if it limits its immediate bargaining power in some municipalities.

G.ATTAL VS. J.BARDELLA: TWO RISING YOURN TALENTS FACES FOR 2027

Behind these municipal numbers lies a larger battle: who will speak for the "centre bloc" in the 2027 presidential race. According to an Elabe poll for BFMTV, among voters who supported Ensemble candidates in the 2024 legislative elections, 42% would like Gabriel Attal to represent the central bloc, just ahead of Horizons leader Edouard Philippe at 40%. Current Prime minister Sebastien Lecornu follows at 30%, with other figures such as Gerald Darmanin, Yael Braun Pivet or Aurore Berge lagging far behind. The message from this segment of the electorate is clear: they want some continuity with Macron on key issues, but through a new face and Gabriel Attal currently embodies that expectation more than anyone else inside Renaissance.

The problem is that, outside this narrow base, the balance of power looks very different. A more recent Ifop Fiducial survey places National Rally president Jordan Bardella at around 36% of first round voting intentions for 2027, ahead of Marine Le Pen herself and far above any candidate of the "bloc central", who struggles to reach the 20% mark in most scenarios. In other words, while Attal can claim a clear lead inside his camp and point to the 100 Renaissance mayors as proof that Macronism is not dead locally, he faces a national landscape dominated by Bardella on the far right and by fragmented forces on the left.

CAN ONE HUNDRED MAYORS COUNTER A FAR RIGHT WAVE?

These municipal results give Gabriel Attal something few centrist leaders have ever had in France: a growing, if still modest, network of local mayors who owe their election directly to his party's label. They also confirm that, among former Macron voters, he is now seen as the most natural heir to the "bloc central". But they do not change the underlying arithmetic of 2027 presidential election: a far right structurally ahead, a left divided and a centre squeezed between rejection of Macron's record and fear of the extremes.

The question, therefore, is simple and brutal: can a former prime minister with one hundred mayors, a clear "neither far left nor far right" line and a solid base among Ensemble voters truly stand up to Jordan Bardella, whose movement now dominates national voting intentions? Or will Gabriel Attal discover that, in a country saturated with anger and fatigue, territorial implantation and moderation are no longer enough to stop a wave that is already reshaping the political map? Source : Public Senat, Ministry of Interior, Cnews, BFM TV

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...

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-26646/renaissance-leader-gabriel-attal-und-the-centrist-block-one-hundred-cities-won.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Rahma Sophia RACHDI, Jedi Foster

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619