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Video surveillance: mayors are backing AI ahead of the 2026 municipal elections

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Video surveillance: mayors are backing AI ahead of the 2026 municipal elections

According to an exclusive study by the Quorum Institute for Orasio, 94.5% of mayors say they are in favour of using artificial intelligence in video surveillance. Automatic reading, crowd or fire detection: these tools appeal to local elected officials, despite concerns about civil liberties.

Security is shaping up to be a major campaign issue in France's 2026 municipal elections. According to a Quorum Institute study for Orasio—"AI and security: what France's mayors want", revealed by Le JDD—a large majority of mayors want to strengthen video surveillance in their municipalities. Out of a panel of 200 elected officials surveyed, 94.5% say they support integrating artificial intelligence into surveillance cameras. Facial recognition, automated license-plate reading, crowd-movement detection: algorithmic video streams promise to revolutionize city monitoring, while also raising many questions about the protection of civil liberties.

Safeguarding civil liberties

"Of course, nobody wants to be watched all the time, but when it comes to fighting crime or terrorism, few people object," comments Florian Fournier, director and co-founder of Orasio. Elected officials see these tools as a way to tackle certain forms of disorder more effectively—especially illegal dumping, which 92% of them believe could be reduced thanks to AI. Protecting public spaces, regulating traffic flows, and early fire detection are also among their priorities.

These results should nonetheless be qualified: 74% of mayors say their support for AI depends on how it is used. Facial recognition or tracking individuals listed in police databases, for example, meets with broad opposition.

Safeguards exist against generalized surveillance

The legal framework for algorithmic video surveillance remains strictly regulated. France's data protection authority, the CNIL (National Commission on Informatics and Liberty), has repeatedly issued opinions on "augmented cameras," reminding that each system must rest on a clearly defined legal basis and ensure respect for civil liberties.

Anonymizing passers-by, rapid deletion of footage, banning facial recognition outside of judicial requisitions: safeguards do exist, and the independent authority warns against any drift toward generalized surveillance. "These new tools can lead to the large-scale processing of personal data, sometimes without the knowledge of the people concerned," it reiterated last November, in the aftermath of the Olympic Games—whose legal framework had nevertheless allowed exceptional use of these technologies.

An "indispensable" tool

"Of course it has to be regulated, but video surveillance has become indispensable for security forces," says Fabien Verdier, the non-affiliated mayor of Châteaudun (Eure-et-Loir) and spokesperson for the Movement for the Development of Sub-Prefecture Towns. For him, AI is an "additional tool" serving the protection of residents.

With nearly 115 cameras for an urban area of 17,000 inhabitants, the mayor welcomes the calmer atmosphere that now prevails in his town. "Twelve-year-old girls can go to gymnastics and walk home alone without their parents worrying—and that's already a victory," he says. A strong argument at a time when insecurity and everyday incivilities continue to rise.