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# Local & London elections

## **MEDIA GUIDE**

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1 May 2008

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- Electoral
- Reform
- Society

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## Media Contacts

The Electoral Reform Society will be running a 24 hour press office during the count and declaration for this year's local elections, providing round the clock monitoring and analysis.

Please direct media enquiries to the Societies press office on 020 7928 1622

Or email [ashley.de@electoral-reform.org.uk](mailto:ashley.de@electoral-reform.org.uk)

# Media Services on Election Night

## Core Issues

On election night the Society's research team will be working around the clock gathering data as the votes come in. Every year there is a crop of results where which reveal significant distortions at the heart of local democracy. We will be working to identify the following common scenarios:

**'WRONG WINNERS'**, also known more academically as 'reversed plurality'. This is when the winner of the most seats has fewer votes than another party, and is particularly significant when that results in an overall majority.

**LIKELY COUNCILS:** usually Con in votes, Lab in seats. Birmingham, Bolton, Bradford, Derby, Liverpool, Sefton, Sheffield, Wirral, Wolverhampton; Cheltenham, Exeter Lincoln and Nuneaton & Bedworth.

**'ONE PARTY STATES'** in which a party, usually with a significant lead in votes, wins all or nearly all the seats (say 85 per cent or more) and the council is therefore less able to provide overview and scrutiny than one in which opposition voices are heard.

**LIKELY COUNCILS:** Knowsley, Peterborough, Tameside, Wokingham; Adur, Brentwood, Broxbourne, Cherwell, Daventry, Eastleigh, Epping Forest, Fareham, Havant, Hertsmere, Huntingdonshire, Runnymede, Tandridge, Tunbridge Wells, Watford, West Oxfordshire, Worthing.

**'UNREPRESENTED PARTIES'** in which a party with sizeable support from local voters (say 20 per cent) does not win any seats.

**LIKELY COUNCILS:** Peterborough (Lab), Cambridge (Con, Green), Woking (Lab), Eastleigh (Con and Lab)

**'LANDSLIDES'** in which a relatively small lead, or sub-40 per cent share in votes becomes a large win in seats, usually because all the seats are marginal.

**LIKELY COUNCILS:** Dudley, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Salford, Tameside, Wakefield; Amber Valley, Barrow-in-Furness, Crawley, Pendle, Rossendale, Rushmoor, Stevenage, Tamworth

## Additional Issues

The Society will also be gathering data and will be available for comment on the following topics.

- Electoral Systems
- Electoral Administration
- Performance of extremist parties
- Women and Minority Representation

## Research to Order

The Society has some free capacity to undertake bespoke research for the media on topics that fit within its remit. Please contact [ashley.de@electoral-reform.org.uk](mailto:ashley.de@electoral-reform.org.uk) to discuss any additional research requests.

## Reporting Timetable

Early findings will be pressed released locally and nationally as the results come in.

Two extended reports on English and Welsh local authority elections are planned, and drafts will be circulated in due course.

## The 2008 context: The battleground

When thinking about local elections one needs to bear in mind which local authorities are being contested and the context of what was happening when the seats coming up for election were last fought. In May 2008 the areas where elections are taking place are as follows:

- The 36 Metropolitan Boroughs – one third of the seats, councillors elected top of the poll in 2004 up for re-election.
- 19 English unitary authorities electing by thirds – one third of the seats, councillors elected in 2004 up for re-election.
- 4 new English unitary authorities electing all-out – every seat to be fought.
- 22 Welsh unitary authorities electing all-out – every seat to be fought.
- 67 shire districts electing by thirds – one third of the seats, councillors elected in 2004 up for re-election

except in a few cases where there were boundary changes in 2007 or 2006.

- 7 shire districts electing by halves – half the seats, councillors elected in 2004 up for re-election.
- 4 shire districts electing all-out – every seat to be fought because of boundary changes.
- Greater London Assembly.
- London Mayor.

The English councils with elections in 2008 are drawn from urban areas, with many of the big cities having elections as well as some smaller, also rather urban, authorities. The London elections are rather different politically, and will be treated in a separate section in this guide. London is not really a local election, but the only elected English regional government that currently exists.

# The political context: The 2004 baseline & the 2008 polls

Nearly all the seats that are being elected this year were last fought in 2004. There are a handful of exceptions such as Lincoln where the baseline is 2007 because a special all-out election in that year followed boundary changes.

2004 was a very bad year for Labour in the local government elections. It is the only year in recent times when Labour has come third in National Vote Share Equivalent (NVE) for the local elections. NVE is the national standing of the parties implied by the results, and is calculated to take account of what sort of areas are up for election, so it is not the same as the proportion of votes actually cast. Labour suffered particularly badly in the large urban areas in 2004, losing ground to the Liberal Democrats and to minor parties, local parties and independents. In some areas the losses were aggravated by Muslim dissatisfaction over Iraq. In these areas Labour recovered some ground in 2006 and 2007 despite the similarly poor national position.

While any prediction at this stage must be sketchy, the past relationship between opinion poll ratings and local election results (as summarised in the National Vote Share Equivalent measure, which translates the outcome into the estimated national shares of the parties allowing for the different types of area that come up each year) is reasonably regular. Labour tends to do worse and the Conservatives and Lib

Dems a little better than their national poll rating in local elections, in large part because of differential turnout. Applying similar adjustments to the last poll figures as were apparent in the last few rounds of local elections, the Conservatives should be in the low to mid 40s, Labour in the mid to high 20s, and Lib Dems in the low to mid 20s. We suspect these figures probably overstate the actual potential Conservative vote and understate the Lib Dems this year, but if they are right the Conservatives should have their best local election night since 1992, and perhaps one that compares with past wipe-outs like 1977. In terms of change since 2004, we would be thinking in terms of a 3-4 per cent swing from Labour to Conservative, a 5-6 per cent swing from Lib Dem to Conservative, and a 1-2 per cent swing from Lib Dem to Labour.

Movements are likely, as they were in 2006 and 2007, to show distinct regional variations, with Labour's vote holding up better in the northern metropolitan authorities and the Conservatives running very well in southern suburban and New Town districts (and the occasional midland and northern suburb too). The next sections go into some detail about what might happen in each area, breaking it down into principal authorities (metropolitan and unitary), shire districts and Welsh unitary councils.

	2004		2006		2007		2008	
	ICM April	NVE	ICM April	NVE	ICM March	NVE	ICM April	NVE?
Conservative	33	37	34	39	37	40	37-43	42-44
Labour	38	26	32	26	30	27	32-34	26-27
Lib Dem	22	27	21	25	21	26	18-19	23-24
Others	8	10	10	10	12	7	7	7

NVE: National Vote Share Equivalent.

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# Local Authorities

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## Changes in Council Structure

There are four entirely new councils being elected in May 2008. These arise in areas where the local government structure is being changed and a two-tier structure of counties and districts is being replaced by single-tier 'unitary' councils. Existing counties and districts are being done away with in Cheshire and replaced by two councils. **East Cheshire**, comprising the existing districts of Congleton, Crewe & Nantwich and Macclesfield, is the more solidly Conservative, containing the outer commuter belt of Manchester. The Conservatives should return a strong majority in the Macclesfield area, and break even or better in the other two, making for a majority on the new council. **Chester and West Cheshire** (Chester City, Ellesmere Port & Neston, Vale Royal) is less predictable. Labour could win this authority in a good year, but 2008 is unlikely to be a good year. The Conservatives should get a majority.

In the North East, the local government map is being chopped back even more, with the remaining two-tier areas of Northumberland and Durham being converted into large unitary authorities covering entire county areas. **Northumberland** county council is Labour controlled with a small majority on the basis of the 2005 county election results, and it would be very surprising if Labour won the new council in the circumstances of 2008. However, it is virtually impossible for either of the other main parties to win outright, so it can be fairly confidently predicted for no overall control. **County Durham** has been Labour since 1919 and it would take an earthquake to shift it. That said, Labour insiders are not completely confident of an overall majority even in Durham, as Independents have nibbled into Labour strength in some previously solid areas. It would be a disaster of historic proportions if Labour were to lose.

# Principal authorities in England with local elections May 2008

In all of these councils, one third of the seats are up for election in 2008 with the exception of the four new unitary councils.

Types: MB: Metropolitan Borough, UA: Unitary Authority

Regions: EE: Eastern England, EM: East Midlands, NE: North East, NW: North West, SE: South East, SW: South West; WM: West Midlands.

**The key councils are put in bold in the table, as these seem to be the councils on which the media has started to focus and on which a fair amount of the post-election analysis of the English local elections will concentrate.**

Council	Type	Region	Current control	Prospects in 2008
Barnsley	MB	YH	Lab	Lab loss to NOC possible
Birmingham	MB	WM	NOC: Con-LD	Will remain NOC
Blackburn-with-Darwen	UA	NW	NOC: Con-LD coalition	Lab gain from NOC possible
Bolton	MB	NW	NOC: Lab minority	Lab gain from NOC unlikely
Bradford	MB	YH	NOC: Con minority	Lab gain from NOC unlikely
<b>Bury</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>NW</b>	<b>NOC: Con minority</b>	<b>Con gain from NOC possible</b>
Calderdale	MB	YH	NOC: Con minority	Will remain NOC
Chester and West Cheshire	UA	NW	New council	Probably Con
County Durham	UA	NE	New council	Probably Lab
<b>Coventry</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>Con</b>	<b>Con loss to Lab or NOC probable</b>
Derby	UA	EM	NOC: Lab-Con coalition	Will remain NOC
Doncaster	MB	YH	Lab mayor, council NOC	Lab gain from NOC possible
Dudley	MB	WM	Con	Con loss to NOC possible
East Cheshire	UA	NW	New council	Almost certainly Con
Gateshead	MB	NE	Lab	Safe Lab
Halton	UA	NW	Lab	Safe Lab
Hartlepool	UA	NE	Ind mayor, council NOC	Lab loss to NOC possible
Hull (Kingston-upon-Hull)	UA	YH	LD	LD loss to NOC possible
Kirklees	MB	YH	NOC: Con minority	Will remain NOC
Knowsley	MB	NW	Lab	Safe Lab
Leeds	MB	YH	NOC: Con-LD-Grn	Will remain NOC
<b>Liverpool</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>NW</b>	<b>LD</b>	<b>LD loss to NOC or Lab possible</b>
Manchester	MB	NW	Lab	Safe Lab
Milton Keynes	UA	SE	NOC: LD minority	Will remain NOC
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	MB	NE	LD	Safe LD
North East Lincolnshire	UA	YH	NOC: LD-Con coalition	Will remain NOC
<b>North Tyneside</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>NE</b>	<b>Lab mayor, council NOC</b>	<b>Con majority probable</b>
Northumberland	UA	NE	New council	Probably NOC
Oldham	MB	NW	NOC: Lab casting vote	Will remain NOC (Lab losses)

				likely)
Peterborough	UA	EE	Con	Safe Con
Plymouth	UA	SW	Con	Safe Con
<b>Portsmouth</b>	<b>UA</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>NOC: LD-Lab coalition</b>	<b>Con gain from NOC unlikely</b>
<b>Reading</b>	<b>UA</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Lab</b>	<b>Lab loss to NOC probable</b>
Rochdale	MB	NW	LD	LD loss to NOC possible
Rotherham	MB	YH	Lab	Safe Lab
Salford	MB	NW	Lab	Safe Lab
Sandwell	MB	WM	Lab	Safe Lab
Sefton	MB	NW	NOC: All party coalition	Will remain NOC
<b>Sheffield</b>	<b>MB</b>	<b>YH</b>	<b>NOC: Lab minority</b>	<b>LD gain from NOC possible Lab gain from NOC possible</b>
Slough	UA	SE	NOC:	Lab gain from NOC probable
Solihull	MB	WM	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC possible
South Tyneside	MB	NE	Lab	Safe Lab
Southampton	UA	SE	NOC: Lab- LD coalition	Will remain NOC
Southend-on-Sea	UA	EE	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
St Helens	MB	NW	NOC: LD-Con	Lab gain from NOC unlikely LD gain from NOC unlikely
Stockport	MB	NW	LD	Safe LD
Stoke-on-Trent	UA	WM	Lab mayor, council NOC	Will remain NOC
Sunderland	MB	NE	Lab	Safe Lab
Swindon	UA	SW	Con	Safe Con
Tameside	MB	NW	Lab	Safe Lab
Thurrock	UA	EE	NOC: Con minority	Lab gain from NOC possible Con gain from NOC possible
Trafford	MB	NW	Con	Safe Con
Wakefield	MB	YH	Lab	Safe Lab
Walsall	MB	WM	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Warrington	UA	NW	NOC: LD-Con coalition	LD gain from NOC probable
Wigan	MB	NW	Lab	Safe Lab
Wirral	MB	NW	NOC: Lab-LD	Will remain NOC
Wokingham	UA	SE	Con	Safe Con
Wolverhampton	MB	WM	Lab	Lab loss to NOC unlikely

## Principal authorities in England: The Ones to Watch

- **Bury** has always been one of the more marginal metropolitan boroughs. It contains some Manchester suburbs around Prestwich as well as the more independent towns of Bury and Ramsbottom to the north. Bury North is a key marginal parliamentary seat, Bury South a very long-shot Conservative target. Labour held the council, somewhat surprisingly, in the 2004 elections but Labour lost control in 2006 and their position as largest party in 2007. To win outright, the Conservatives need 3 gains from 2004, which means hitting three out of the four target wards. Winning Bury is important enough for the Conservatives that it will have been receiving financial aid and helpers from outside. Conservative outright control would be a genuinely good result for the party.
- **Coventry** was a surprise Conservative gain in 2003 but their fortunes have receded in the last two rounds of elections (incumbent parties locally often ride into power on a high swing that is then not sustained, as the difficult problems of running a local authority mount up). The Conservatives would need only one loss to lose control, and a repeat of the 2007 results would do this. Labour's launch of their campaign in Coventry suggests that the party is confident of ending Conservative control in the city – a Conservative hold would be a bad result for Labour.
- **Liverpool** is worth mentioning, as it has always been a very independent-minded city in local elections and pays little attention to national trends. The Lib Dems have ruled since 1998 but in 2006 and 2007 sustained losses. Labour would have to do better than 2007 to knock the Lib Dems out, but it is possible.
- **North Tyneside** has attracted attention as a northern Conservative target. While winning a majority on a council in the North East would undoubtedly be good for Conservative morale, it would not mean a great deal because it is run by a Labour mayor (and in fact elected Conservative mayors in 2002 and 2003). It should be possible for the Conservatives to manage the three gains they need – they were a reasonable amount ahead in each of the targets in 2007. If they do not manage, it would be a disappointment for the Tories.
- **Portsmouth** has remained just outside Lib Dem control for a few years, and the party has gone into coalition with Labour to provide a more stable basis for government. However, the Lib Dems are defending a lot of seats in 2008 and will probably lose ground to the Conservatives (who are targeting the two parliamentary seats in the city). The Conservatives would need all their targets to come good, and then not to lose a council estate ward they won in a freak result in 2004, but it is just about possible. If they do win, it is very good news indeed for them.
- **Reading** saw Labour produce good results for 20 years – the party lost no seats in any local election from 1983 to 2004, and the Labour Party in the town is well organised and good at pavement politics. But the Conservatives made serious inroads in the 2007 local elections, and they could afford to do considerably less well this year and still deprive Labour of control. If Labour do manage to retain control in these conditions, it would be a nearly incredible achievement. Reading is the last Labour council in the south east of England; if Labour fail to gain Slough (or Oxford) in these elections, there will be none left.
- **Sheffield** is tightly balanced between Labour and Lib Dem. Labour need 2 gains for control, the Lib Dems 4, but Labour defend some difficult seats this year and would need to be doing very well to manage it and perhaps a Lib Dem gain of control is more likely. But the most probable outcome is that it remains under no overall control, but with the Lib Dems taking Labour's place as the largest single party.
- **Thurrock** in Essex was a surprise Conservative gain in 2004 which they lost in 2007. The Conservative council administration has not been popular and the strength of the BNP has confused the situation in a number of wards. Although the Conservatives need only a single gain to win control, it is difficult because they did so well in 2004 and have slipped back since. Labour will also be looking to regain control. The size of the BNP vote in 2008 will add interest to the contest in this white working class corner of southern England.

## District councils in England with elections 2008

Council	Region	Scope	Current control	Prospects in 2008
Adur	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Amber Valley	EM	1/3	Con	Safe Con
<b>Barrow-in-Furness</b>	<b>NW</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>NOC: All party coalition</b>	<b>Con gain from NOC probable Lab gain from NOC possible</b>
Basildon	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Basingstoke & Deane	SE	All	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC probable
Bassetlaw	EM	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Brentwood	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Broxbourne	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Cambridge	EE	1/3	LD	Safe LD
Cannock Chase	WM	1/3	NOC: LD-Con coalition	Will remain NOC
Carlisle	NW	1/3	NOC: Con-LD coalition	Will remain NOC
Castle Point	EE	1/2	Con	Con loss to NOC or Ind possible
Cheltenham	SW	1/2	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC probable LD gain from NOC possible
Cherwell	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Chorley	NW	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Colchester	EE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Craven	YH	1/3	NOC	Will remain NOC
Crawley	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Daventry	EM	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Eastleigh	SE	1/3	LD	Safe LD
Elmbridge	SE	1/3	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC probable
Epping Forest	EE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Exeter	SW	1/3	NOC: Lab minority	Will remain NOC
Fareham	SE	1/2	Con	Safe Con
Gloucester	SW	1/3	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC possible
Gosport	SE	1/2	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC probable
Great Yarmouth	EE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Harlow	EE	1/3	NOC: Lab-LD coalition	Will remain NOC
Harrogate	YH	1/3	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC possible
Hart	SE	1/3	NOC: LD-Ind coalition	Con gain from NOC possible
Hastings	SE	1/2	NOC: All party	Con gain from NOC

			coalition	probable
Havant	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Hertsmere	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Huntingdonshire	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Hyndburn	NW	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC likely
Ipswich	EE	1/3	NOC: Con-LD coalition	Con gain from NOC unlikely
<b>Lincoln</b>	<b>EM</b>	<b>1/3</b>	<b>Con</b>	<b>Lab gain from Con, or Con loss to NOC, possible</b>
Maidstone	SE	1/3	NOC: LD-Ind coalition	Con gain from NOC probable
Mole Valley	SE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Newcastle-under-Lyme	WM	1/3	NOC: Con-LD coalition	Will remain NOC
North Hertfordshire	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Norwich	EE	1/3	NOC: Lab minority	Will remain NOC
<b>Nuneaton &amp; Bedworth</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>1/2</b>	<b>Lab</b>	<b>Con gain from Lab possible</b>
<b>Oxford</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>1/2</b>	<b>NOC: LD-Lab-Grn coalition</b>	<b>Lab gain from NOC possible</b>
Pendle	NW	1/3	LD	Safe LD
Preston	NW	1/3	NOC: Con minority	Will remain NOC
Purbeck	SW	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC possible
<b>Redditch</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>1/3</b>	<b>NOC: Lab minority</b>	<b>Con gain from NOC unlikely</b>
Reigate & Banstead	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Rochford	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
<b>Rossendale</b>	<b>NW</b>	<b>1/3</b>	<b>Con</b>	<b>Con loss to NOC probable Lab gain from Con unlikely</b>
Rugby	WM	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Runnymede	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Rushmoor	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
South Cambridgeshire	EE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
South Lakeland	NW	All	LD	Con gain from LD possible
St Albans	EE	1/3	NOC: LD minority	LD gain from NOC unlikely
Stevenage	EE	1/3	Lab	Safe Lab
Stratford-on-Avon	WM	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Stroud	SW	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Swale	SE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
Tamworth	WM	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Tandridge	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Three Rivers	EE	1/3	LD	Safe LD
Tunbridge Wells	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Watford	EE	1/3	LD mayor, LD council	Safe LD
Waveney	EE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Welwyn Hatfield	EE	All	Con	Safe Con
West Lancashire	NW	1/3	Con	Safe Con
West Lindsey	EM	1/3	LD	LD loss to NOC probable Con gain from LD possible
West Oxfordshire	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con

Weymouth & Portland	SW	1/3	NOC	Will remain NOC
Winchester	SE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC possible
Woking	SE	1/3	Con	Con loss to NOC unlikely
<b>Worcester</b>	<b>WM</b>	<b>1/3</b>	<b>NOC: Con minority</b>	<b>Con gain from NOC probable</b>
Worthing	SE	1/3	Con	Safe Con
Wyre Forest	WM	1/3	NOC: Con minority	Con gain from NOC unlikely

## English District councils: The Ones to Watch

- **Barrow-in-Furness** is having a whole council election because of boundary changes. It could be won either by Conservative or Labour – a Conservative gain would be encouraging for them as this is a parliamentary seat they lost in 1992 (to John Hutton). Elections for the council, and to some extent the parliamentary seat, can sometimes produce results that go against, or wildly exaggerate, national trends.
- **Lincoln** was very narrowly won by the Conservatives in 2007 in an all-out election. The Conservatives, because of the seats that are being contested this year, need to do on average a little better than they did in 2007 to hold on – Labour could make two gains by defeating a Conservative and a Lib Dem in wards that elected two Labour councillors out of three in 2007.
- **Nuneaton and Bedworth** has been Labour controlled since 1973, but in the last two elections (2004 and 2006) Labour had more seats despite the Conservatives polling considerably more votes. While Labour did well in a couple of by-elections here in 2007, there is still a chance that this council (which covers parts of two marginal seats, Nuneaton and North Warwickshire) could flip to the Tories.
- **Oxford** saw Labour poll very badly in 2004, with losses to the Lib Dems and a fringe group (the Independent Working Class Association) in particular, but rather better in 2006 (Labour would be the largest party but short of an overall majority on a repeat of 2006). Oxford East is a seat that is closely contested between Lib Dem and Labour.
- **Redditch** is the marginal parliamentary seat of Jacqui Smith. Labour made an unexpected gain here in 2004 and have been resilient in local elections, but it is a natural Conservative target and they must be hoping to pick up seats.
- **Rossendale**, like **Hyndburn**, is a Lancashire marginal at both council and parliamentary level. Most wards are also marginal, so fairly small moves in public opinion can cause big shifts in representation. Local discontents over Tory councils might lead to Labour gains.
- **Worcester** was lost by the Conservatives through a by-election at Labour's high tide in September 2007. Only just short of a majority, the Tories must hope to regain it in May, in a key marginal parliamentary seat ('Worcester woman' and all that).

## Welsh unitary councils

Elections for Welsh local authorities, particularly outside the big southern towns and cities (Swansea, Cardiff, Newport), do tend to be a bit more local and less subject to national trends in opinion than most in England. Most candidates in some mainly rural authorities are Independents, and there are a considerable number of wards in which candidates (again mostly Independent) are elected unopposed. Labour did relatively poorly in the Welsh local elections in 1999 and 2004, so there is limited scope for further losses. The picture is complicated by the fact that Labour and Plaid Cymru are working together as the Welsh Assembly government but are in electoral competition with each other in several local authorities including the large Rhondda Cynon Taff council and Caerphilly.

Council	Region	Current control	Prospects in 2008
Anglesey	North	Ind	Safe Ind
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Lab</b>	<b>Lab loss to NOC probable</b>
Bridgend	SW	NOC: LD-led coalition	Lab gain from NOC possible
Caerphilly	SC	Lab	Lab loss to NOC or Plaid possible
Cardiff	SC	NOC: LD minority	Lab gain from NOC possible LD gain from NOC unlikely
Carmarthenshire	Mid W	NOC: Ind-Lab coalition	Will remain NOC
Ceredigion	Mid W	NOC: Ind-LD-Lab coalition	Plaid gain from NOC possible
Conwy	North	NOC: Ind-led coalition	Will remain NOC
Denbighshire	North	NOC: Ind-led coalition	Ind gain from NOC possible
Flintshire	North	Lab	Lab loss to NOC probable
Gwynedd	North	Plaid	Plaid loss to NOC unlikely
Merthyr Tydfil	SE	Lab	Lab loss to Ind or NOC possible
Monmouthshire	SE	Con	Safe Con
Neath & Port Talbot	SW	Lab	Safe Lab
<b>Newport</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Lab</b>	<b>Lab loss to NOC possible</b>
Pembrokeshire	Mid W	Ind	Safe Ind
Powys	Mid W	Ind	Safe Ind
Rhondda Cynon Taff	SC	Lab	Lab loss to Plaid or NOC possible
<b>Swansea</b>	<b>SW</b>	<b>NOC: LD-led coalition</b>	<b>Lab gain from NOC probable</b>
Torfaen	SE	Lab	Safe Lab
<b>Vale of Glamorgan</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>NOC: Lab-Plaid coalition</b>	<b>Con gain from NOC probable</b>
Wrexham	North	NOC: All party coalition	Lab gain from NOC possible

## Welsh unitary councils: The Ones to Watch

- **Blaenau Gwent** was once a heartland Labour area but it now has ex-Labour Independent representation at Westminster and the Welsh Assembly. Independents and Welsh Voice candidates are challenging Labour control of the town hall as well, and on the basis of the other elections in 2005, 2006 and 2007 should win. Merthyr Tydfil has seen similar Independent activity but so far confined to a local government level.
- **Newport** has been long-term Labour, but the party's vote has trended downwards in recent elections. There are enough Conservative suburbs to provide that party with a stable core, and the Liberal Democrats have been making inroads as well. Labour may well lose overall control this time, but neither other party is really capable of winning outright.
- **Swansea** is probably Labour's best hope of a gain, after four years of a chaotic Lib Dem-led city council.
- **Vale of Glamorgan** is a suburban and rural area south west of Cardiff and the Conservatives are competitive – they actually ran the council as a minority administration for part of the previous four years. There is a fair chance that they will win outright because of the general upswing in Conservative fortunes in Wales, although local issues may not help them here.



## London Mayor

Directly elected mayors, including the London Mayor, are chosen using a part-preferential system called the Supplementary Vote (SV). Each voter has two votes, a first preference for his or her first choice and a second preference for whichever of the leading two candidates he or she prefers. If no candidate has an overall majority, all candidates except the top two are knocked out of the election and the second preferences of their supporters are reallocated, as long as they are for one of the top two. In some mayoral elections it is not clear who the top two candidates will be, but this is not a problem in London. The choice boils down to Ken Livingstone for Labour, or Boris Johnson for the Conservatives.

The contest has generated a great deal of media attention. It is an example of personality politics, the projection of an individual as a brand that goes somewhat beyond traditional party images. The media are also London-centred to an extreme degree, and the local elections outside London are getting rather little national publicity because they are overshadowed by the 'Ken and Boris' show.

Polls during the campaign have varied between showing a very slight edge for Livingstone, and a big lead for Johnson of up to 13 points. The general feeling seems to be that Livingstone has recovered some ground as the campaign has gone on, following a disastrous start when Labour's national poll ratings sank and City Hall scandals claimed two advisers.

The past two mayoral elections have seen unusual constellations of voters. In 2004 Livingstone's strength was in inner London, even in areas that are normally Conservative or Lib Dem. He won all but one ward in Camden, for instance, even leading in the upper middle class heights of Hampstead Town. Steve Norris polled best in the outer boroughs, many of which are ambivalent about their allegiance to "London". Johnson seems, whichever poll one looks at, to have maintained the Conservative advantage in outer London and pulled away some non-Labour voters in inner London who supported Livingstone in 2004. Interestingly, YouGov finds Labour's vote

in the assembly election pretty much identical to Livingstone's support, also suggesting that Livingstone's vote this time will be a more conventional Labour party coalition of support.

Looking at the detail of the polls, which seem to suggest a strong Conservative tilt among older voters and those who feel certain to vote, and the closeness between perceptions now of Livingstone and the national Labour brand (which were clearly separate even in 2004), I would have to put the odds slightly in Johnson's favour. But the London mayoral campaign is perhaps an unstable political environment because of the personality factors. Both main candidates are flawed and vulnerable figures, and while Livingstone has been under relentless scrutiny from sections of the press, Johnson's team have been less apparent except when he starts talking about policy, or detail, or starts going off message. There is still room for events to take place which upset the current state of the mayoral race.

## Greater London Assembly

The Greater London Assembly (GLA) is elected using the Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP, which is often known as the Additional Member System, AMS, in Britain).

Each voter has two votes for the GLA.

There are 14 constituency seats made up of combinations of whole London boroughs, and voters choose a candidate. The candidate with the largest number of votes is elected for the constituency.

There is also a London-wide vote, which voters cast for a complete list of candidates nominated by the political parties. The remaining 11 seats on the GLA are divided between the parties in proportion to the London-wide votes, taking account of the constituency seats won. In 2000 and 2004 Labour and Conservative were the only parties to win constituency seats, so the list seats enabled the other parties to gain representation. There is a threshold by which a party needs 5 per cent of the London-wide vote to qualify for a list seat, which kept the BNP and Respect out of City Hall in 2004.

There are some small changes to the ballot paper. In 2000 and 2004 the constituency and regional ballots were on the same piece of paper, while in 2008 they are separate papers for constituency and list. Again, rather contrarily, this is a change in the opposite direction from what happened in Scotland in 2007, although the combined ballot in Scotland in 2007 did seem to confuse voters more than the separate piece of paper did there in 1999 or 2003.

The overall composition of the Greater London Assembly is unlikely to change much:

<b>Certain winners</b>		
Kit Malthouse	Con	West Central
James Cleverly	Con	Bexley & Bromley
*Mike Tuffrey	LD	London list
Stephen O'Connell	Con	Croydon & Sutton
*Dee Doocey	LD	London list
*Roger Evans	Con	Havering & Redbridge
Richard Tracey	Con	Merton & Wandsworth
*Len Duvall	Lab	Greenwich & Lewisham
*Valerie Shawcross	Lab	Lambeth & Southwark OR London list
*Jennette Arnold	Lab	North East
*Richard Barnes	Con	Ealing & Hillingdon
*Nicky Gavron	Lab	London list OR Barnet & Camden
<b>Very likely winners</b>		
*Tony Arbour	Con	South West
*Murad Qureshi	Lab	London list
*John Biggs	Lab	City & East
*Joanne McCartney	Lab	Enfield & Haringey OR London list
*Caroline Pidgeon	LD	London list OR Lambeth & Southwark
*Brian Coleman	Con	Barnet & Camden
*Robert Blackman	Con	Brent & Harrow
<b>One of:</b>		
Andrew Boff	Con	London list
Matthew Laban	Con	Enfield & Haringey
<b>Possible winners</b>		
Navin Shah	Lab	London list OR Brent & Harrow
*Jenny Jones	Green	London list
Richard Barnbrook	BNP	London list
Jeremy Ambache	LD	London list
*Darren Johnson	Green	London list
Robert Bailey	BNP	London list
Ranjit Dheer	Lab	London list
Stephen Knight	LD	South West
Lawrence Webb	UKIP	London list
George Galloway	Resp	London list

(\* indicates incumbent)

Candidates within each category are listed in approximate descending order of likelihood. So, of 13 who are completely certain to be GLA members, there are 7 Conservatives, 4 Labour and 2 Lib Dem. Of 6 more who are overwhelmingly likely, there are 2 Conservatives, 3 Labour and 1 Lib Dem. This leaves 6 seats uncertain, of whom one is very likely to be a Conservative (either Boff or Laban, depending on the constituency outcome in Enfield & Haringey, although a high Conservative share of the vote could elect both). Then we have 5 uncertain, drawn from among Boff and two Labour, two Green, two BNP, UKIP, Respect and one Lib Dem. Tony Travers, the expert on London politics thinks UKIP might win a list seat, and while I respect his views I do not think this is likely in 2008. UKIP won two seats in 2004, but this was a cross-over effect of

the European Parliament elections and I would be very surprised if UKIP reached the 5 per cent threshold in 2008.

**Overall composition is therefore very likely to be within the following ranges:**

Conservative	9-11
Labour	7-9
Lib Dem	3-4
Green	0-2
BNP	0-2
UKIP	0-1
Respect	0-1

The Greater London Assembly is one of the weaker elected bodies in Britain, having a role essentially as overview and scrutiny of the London Mayor's executive, and providing members for London-wide boards such as police and fire authorities. The key in this context is the ability to veto the Mayor's budget with a two-thirds majority, which could shift considerable power away from the Mayor and towards the leading figures in the Assembly if the political arithmetic makes it possible. The Mayor therefore needs the support of 9 members out of 25 to ensure that his government continues. Only if Livingstone wins, but Labour plus Green (the coalition that has supported him since 2004) falls below 9, is there much of an implication for the governability of London. This is possible if Labour Assembly candidates do badly and the

Greens drop below the 5 per cent threshold. If the Greens are close to the threshold, Labour would be better served by enough of their supporters tactically voting Green to make sure they return to the Assembly. If Johnson wins, there will certainly be at least 9 Conservative GLA members. The last important question is whether the BNP will reach the threshold and elect one or two members to the GLA. This would give the party a platform it has not enjoyed before, and pave the way to possibly electing MEPs in 2009. The BNP has a measure of support everywhere, but a concentrated vote in the outer east of London – Barking, Havering and parts of Redbridge in particular. However, a high turnout (driven principally by the mayoral election) would make it more difficult for the BNP to qualify for Assembly seats.

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# Post-Election Politics

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## Post-Election Politics

The mayoralty will be the most important election by far in terms of its effect on future British politics. A Livingstone win would to some extent mean business as usual; Labour would have had a fright but the broad flow of politics and policy would not be much changed. A win for Johnson would at least in the short term be a boost to the Tories in London and nationally. It would show that the Conservatives could win a serious election in urban England. The London Mayor is the elected figure in Britain who has had the most votes cast for him as a candidate. It would also, to some extent, vindicate the broad Cameron project of combining a traditional Tory core vote (motivated in outer London by issues such as crime), with a less traditional middle class, young metropolitan Conservative vote. If the Tories can win London, convincingly, it makes the prospect of a Conservative win at the general election all the more plausible. It would also be another step in the dissolution of Labour's power nationally, now that Scotland has gone, Wales has a significant Plaid Cymru input and Manchester City Council would be the largest Labour-run entity other than the UK central government.

However, a Johnson mayoralty would not be a complete blessing for the Conservatives. Their image in London, with its concentration of marginal seats, and nationally would be strongly affected by the fact that the most powerful Conservative in Britain would be Boris Johnson. If Johnson is perceived as having been an incompetent executive, or making London a laughing stock, there will be reverberations for the party nationally.

The 2008 local government elections in England outside London are unlikely to produce much change in terms of who controls local authorities and how local government is carried out. Labour lost most of what it was going to lose in 2004-07, and there is not much further to fall. The exception is County Durham unitary, loss of which would be a severe psychological blow for Labour and the end of what has been a strong reservoir of Labour support and organisation since the birth of the party.

Otherwise, the main interest is as a barometer of how well the parties are faring nationally. If Labour do significantly worse than in the last three sets of comparable elections in comparable areas (2004, 2006, 2007) then what has so far been a vague feeling of discontent and pessimism might grow into something stronger and provoke serious moves at undermining Brown, whose personal qualities are widely identified with the government's malaise. A NVE of 25 per cent or less, and losses of more than about 200 seats net and London, would be enough to cause a serious crisis in Labour morale.

The Conservatives will do well, to some extent. They are in a position to make net gains even from a 2004 starting point because while Labour might not fall very much further, the Tories seem to have a higher share of the anti-Labour vote. Support for the smaller parties and Lib Dems seemed to top out or fall a bit in 2006-07, and compared to 2004 the Conservatives have gained support in national voting intention. In terms of councils gained, there are limited possibilities, but victories in Bury, North Tyneside and Nuneaton would undoubtedly be good for morale. The risk is underperforming expectations. If they really do achieve an NVE of around 43 per cent, the Conservatives will have something of a landslide win in the local elections, and in these circumstances just doing well and getting 40-41 per cent would seem disappointing. Getting an NVE any higher, particular if it is combined with winning in London, would have an important psychological effect (as Labour's landslide in 1995 did) of making the prospect of a change of government more credible. The media would start to think more seriously about what a Conservative government would be like.

The Liberal Democrats, having performed patchily in 2006 and 2007, need to halt the drift back to Labour in the cities, and also fend off the Conservatives in areas such as Cheltenham which are contested between the two opposition parties. Too many failures not balanced by surprising successes would be bad for morale, particularly in a party that thrives on local activism.

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# Appendix

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# Count Timetable: Local Elections

(Source: Press Association)

Expected declaration times are listed in chronological order. Contests referenced in earlier chapters have been highlighted for ease of reference.

Broxbourne	23:30
Plymouth	23:30
Tamworth	23:30
Salford	23:45
Barnsley	23:59
Brentwood	23:59
<b>Bury</b>	<b>23:59</b>
Castle Point	23:59
Great Yarmouth	23:59
Ipswich	23:59
Kingston-upon-Hull	23:59
Maidstone	23:59
Manchester	23:59
Mole Valley	23:59
North East Lincolnshire	23:59
Norwich	23:59
Southend-on-Sea	23:59
Stevenage	23:59
Swale	23:59
Tunbridge Wells	23:59
West Lindsey	23:59
West Oxfordshire	23:59
<b>Worcester</b>	<b>23:59</b>
Harlow	00:30
Hart	00:30
Pendle	00:30
Basildon	01:00
Cannock Chase	01:00
Carlisle	01:00
Carmarthenshire	01:00
Chorley	01:00
Derby	01:00
Eastleigh	01:00
Elmbridge	01:00
Halton	01:00
Hartlepool	01:00
Havant	01:00
Huntingdonshire	01:00
Knowsley	01:00
<b>Liverpool</b>	<b>01:00</b>
<b>Newport</b>	<b>01:00</b>
North Hertfordshire	01:00

<b>Nuneaton &amp; Bedworth</b>	<b>01:00</b>
<b>Oxford</b>	<b>01:00</b>
Peterborough	01:00
Rochford	01:00
Rotherham	01:00
Rushmoor	01:00
Sandwell	01:00
Southampton	01:00
Stratford-on-Avon	01:00
<b>Swansea</b>	<b>01:00</b>
Tameside	01:00
Tandridge	01:00
Trafford	01:00
Weymouth & Portland	01:00
Wigan	01:00
Wirral	01:00
Woking	01:00
Doncaster	01:30
Exeter	01:30
Gosport	01:30
Isle of Anglesey	01:30
Oldham	01:30
<b>Portsmouth</b>	<b>01:30</b>
Runnymede	01:30
South Tyneside	01:30
Stockport	01:30
Stoke-on-Trent	01:30
Walsall	01:30
West Lancashire	01:30
Amber Valley	02:00
Basingstoke & Deane	02:00
Ceredigion	02:00
Daventry	02:00
Dudley	02:00
Durham	02:00
Fareham	02:00
<b>Hyndburn</b>	<b>02:00</b>
Kirklees	02:00
Merthyr Tydfil	02:00
Neath Port Talbot	02:00
Preston	02:00
Rochdale	02:00
St Albans	02:00
St Helens	02:00
Sefton	02:00
Swindon	02:00
<b>Thurrock</b>	<b>02:00</b>
Torfaen	02:00

Waveney	02:00
Winchester	02:00
Wyre Forest	02:00
Bolton	02:30
Cambridge	02:30
Birmingham	03:00
Bridgend	03:00
Colchester	03:00
<b>Coventry</b>	<b>03:00</b>
Flintshire	03:00
Hastings	03:00
<b>Lincoln</b>	<b>03:00</b>
Northumberland	03:00
Monmouthshire	03:30
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	<b>04:00</b>
Cardiff	04:00
Warrington	04:00
Welwyn Hatfield	04:00
<b>Barrow-in-Furness</b>	<b>05:00</b>
Rugby	05:00
Sunderland	11:30
Bradford	12:00
Burnley	12:00
Cherwell	12:00
Craven	12:00
Crawley	12:00
Gateshead	12:00
Gloucester	12:00
Hertsmere	12:00
Leeds	12:00
Milton Keynes	12:00
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	12:00
<b>North Tyneside</b>	<b>12:00</b>
<b>Reading</b>	<b>12:00</b>
<b>Redditch</b>	<b>12:00</b>
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	12:00
<b>Rossendale</b>	<b>12:00</b>
South Lakeland	12:00
Stroud	12:00
Three Rivers	12:00
<b>Vale of Glamorgan</b>	<b>12:00</b>
Wakefield	12:00
Wokingham	12:00
Wolverhampton	12:00
Worthing	12:00
Caerphilly	13:00
Calderdale	13:00
Cheltenham	13:00

Newcastle-under-Lyme	13:00
Slough	13:00
Solihull	13:00
Bassetlaw	13:30
Adur	14:00
Epping Forest	14:00
Gwynedd	14:00
Powys	14:00
Purbeck	14:00
Reigate & Banstead	14:00
<b>Sheffield</b>	<b>14:00</b>
Watford	14:00
Wrexham	14:00
Blackburn with Darwen	15:00
Cheshire East	15:00
Cheshire West & Chester	15:00
Harrogate	15:00
South Cambridgeshire	15:00
Pembrokeshire	16:00
Conwy	17:00
Denbighshire	17:00

## London Elections

Electronic counting starts at **8.30 am** on **Friday May 2**

FPTP constituency declarations expected from **mid afternoon**

The Mayoral result is expected before **8.30 pm**

Top up list results are expected shortly after the mayoral declaration.