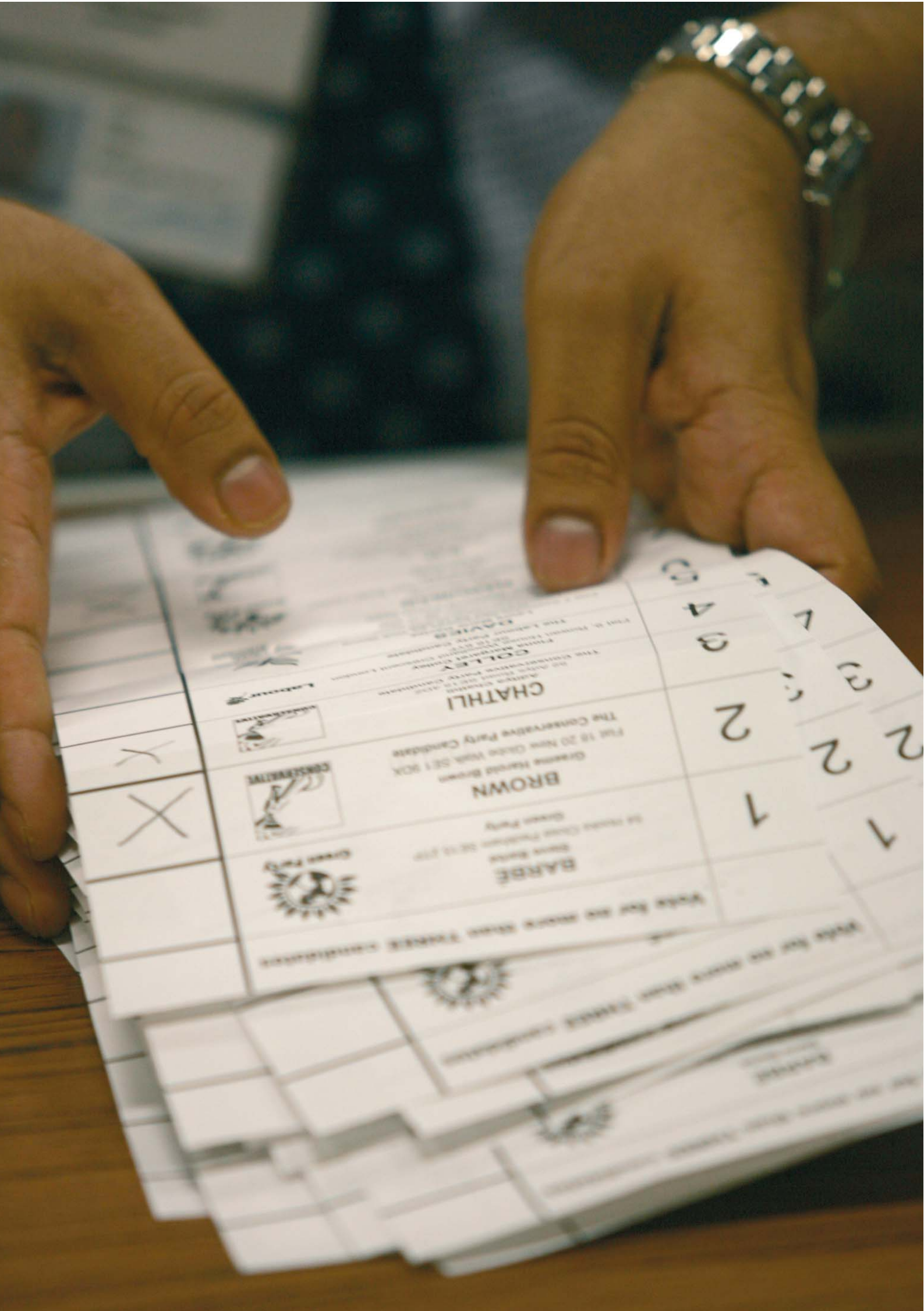


**POLLING
STATION**



Electoral Reform Society

**The great local
vote swindle**



CHATHLI

Green Party
Full 18 20 New Club 1981 90K

BROWN

Green Party
Full 18 20 New Club 1981 90K

BARBE



X

X

The great local vote swindle

The local
government
elections on
4 May 2006

A photograph of a polling station entrance. A wooden door is open, revealing a person inside. Signs above the door and on the door itself read "POLLING STATION". A "WAY IN" sign with an arrow points into the room. A "No smoking in this building" sign is also visible. A large document is posted on the wall to the left.

hones



No smoking in this building

atch

ing Rooms B&D

**POLLING
STATION**

WAY IN

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Executive summary

The May 2006 local election results provided cold comfort for any of the national parties, and more importantly for people who believe in strong local democracy. Although turnout was higher than in most recent sets of local elections, it was still disappointingly low. The electoral system produced a situation in many parts of England in which council representation and control were an extremely distorted reflection of the votes cast by local people.

This report analyses the local elections of 2006. It contains statistics on the seats up for election nationally and detailed results for each of the London boroughs, and examines the performance of the electoral system in all types of authority that were up for election in May 2006. Among the findings from the analysis are:

- In six out of 32 London boroughs, the party that won the most seats had not won the highest share of the vote. In two of those councils, overall control of the council went to the second most popular party.
- In six out of 36 metropolitan boroughs there was the same 'wrong winner' phenomenon.
- In several local authorities controlled by all the main parties (Newham for Labour, Eastleigh for the Liberal Democrats and Bexley for the Conservatives) the electoral system produced virtual one-party states despite people having voted in a much less overwhelming fashion.
- In several councils, notably Peterborough (Labour), Cambridge (Conservatives) and Rotherham (Liberal Democrats), a party had more than 20 per cent of the votes but failed to win any seats. Green voters in London were particularly likely to be deprived of a voice.
- In some authorities the electoral system failed to represent the main opposition adequately – in the borough of Barking & Dagenham, the Conservatives with 9,315 votes elected one councillor and the BNP

with 8,506 votes elected 12 (subject to resolving a returning officer error). This can lead to artificial polarisation of local politics.

- Some councils see a large number of seats changing hands on a small change in votes, as in Richmond and Tamworth.
- Some ward elections are decided on ridiculously small shares of those voting – 24.9 per cent of the vote elected a BNP councillor in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Both the Conservatives and Labour improved their gender balance somewhat, although there was only one council electing this time in which women outnumbered men.
- The Supplementary Vote system for electing mayors creates confusion, spoiled ballots and wasted votes on a massive scale.

The report also examines the fortunes of the main parties.

- Labour are in a vulnerable position, with a low share of the vote (in part because of the adverse conditions at the time of the poll), signs of anti-Labour tactical voting and a very poor performance in the party's top 200 marginal seats.
- The Conservatives made gains in seats but their share of the vote was unimpressive, rising by only a percentage point or less in London and the metropolitan councils. They still have a mountain to climb for an overall majority.
- The Liberal Democrats fared less well than they might have had reason to expect, particularly in London, and often did poorly where they had controlled councils.
- Three-party politics at a local level is dead in many areas, with increasing competition from minor parties, independents and local political parties, but the electoral system is still based on the assumption of *two*-party politics.

The 2006 local elections provide ample evidence that the current electoral system is a seriously flawed way of choosing local councillors and should be replaced by a fairer system that increases voter choice and reflects the balance of local opinion more accurately. We show how a different voting system could improve the way local authorities are elected.

The results in May 2006 also raise worrying questions for all the political parties. Labour in particular received a 'wake up call' and one thing in particular that should be roused from its slumber is the party's 1997 commitment to a referendum on the way we elect our MPs.

We hope that there is much in this report that will interest those who want to know more about the state of public opinion, local government and national politics in Britain.

The principal author of the report was Lewis Baston, Research Officer of the Electoral Reform Society. Alex Folkes and Christine McCartney each contributed chapters (on mayors and women's representation respectively), and Ken Ritchie drafted the interim report and honed the analysis. Stuart Stoner, Malcolm Clark, Ken Ritchie, James Osmond and Mary Southcott helped on the night shift on 4-5 May, and the next day Christine McCartney, Paul Davies and Jon Pyke entered lots of data with admirable speed and accuracy.



NEWINGTON

NUNHEAD

**SOUTHWARK
COUNCIL
64**

SOUTHWARK ELECTION

Introduction

Introduction

Local government elections take place every year in May (very occasionally – as in 2001 and 2004 – in June) for a range of local authorities. The pattern of elections is irregular, so that over a four-year cycle a different set of authorities is up for election each year.

Local government elections are affected by both local and national factors; the mix will vary from year to year and area to area, but the broad pattern of share of the vote, gains and losses in seats and councils, is a reasonable indicator of where the parties stand nationally.

In some years (notably 1970, 1983 and 1987, and to some extent in 1978 and 1991) the government party has examined the local election results to see whether the circumstances were right to call a general election. In local election years when an incumbent government is particularly unpopular, the result can be a vast cull of that party's councillors. Labour polled exceptionally badly in local elections in 1967-69 and 1977, and the Conservatives suffered a virtual wipe-out in the round of elections from 1993 to 1996.

Local election results tend to go consistently against the party nationally in power, particularly when the government is a Labour government. Even in the honeymoon period of the 1998 election, the Labour lead was lower than in the 1997 general election or in the national polls. There is always a turnout differential that makes it difficult to get Labour supporters to the local polls while Labour hold office nationally.

Local variation seems to have increased significantly in the past decade or more, making local elections a less reliable indicator of national patterns than before (and requiring a more subtle analysis to determine what is going on).

- Movements between the national parties are affected by local issues such as the poor performance of a council controlled by a certain party (hence an against-the-trend gain for Labour in Plymouth in 2003, for instance). Some councils, such as Conservative Wandsworth, are insulated from national swings in opinion because their local electorate thinks they are good at running the council. There was not much of this sort of thing before 1990 (although of course it did exist).
- The Liberal Democrats have made a particular strength of their local government base. Hard work at the level of an individual ward can create a nucleus of political support which can withstand national swings of opinion. Once a ward has been established as a base, the party can attack other wards in the same authority and gradually build up strength. Eventually the party can end up with a strong role even on traditionally Lab-Con authorities such as Bolton or Southampton.
- Because of the small scale of ward politics (there are usually 5-10,000 voters in London wards and fewer in rural areas) it is possible for minor-party, local-party and non-party candidates to become established.
- Personal votes for sitting councillors or hard working campaigners can be an important influence on the outcome given that the electorates tend to be relatively small and turnout tends to be low.

Background to 2006

The local elections of 4 May 2006 were the first large-scale test of the popularity of the government re-elected in May 2005, and the two main opposition parties under their new leaders David Cameron and Sir Menzies Campbell. They also decided who should run local services in large parts of England. Of all the

seats up for re-election, 42.5 per cent were in London where every borough council seat was contested. Seats were also up for election in the metropolitan boroughs and some unitary and district councils in the rest of England, in most cases for a third of the council's membership.

No seats, except for the occasional by-election, were contested in Scotland or Wales. Within England, the areas with elections in 2006 were primarily urban. The district councils with elections tended to be the larger towns that did not achieve unitary status in the 1990s, such as Oxford, Cambridge and Preston. There were only a few elections in rural areas such as South Lakeland and West Lindsey.

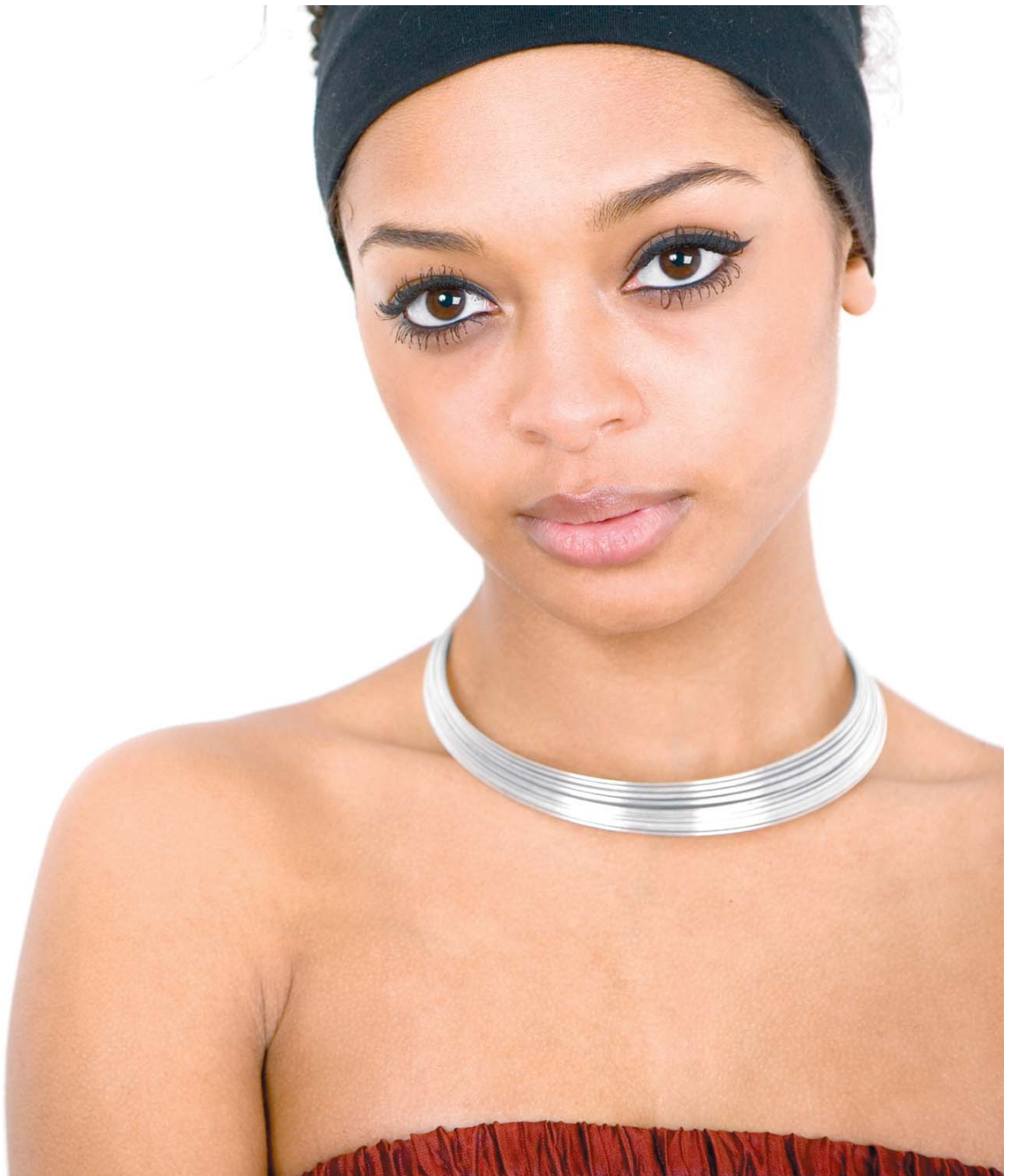
The London elections were the principal focus of media interest during and after the campaign, not only because political discourse in Britain is centred on London but also because all-out elections in these councils offered the possibility of large-scale changes in terms of councillors and seats. The London borough seats were last fought in 2002, a year when the government was more popular and Labour and the Conservatives were fairly evenly matched in London, while the elections in many other areas were comparable only with 2004, a bad year for Labour.

From the beginning of 2006 onwards, Labour had no reason to look forward to the elections with much confidence, as the party's national popularity sagged and David Cameron in particular attracted positive media coverage. The Liberal Democrat leadership election did not seem to dent the party's ability to score electoral gains from Labour, as shown in the Dunfermline & West Fife by-election in February. There was a run of bad publicity about donations to the Labour party and appointments to the House of Lords, and the personal finances of the Cabinet Minister, Tessa Jowell, who was co-ordinating the London campaign. This probably affected morale more than actual support and Labour had some reason to hope that a strong campaign stressing the successes of some boroughs in reducing crime and providing good services could produce enough positive results to provide some cause for satisfaction on election day.

However, in the two weeks before the poll, the government was hit by even more adverse publicity, including revelations about John Prescott's private life and a much more serious and worrying bungle at the Home Office which led to foreign prisoners being released without being considered for deportation. From anecdotal evidence, this seems to have hit

	London boroughs	Metropolitan boroughs	Unitary authorities	Shire districts	Total
Authorities	32	36	20	89	177
Seats	1,861	815	352	1,350	4,378
Seats %	42.5	18.6	8.0	30.8	
Labour	866	393	144	379	1,782
Con.	653	187	99	570	1,509
Lib Dem	309	192	88	314	903
Others	33	43	21	87	184
<i>Previous election</i>	2002	2004	2002/3/4	Mostly 2002	

home much more with the electorate than any of the other stories. It also exploded Labour's campaigning strategy in several local authorities, where greater public safety was a main point. In the week before the local elections, Prescott and Home Secretary Charles Clarke were both under clouds, and Patricia Hewitt's defence of the government's record on the health service also attracted strong criticism. It was a poor prelude for the elections, and must have resulted in the results being worse for Labour than they would have been otherwise.



Anjelika Obusimwe *Tulse Hill*

The party running the council seems to change with every election. Whoever is in power just plans for the next four years rather than for the future. I don't want short term thinking. This area needs more long term planning.



London

London

Introduction



The present London boroughs were established in 1964 and since 1974 have had elections for all councillors every four years. The all-out elections in London allow some features of the local government electoral system to shine through clearly, because control is totally dependent on what happens in a single election year. Unlike the metropolitan, unitary and district elections there are no holdovers from 2003 or 2004 on London borough councils.

Ever since their inception, the London borough councils have had an anomalous multi-member winner-takes-all electoral system. Each ward has several members elected at the same time and each voter has as many X-votes as there are council seats in the ward. Nearly all wards have three councillors, particularly since the current ward boundaries were introduced in 2002.

Multi-member First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) elections tend to magnify the distortions in the relationship between votes and seats inherent to FPTP. If people voted exactly along party lines, the result would be that the three candidates of the most popular party would win all three seats in the ward, even though there may be significant levels of support for other parties in the ward.

Of course, people do not vote exactly along party lines, and some voters are confused by the system and do not use all their votes, so the votes cast for candidates of the same party will vary a little. Councillors and well-known local personalities will sometimes have personal votes, people will sometimes support candidates from one or other ethnic community, or vote for women. An additional factor that has tended to increase variation between the votes for candidates of the same party is that more parties contest seats and sometimes, from deliberate strategy or lack of resources, stand only one candidate. The Green Party often does this, and the other votes from supporters of the Greens can cause differences in votes for the candidates of the other parties. Alphabetical order is a small but sometimes significant factor in the variation. But unless the ward is very marginal, or the difference in votes for each candidate very large, the result will still be that the three winners will be from the same party. 'Split wards' are the exception rather than the rule.

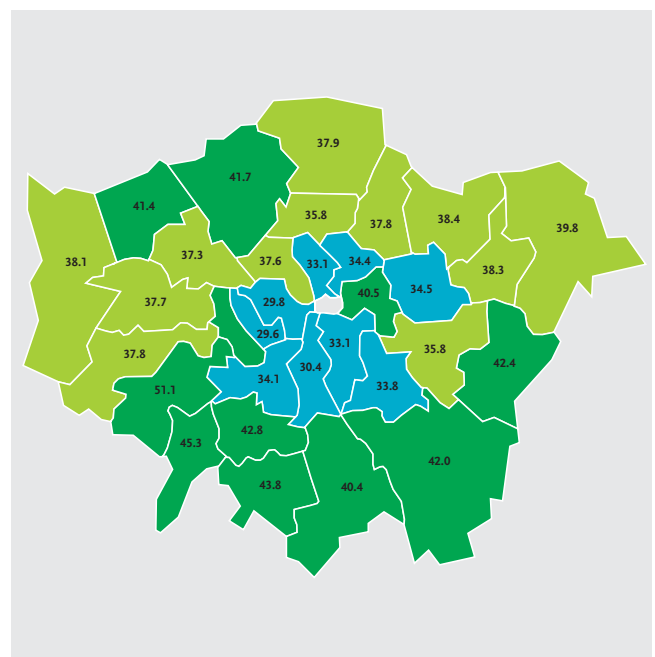
Multi-member winner-takes-all elections sometimes result in a party with less than one vote in three having three out of three representatives for the ward. There are some examples noted in the borough by borough analysis which follows. But the prize recent example is probably from the 2004 metropolitan borough elections, which were all-out because of boundary changes, when the Liberal Democrats won all three seats in the Calder ward of Calderdale

council with only 28.5 per cent of the vote.

Multi-member elections cause some problems when it comes to deciding what the share of the vote may be, particularly when parties only stand one candidate. Each method of calculation has advantages and disadvantages. The standard method is to take the vote of the highest-polling candidate of each party, add them together and calculate percentages from the total. This method is used in this report. There are other possibilities, including taking averages, summing votes, and more sophisticated algorithms for dealing with parties that stand incomplete slates.

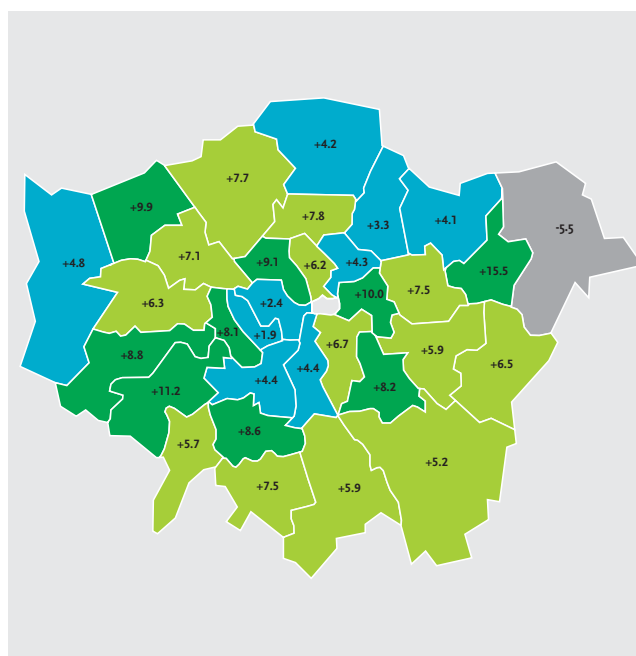
**Derek and Eileen
Rostock
Dagenham
We voted
Conservative and
only have one
councillor to show
for it in the entire
borough. Fewer
people voted for the
BNP but they won 12
seats. The BNP have
done well out of this
system, even though
the number of votes
they got didn't really
justify it.**





Changes in turnout in 2006 were related to the level of media attention on the borough and its perceived marginality. The largest increase was in Barking & Dagenham (up 15.7 percentage points) where the 2002 elections were a routine Labour walkover and the 2006 elections saw huge attention focused on the BNP in the borough. Richmond upon Thames saw a large increase in turnout (up 11.2 percentage points), perhaps as Liberal Democrats who had sat out the 2002 elections returned to the polls to evict the Conservative council. The bitter contest in Tower Hamlets (turnout up 10.0 percentage points) also attracted more voters. In Camden (up 9.1 percentage points) the contest had been flagged as a key test for Labour, and although Labour polled more votes than in 2002 the other parties added even more votes and Labour lost control. New activity by parties such as the BNP and Respect, who target previously low turnout sections of the electorate and attract fervent opposition as well as support, seems to raise overall turnout markedly.

Turnout fell in only one borough, Havering. This had much to do with the circumstances of the 2002 election, when a Labour-led council had become unpopular with electors and the Conservatives were on a roll after their 2001 general election success in the borough when they gained Romford and Upminster. There was an unusually large increase in turnout in 2002, up from 34.0 per cent to 45.0 per cent, which subsided in 2006. The smallest increases in turnout tended to be in boroughs where the local elections are not competitive. Bottom of the league were Kensington & Chelsea (+ 1.9 percentage points) and Westminster (+ 2.4 percentage points), two extremely safe Conservative councils. The rise in Wandsworth was the next lowest, at only 3.3 percentage points.



Dark green indicates rise of eight or more percentage points, light green a rise of five to eight points (average rise was 6.4 points), light blue a smaller rise than that and grey a fall.

Outcomes

Party performance

The following tables summarise what happened in the 2006 London borough elections and compare this with what happened in previous elections. The 2006 elections saw the Labour vote continue to decline from its recent peak in 1994, and the vote for candidates other than those of the three main parties continue to increase to a record high. Both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats increased their share a little since 2002. However, the Conservatives failed to achieve a dramatic breakthrough, and the Lib Dems did not get back up to where they were in 1994 or the 1980s.

London-wide vote share	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	Others
2006	34.8	27.9	20.7	16.6
2002	34.4	33.8	20.3	11.6
1998	32.3	40.5	20.6	6.6
1994	31.3	41.5	21.8	5.4
1990	37.8	38.3	14.1	9.7
1986	35.8	37.4	23.8	3.1
1982	43.0	30.4	24.6	2.0
1978	49.6	39.6	6.4	4.4
1974	41.7	42.9	12.3	3.1
1971	39.4	53.1	4.2	3.3
1968	60.1	28.3	7.2	4.4
1964	NA	NA	NA	NA

	Vote share %	Vote change (02/06)	Seats	Change in seats (02/06)	Seats share %	Council control	Council change (02/06)
Conservative	34.8	+0.4	785	+132	42.2	14	+6
Labour	27.9	-5.9	684	-182	36.8	7	-8
Lib Dem	20.7	+0.4	317	+8	17.0	3	0
Green	7.9	+2.4	12	+11	0.6	0	0
Respect	1.8	+2.7	15	+15	0.8	0	0
BNP	1.1	+2.7	14	+14	0.8	0	0
Others	5.8	+2.7	34	+2	1.8	0	0
NOC						8	+2

The shares of the vote in the 2006 London borough elections seemed to fit into the broad pattern of all elections since 1994. The Conservative vote remained pretty much where it was before, in a band of percentages around 30 per cent (albeit at the top of that band). Labour's vote has varied wildly depending on what type of body is being elected, and the vote for 'Others' also depends on what is being voted for. In general elections the 'Other' share is lower than in other elections, although it has been increasing in all types of election. Proportional systems tend to depress the votes of the two main parties.

However, analysis of the votes took some time to complete after the election and immediate comment depended on the more tangible indicators of gains and losses of seats and councils. These indicators gave the Conservatives great cause for cheer, offering

them their best year since the Falklands-influenced elections of May 1982.

London borough cllrs	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	Others
2006	785	684	317	75
2002	653	866	309	33
1998	538	1,050	301	28
1994	519	1,044	323	31
1990	731	925	229	29
1986	685	957	249	23
1982	980	781	124	29
1978	960	882	30	36
1974	713	1,090	27	37
1971	597	1,221	9	36
1968	1,438	350	10	65
1964	668	1,112	13	66

London-wide vote share	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	Others	System
2006 LB	34.8	27.9	20.7	16.6	MM FPTP
2005 GE	31.9	38.9	21.9	7.3	FPTP
2004 GLA list	28.5	25.0	16.9	29.6	List PR
2004 GLA seat	31.2	24.7	18.4	25.8	FPTP
2004 Mayor	29.1	36.8	15.3	18.8	SV
2004 Euro	26.8	24.7	15.3	33.2	List PR
2002 LB	34.4	33.8	20.3	11.6	MM FPTP
2001 GE	30.5	47.4	17.5	3.9	FPTP
2000 Mayor	27.1	13.1	11.9	47.9	SV
2000 GLA list	29.0	30.3	14.8	25.9	List PR
2000 GLA seat	33.2	31.6	18.9	16.2	FPTP
1999 Euro	32.7	35.0	11.7	20.6	List PR
1998 LB	32.3	40.5	20.6	6.6	MM FPTP
1997 GE	31.2	49.5	14.6	4.7	FPTP
1994 Euro	29.8	50.3	12.1	7.8	FPTP
1994 LB	31.3	41.5	21.8	5.4	MM FPTP

Control of boroughs	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	No Overall Control
2006	14	7	3	8
2002	8	15	3	6
1998	4	18	2	8
1994	4	17	3	8
1990	12	14	3	3
1986	11	15	2	4
1982	17	12	0	3
1978	17	14	0	1
1974	18	13	0	1
1971	10	21	0	1
1968	28	3	0	1
1964	9	20	0	3

Susan Ursell Camberwell

Our borough is too geographically divided. The Conservatives get votes across the whole borough but their councillors are confined to the southern tip. Why can't we have councillors from different parties representing each area?

Outcomes Incumbency

As well as being a reaction against the national government, there was also a pattern in the London borough elections of voters reacting against incumbent council administrations. Although not completely uniform, there was a trend for a party, even the Conservatives, to do relatively poorly in areas where they had been running the council.

Labour's average vote share loss in boroughs where the party played no part in the council administration was 4.8 per cent, compared to an average loss of 7.4 per cent of the vote in boroughs where the party had controlled or led the council.

Labour lost 167 seats in the boroughs where the party had majority control before the elections, and another 10 in the two boroughs where Labour led an administration (Harrow and Waltham Forest). In the other half of London the party nearly broke even. Labour lost another 25 seats in two boroughs where the Conservatives had been in minority administration (Havering and Hillingdon) but won a net 20 in boroughs the Lib Dems controlled or led.

The Conservative share of the vote rose by an average of 2.2 per cent in boroughs where they had no previous share in the administration, and fell 0.9 per cent when they were previously in majority control. Boroughs in which the Conservatives had led a minority administration, or been junior coalition partners, showed no clear trend.

Despite general gains, the Conservatives lost a net nine seats in boroughs they controlled before the

LABOUR	Vote change 02/06	Councillors change 02/06
MAJORITY		
Barking & Dagenham	-14.3	-4
Bexley	-8.2	-23
Brent	-7.3	-14
Camden	-4.0	-17
Croydon	-11.9	-10
Ealing	-12.2	-19
Greenwich	-8.7	-2
Hackney	-1.1	-1
Hammersmith & Fulham	-9.3	-15
Haringey	-5.3	-12
Hounslow	-7.8	-12
Lewisham	-6.4	-19
Merton	-2.0	-5
Newham	-7.2	-5
Tower Hamlets	-10.9	-9
Overall change	-7.3 (average)	-167 (net)
LEADING NOC		
Harrow	-12.3	-7
Waltham Forest	-4.2	-3
Overall change	-8.3 (average)	-10 (net)

elections (although this is mostly accounted for by their sweeping losses in Richmond).

Incumbency was particularly bad for the Liberal Democrats, whose vote fell severely in every council where they led the administration (6.9 per cent on average, and 7.8 per cent where they had control). However, in Waltham Forest where they had entered a formal pact to support a Labour minority

CONSERVATIVE	Vote change 02/06	Councillors change 02/06
MAJORITY		
Barnet	+2.2	+4
Bromley	+3.6	+8
Enfield	-11.0	-5
Kensington & Chelsea	+3.1	+3
Redbridge	-3.3	+1
Richmond-upon-Thames	-4.7	-21
Wandsworth	+1.7	+1
Westminster	+0.9	0
Overall change	-0.9 (average)	-9 (net)
LEADING NOC		
Havering	-0.7	+8
Hillingdon	+5.5	+14
	+2.4 (average)	+22 (net)

administration, their vote slipped only slightly and they gained seats. Their vote on average in the rest of London was up a little, but there was wide variation between different boroughs.

In the five councils where they led the administration, the Lib Dems lost 43 seats, and they gained 51 seats in the rest of London (21 of them in one borough, Richmond).

To some extent, incumbents might be expected to fare relatively poorly, as some results reflected exceptional outcomes in 2002 and the 2006 election was a return to normality. This was true of Enfield, where there was a particularly large swing to the Conservatives in 2002, and Merton where Labour suffered a large swing in 2002 but only a small one in

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	Vote change 02/06	Councillors change 02/06
MAJORITY		
Kingston-upon-Thames	-8.9	-5
Sutton	-4.8	-11
Islington	-9.7	-14
Overall change	-7.8 (average)	-30 (net)
LEADING NOC		
Lambeth	-6.0	-11
Southwark	-5.2	-2
Overall change	-5.6 (average)	-13 (net)

2006. But it also reflects the difficulties of local politics, in which councillors are often held accountable for things that are beyond their control such as planning decisions, and have little financial independence. Local elections in some boroughs such as Lambeth (and some other councils such as Harrogate, Torbay and Plymouth) have produced successive reactions against incumbents (exaggerated in terms of seats) which do little good for the localities.

Outcomes

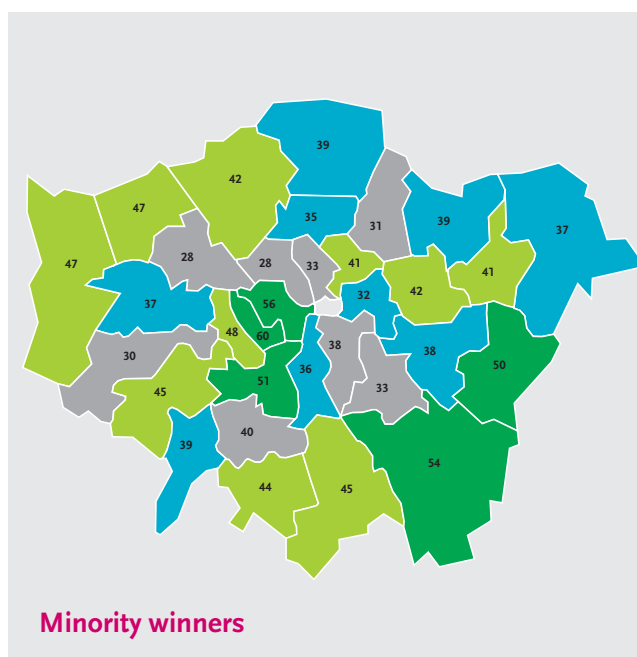
The electoral system

The 2006 London borough elections provided illustrations of several faults of the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system of electing councillors. These include:

- Minority winners
- Wrong winners
- Exaggerated mandates
- Excessive swings of seats
- Unrepresented parties

Minority winners

Dark green indicates majority winner, light green winner had over 40 per cent, light blue winner with under 40 per cent, grey no overall control. Numbers indicate percentage vote for largest party on the council.



In only five out of the 32 London boroughs did a party win more than 50 per cent of the vote. These boroughs were Bexley, Bromley, Kensington & Chelsea, Wandsworth and Westminster, for the Conservatives in each case. In 10 more boroughs the majority party had more than 40 per cent of the vote, but there were nine boroughs where a party won a majority of seats despite polling less than 40 per cent of the vote. These boroughs were Ealing, Enfield, Havering and Redbridge for the Conservatives, Greenwich, Haringey, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets for Labour, and Kingston for the Lib Dems. The wooden spoon for popular support goes to Tower Hamlets, whose ruling Labour group won 31.9 per cent of the vote, the lowest ever for a majority in a London borough.

As party politics has become more diverse and voting behaviour has moved away from main-party loyalty, majority winners have become less common in the London boroughs. In 1978 either Labour or Conservative won more than 50 per cent of the vote in 20 boroughs out of 32, and even in 1994 there were 10 majority winners – now there are only five. The lowest share of the vote to win control of a borough has also declined, from 43.1 per cent in 1978 to 39.2 per cent in 1994 to only 31.9 per cent in 2006.

Wrong winners

In six out of the 32 London boroughs the party polling the most votes did not get the most seats.

In two of these boroughs (Haringey and Kingston) the party that came second in share of the vote had enough seats for overall control. In another borough (Islington) the second party won exactly half of the seats and should be able to exercise control on the mayoral casting vote.

In the three others (Brent, Camden and Hounslow) there is no overall control but the party with the most councillors had fewer votes than another party.

In 2004 there were four wrong winners, in each case a Labour majority despite the Conservatives having more votes – by a long way in Bexley and Croydon, and narrowly in Hammersmith & Fulham and Merton. In nearly every round of London borough elections there are one or more boroughs where the electorate did not get the council for which they voted – it is a systematic flaw of FPTP in local government in London and elsewhere.

Exaggerated mandates

The highest share of the vote won by any party in any borough was 60.4 per cent for the Conservatives in Kensington & Chelsea. However, in 12 boroughs the winning party won two-thirds or more of the seats, creating a council with a lopsided majority that makes effective scrutiny and opposition difficult. In Newham Labour received 90 per cent of the seats, with 54 councillors to three each for the two opposition parties.

Excessive swings in seats

In Bexley in 2006, Labour went from 51 per cent of the seats on 33 per cent of the vote to only 14 per cent of seats on 25 per cent of the vote. There were similar exaggerated losses in Hammersmith & Fulham and Ealing. In some councils under FPTP, particularly under multi-member FPTP, large numbers of seats can change hands based on relatively small changes in votes. This tends to happen in areas which are relatively socially and politically homogeneous and marginal, such as Bexley and Richmond.

The classic case of this phenomenon, however, is Richmond. A large number of wards are marginal and the council has swung back and forth between a

Richmond-upon-Thames borough elections 1998–2006

	Conservative			Liberal Democrat		
	Votes %	Seats	Seats %	Votes %	Seats	Seats %
1998	35.6	14	26.9	42.6	34	65.4
2002	43.9	39	72.2	36.3	15	27.8
2006	39.2	18	33.3	44.9	36	66.7

two-to-one Lib Dem majority and a two-to-one Conservative majority on relatively small changes in votes in the last two elections.

Unrepresented parties

Some areas are electoral deserts for one party or another, not because they have no voters but because those voters are spread thinly and evenly and do not form a critical mass in any ward. There were seven boroughs in which the Lib Dems polled more than 10 per cent and elected no councillors (Bexley, Croydon, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Merton, Wandsworth, Westminster) and two where this happened to the Conservatives (Haringey, Newham). Labour's share of the vote in the two boroughs where the party won no seats (Richmond and Sutton) was below 10 per cent, but a persistent lack of electoral success can demoralise parties and cause their organisation to wither.

While this problem affects the major parties in some areas, it operated harshly and consistently against the Green Party which has significant support in many boroughs, particularly in inner London. The section about the Green Party in the analysis of party performance has the details.

In other boroughs a party may have a considerable vote but only a token one or two councillors, which is not enough according to most councils' standing orders to qualify as a group. Group status brings

benefits such as higher allowances for leaders, and the ability to appoint staff to assist the group with its duties. One or two councillors working by themselves will find it difficult to develop and put forward the party's policies in the borough and often find themselves isolated. There are glaring examples for the three main parties. The Conservatives have a lone councillor in Barking & Dagenham for their 18.7 per cent of the vote, Labour has two in Havering for 15.4 per cent and the Lib Dems only one to show for their 19.7 per cent of the vote. The worst case, though, is the Green Party in Hackney with one councillor and 20.6 per cent of the vote.

London Borough by borough

Barking & Dagenham

The BNP gains in Barking & Dagenham attracted a great deal of attention on election night, but the results raised a lot of questions about the electoral system.

Non-Labour representation on the council is dominated by the BNP, with 12 councillors (subject to remedying the mistaken result in Eastbury ward) and only one Conservative. This does not accurately reflect the votes cast at the 2006 election, in which the Conservatives were the largest non-Labour party despite their token representation on the council. UKIP also polled well but received no seats at all.

Local politics in Barking & Dagenham is artificially polarised between Labour and the BNP despite the existence of more diverse views among the voters. The Conservatives in particular were robbed by having their vote evenly distributed.

However, had the BNP stood more candidates, the party would have polled a higher share of the vote than recorded, and also elected more councillors. The party topped the poll in all but one of the seats it contested, electing 12 of its 13 candidates. The only ward in which it was not ahead was, not coincidentally, in Dagenham rather than Barking. This may have reflected slower social change in Dagenham, but also a more determined anti-BNP campaign in that half of the borough.

Part of the problem with Barking & Dagenham politics that has led to the rise of the BNP is the fact that in local politics it has been a bit of a democracy desert. Labour have dominated the council ever since it was established in 1964. Labour could rely on having at least six councillors before a single vote

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	18.7	+4.9	1	-1
Labour	41.3	-14.3	38	-4
Lib Dem	1.6	-21.6	0	-3
Green	3.5	+2.3	0	0
BNP	17.0	+17.0	12	+12
UKIP	13.2	+13.2	0	0
Others	4.7	-1.5	0	-4

LABOUR HOLD

was cast (two in Abbey, one each in Gascoigne, River, Thames and Whalebone wards) because not enough candidates were put forward by opposition parties. Before the BNP elected their 12 candidates in 2006, the only other term of the council in which there was a group of more than five councillors for an opposition party was 1968-71 when there were 13 Conservatives. Although the current Labour group has tried hard to engage in dialogue with residents of all communities and be more responsive, there have been many years of remote and unresponsive local government.

Barnet

The Conservatives returned to power in Barnet with an increased majority despite a controversial term in office from 2002 to 2006. The Labour vote in the borough fell and all the other parties benefited, although the increase in the Liberal Democrat and Green votes brought them no extra seats.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	41.8	+2.2	37	+4
Labour	26.7	-7.2	20	-4
Lib Dem	19.8	+2.7	6	0
Green	10.4	+2.1	0	0
Others	1.4	+0.2	0	0

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

Bexley

Bexley has had two unsatisfactory election results in a row. In 2002 Labour won a one-seat majority on the council despite lagging a long way behind the Conservatives in terms of the votes cast by the electors of Bexley. Labour, with 33.3 per cent of the vote, won 32 seats while the Conservatives won 30 seats with 42.1 per cent. The new ward boundaries were widely felt to have advantaged Labour. A lone Liberal Democrat was elected to represent the 15.2 per cent who voted for his party, but in 2005 he ended his lonely stint on the Lib Dem benches and joined the Conservatives.

The 2006 result illustrated another feature of FPTP elections. While Labour had won on a minority vote in 2002, there were a lot of marginal wards vulnerable to a swing to the Conservatives. When this happened in 2006, the Conservatives won a landslide majority. While their share of the vote, at just over 50 per cent, justified them taking a majority of seats, winning 86 per cent of the seats was excessive. The reduced Labour group of nine members may be too small to conduct the necessary functions of scrutinising and criticising the ruling group, and providing an alternative leadership when the next elections come round.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	50.3	+8.7	54	+24
Labour	24.8	-8.2	9	-23
Lib Dem	11.0	-4.0	0	-1
BNP	3.8	+3.5	0	
UKIP	2.7	+3.5	0	
Others	7.3	+3.5	0	

CONSERVATIVE GAIN FROM LABOUR

Brent

Brent was one of six boroughs in which the party with the most votes won fewer seats than one of its competitors. Labour were clearly ahead in votes cast in the elections in Brent (although well short of deserving an overall majority) with 34.7 per cent, while the Liberal Democrats trailed on 28 per cent, only just ahead of the third-placed Conservatives. Despite this, the Liberal Democrats won 27 seats to Labour's 21.

The problem for Labour is that the party polled a respectable share of the vote everywhere in Brent, tending to come second to the Conservatives in the northern wards and to the Lib Dems in the eastern wards. Winning 25-30 per cent of the vote does not help win wards although it does demonstrate widespread support. The Liberal Democrat and Conservative votes were much more efficiently distributed, either winning seats or not wasting many votes on a good second place. The 2006 results leave Brent politics rather unstable. A 5 per cent swing back to Labour would win them 18 more seats and a comfortable majority.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	27.5	-5.4	15	-4
Labour	34.7	-7.3	21	-14
Lib Dem	28.0	+11.0	27	+18
Green	8.7	+2.9	0	
Others	1.1	-1.2	0	

LABOUR LOSE TO NO OVERALL CONTROL

Bromley

Bromley became a one-party state council in the 2006 elections as the Conservatives expanded their already comfortable majority by winning seats from the other two parties. The Conservatives now have 82 per cent of the seats and the other parties have been reduced to levels that make effective opposition and scrutiny difficult, with the Liberal Democrats suffering for having support evenly spread in the borough. While the Conservatives certainly deserve to have an overall majority on the council, their support entitled them to 32-35 seats rather than the 49 they received.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	54.1	+3.6	49	+8
Labour	12.3	-1.8	4	-2
Lib Dem	25.6	-7.0	7	-6
Green	4.4	+3.2	0	0
Others	3.7	+2.1		

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

Camden

In Camden there was a wrong 'winner' and a large turnover of seats on a relatively small shift in votes. Labour polled the most votes of any of the parties, but the Liberal Democrats (second in votes) won the most seats.

The reason for this was partly that Labour were very lucky with the electoral system in 2002, winning a two-thirds majority with only a third of the vote. In 2006, although the Labour share of the vote did not fall much (and because of higher turnout, the Labour total actually rose), Labour lost nearly half of their seats. This was mainly because the votes for other parties tended to line up behind the best-placed anti-Labour candidates, as illustrated by the results in the marginal Labour wards shown in the table.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	26.0	+0.7	14	+3
Labour	29.0	-4.0	18	-17
Lib Dem	27.8	+4.6	20	+12
Green	14.8	+1.2	2	+2
Respect	1.3	+3.5	0	
Others	0.9	+3.5	0	

LABOUR LOSE TO NO OVERALL CONTROL

Another notable feature of the Camden result was the under-representation of the Green Party, whose 14.8 per cent of the vote would have won them nine seats had the result been proportional. They suffered from having their vote evenly spread throughout the borough, although in this election they did manage to elect two councillors in Highgate.

	Position in 2002	Change in Con %	Change in Lab %	Change in LD %	Change in Grn %	Outcome
Conservative targets						
Highgate	Lab 5.0% over Con and Green	+5.3	-4.9	-1.8	+8.2	2 Grn gains, 1 Con gain
Bloomsbury	Lab 6.0% over Con	+3.8	+1.7	-2.7	+1.0	1 Con gain, 2 Lab holds
Gospel Oak	Lab 14.8% over Con	+14.1	-5.1	-4.7	-2.0	3 Con gains
Liberal democrat targets						
Camden Town with Primrose Hill	Split Lab/LD 1 Lab hold	-2.2	+6.8	+13.7	+0.1	1 LD gain,
Kentish Town	Lab 10.6% over LD	-0.6	-5.3	+10.4	+11.0	2 LD gains, 1 Lab hold
Kilburn	Lab 24.4% over Con	-3.8	-5.8	+25.8	-3.1	3 LD gains
Cantelowes	Lab 24.6% over LD	-0.8	-15.4	+18.2	-2.1	3 LD gains

Croydon

Labour won Croydon three times in succession from 1994 to 2002 despite the Conservatives always having more votes. This was because there are a number of very safe Conservative seats in the south of the borough where turnout has been quite high, while Labour wins wards in the centre and north of Croydon with smaller shares of the vote on a lower turnout.

This pattern came to an end in 2006 as the Conservatives won control, although it should be noted that the Conservative share of the vote was fractionally down on 2002. The result was more because Labour's vote fell sharply and went mainly to the Greens (in some wards to the Liberal Democrats).

The parties gaining votes – Greens, Lib Dems and UKIP – were left unrepresented in the council chamber. The Lib Dems lost the seat they were defending to the Conservatives while picking up votes in wards where they stood little chance of success.

The possibility of future anomalous results in Croydon is still there. It would take a relatively small swing to Labour in order for the party to reach 36 seats and overall control. There are four Conservative seats in split wards, and two wards (six seats) which are vulnerable to a 3 per cent swing back to Labour. It is therefore possible that in a future election Labour could run Croydon with less than 30 per cent of the vote and lagging more than 10 percentage points behind the Conservatives.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	45.1	-0.0	43	+11
Labour	26.1	-11.9	27	-10
Lib Dem	13.1	+0.8	0	-1
Green	9.3	+9.0	0	0
UKIP	2.9	+2.1	0	0
Others	3.5	+2.1	0	0

CONSERVATIVE GAIN FROM LABOUR

Ealing

Ealing was one of the most dramatic results of the London borough elections, with an enormous (10 per cent) swing of votes from Labour to Conservative. A large Labour majority disappeared and was replaced by a Conservative controlled council.

However, the Conservatives won control with only 37.4 per cent support from the voters in Ealing. The other parties that gained in votes, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, were pushed to the margins in terms of seats. The Liberal Democrats dropped one seat to three, and the Greens remained unrepresented despite having a significant level of support.

In the South Acton ward, Labour returned all three councillors despite having the support of slightly less than one in three voters – 32.4 per cent.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	37.4	+7.9	37	+20
Labour	32.5	-12.2	29	-19
Lib Dem	19.6	+3.4	3	-1
Green	8.0	+0.6	0	0
Others	2.5	-0.7	0	0

CONSERVATIVE GAIN FROM LABOUR

Enfield

The Conservatives held Enfield with a reduced majority as their vote fell, to the benefit of Labour in some wards and campaigners for a local hospital, Chase Farm, in others. The two gains for the Chase Farm group marked the first time since a Liberal held a by-election seat from 1976 to 1978 that there had been any councillors elected who were not part of the Conservative or Labour group. The standing orders of Enfield council have had to be rewritten to accommodate the presence of a third party. However, two-party politics has been less solidly based among the local electorate. Liberal Democrats and Greens would have had a voice with three or four councillors each had the result been more proportional in 2006.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	38.5	-11.0	34	-5
Labour	28.0	-7.3	27	+3
Lib Dem	9.9	-1.4	0	0
Green	7.1	+5.3	0	0
UKIP	1.9	+14.4	0	0
Chase Farm	14.1	+14.4	2	+2
Others	2.3	+14.4	0	0

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

Greenwich

In Greenwich, for the second election in a row, a sizeable slippage in the Labour share of the vote caused only the slightest ripple in the composition of the council. Labour continues to enjoy better than a two-to-one majority on less than 40 per cent of the vote. The Liberal Democrats, lacking the Conservatives' concentrated support in the Eltham area, were particularly under-represented in the result although this was yet another borough in which the Greens polled a significant vote but obtained no seats.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	27.4	+1.5	13	+4
Labour	38.2	-8.7	36	-2
Lib Dem	18.4	-1.8	2	-2
Green	8.0	+4.9	0	0
Others	7.9	+4.1	0	0

LABOUR HOLD

Hackney

Labour preserved its massive majority in Hackney almost unscathed, despite the party's vote share slipping a little to just over 40 per cent. The largest opposition group on the council are the nine-strong Conservatives, but compared to the ranks of 44 Labour councillors they face a difficult task in the council's work of scrutiny and oversight, all the more significant given that Labour's Jules Pipe was re-elected mayor.

The most striking feature of the Hackney result is FPTP's ability to select the wrong opposition. The Green Party are clearly the second party in Hackney, and their 20.6 per cent of the vote is the highest in any of the London boroughs. Despite this, they elected only one councillor – one representative in 57 despite getting one vote in five. The Greens (and the Liberal Democrats who also gained votes in 2006) suffered from having their support broadly spread across the borough, compared to the Conservatives whose support is concentrated in the north east corner of the borough.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	17.1	+1.5	9	0
Labour	40.5	-1.1	44	-1
Lib Dem	16.3	+5.0	3	0
Green	20.6	+5.1	1	+1
Respect	2.6	-10.5	0	0
Others	2.9	-10.5	0	0

LABOUR HOLD

Hammersmith & Fulham

The relatively easy Conservative win in Hammersmith & Fulham in 2006 followed the election of 2002 in which they had already squeezed just ahead of Labour in terms of votes cast. The swing in seats, however, was rather disproportionate to the swing in votes. Hammersmith & Fulham politics is traditionally a two-party battle between Labour and Conservative; on this occasion, as in most other elections, other parties such as the Liberal Democrats lost out. Two rebel Conservative councillors were defeated by new Tory candidates in one ward, Palace Riverside.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	48.3	+6.6	33	+15
Labour	32.2	-9.3	13	-15
Lib Dem	14.5	0.0	0	0
Green	1.3	+1.3	0	0
Others	3.8	+1.4	0	0

CONSERVATIVE GAIN FROM LABOUR

Haringey

The election in Haringey was an incredibly close battle for control between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The result was so close that it was decided in three wards where representation was split between the two parties.

Haringey was one of the two councils in London where the party that came second in votes won a clear overall majority in seats.

Labour won a majority of three seats despite being narrowly outpolled by the Liberal Democrats. This owed much to differential turnout, with turnout in Labour wards being 33 per cent and in the Lib Dem wards being 43 per cent. The result was very polarised between the Tottenham and Hornsey parts of the constituency. Of the ruling Labour group, 25 councillors represent Tottenham and only five Hornsey or Wood Green, despite over 40 per cent of the votes for Labour in Haringey being cast in Hornsey or Wood Green. This makes it difficult for the council groups for each party to bear in mind the interests of the whole borough rather than representing the interests of its component parts.

Neither Labour nor Liberal Democrat can feel too hard done by the system. The electoral system has, for the second election in a row, created a two-party duopoly in Haringey that is not endorsed by the voters. Nearly 30 per cent of voters chose another option, for the most part the Greens or the Conservatives, but elected no councillors. FPTP has narrowed the range of political choice in the borough, created an artificial two-party system and in 2006 given an overall majority to the second-placed party.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	13.5	-2.8	0	0
Labour	35.0	-5.3	30	-12
Lib Dem	35.2	+8.5	27	+12
Green	13.1	+0.3	0	0
Respect	2.1	-0.9	0	
Others	1.2		0	

LABOUR HOLD

Harrow

Harrow saw the Conservatives gain a comfortable majority in 2006 from a council previously under no overall control.

The changes in the vote in Harrow are distorted by the lack of Liberal Democrat candidates in 2002, owing to a blunder over their nomination papers, in all but one ward. This artificially inflated the Conservative and Labour shares in 2002. It is however intriguing to note that the Lib Dems got three seats for their 2.4 per cent of the borough vote in 2002 and only one seat for nearly 20 per cent in 2006.

In the Greenhill ward, the Conservatives won all three seats despite polling only one third (33.5 per cent) of the vote.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	46.6	-3.1	38	+9
Labour	31.1	-12.3	24	-7
Lib Dem	19.7	+17.3	1	-2
Green	1.6	0.0	0	0
Others	1.0	-1.9	0	0

CONSERVATIVE GAIN FROM NO OVERALL CONTROL

Havering

The result of the election in Havering was somewhat odd. The Conservatives gained control despite their vote falling a little across the borough because they managed to benefit from the sharp drop in the Labour vote in the wards previously held by that party.

As in several other local authorities, the BNP won representation despite polling fewer votes than the Greens.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	36.8	-0.7	34	+8
Labour	15.4	-9.9	2	-7
Lib Dem	2.4	-3.0	1	0
Green	2.5	+1.8	0	0
BNP	2.2	+1.8	1	+1
UKIP	4.0		0	0
Residents	30.3		16	-2
Others	6.5			

CONSERVATIVE GAIN FROM NO OVERALL CONTROL

Hillingdon

The Conservatives did well in Hillingdon with a considerable increase in their share of the vote and by winning a large majority in councillors (although still with less than half the vote).

The Liberal Democrats lost most of their seats despite slightly increasing their share of the vote. All of Labour's 18 councillors are from the Hayes and Harlington end of the borough, with the Conservatives challenged only by the two Liberal Democrats in the rest of the borough.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	47.2	+5.5	45	+14
Labour	25.6	-9.4	18	-9
Lib Dem	19.5	+2.0	2	-5
Green	3.8	+0.5	0	0
Others	4.0	+1.4	0	0

CONSERVATIVE GAIN FROM NO OVERALL CONTROL

Hounslow

Labour lost control of Hounslow council to no overall control, but remained the largest single party by a margin of a single seat despite falling behind the Conservatives in terms of votes cast. This made Hounslow one of six 'wrong winner' councils in London in 2006.

The parties that most increased their share of the vote between 2002 and 2006, namely the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, remained where they were in terms of seats, on five and zero respectively.

In Hounslow South ward the Conservatives won all three seats with just under one vote in three (32.7 per cent).

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	30.2	+1.0	23	+8
Labour	29.8	-7.8	24	-12
Lib Dem	19.0	+5.7	5*	0
Green	6.9	+3.5		
Others	14.0	-1.7	8*	+4

LABOUR LOSE TO NO OVERALL CONTROL

* Since the election one councillor has left the Liberal Democrats and joined the Hounslow Independent Alliance. There are 3 councillors for the Independent Alliance and 5 for the Community Group.

Islington

Islington was one of the more surprising results of the local elections, with the Liberal Democrat administration shedding sufficient seats to leave their control hanging on a mayoral casting vote. This is not the first time that Islington has been so closely fought – in 1998 Labour and the Lib Dems won an equal number of seats and Labour ran the borough on the casting vote until losing a by-election in 1999.

Islington, like Haringey and Kingston, was a ‘wrong winner’ council. Labour polled more votes than the Lib Dems but ended up with fewer seats because the Lib Dems were lucky with their vote distribution. However, this result was not because Labour did particularly well in 2006 but because the Lib Dems lost votes to the Conservatives (who ran a more serious campaign than they did in the past) and the Greens. The Conservatives, however, ended up with no councillors and the Greens only one, despite winning nearly 30 per cent of the vote between them.

The electoral system has created what is effectively a two-party system at Islington Town Hall on less than 70 per cent of the combined vote. Because the borough is finely balanced, the system has perpetuated a tribal, machine-politics culture in Islington in which the winner takes all and the minority are excluded from power. As quoted (*Islington Gazette* 11 May 2006):

Ousted council leader Steve Hitchins sees no reason why the Lib Dems’ new leader, Councillor James Kempton, should not take charge and head a mostly – if not entirely – Lib Dem executive. Mr Hitchins said: “I think that is what everybody is expecting. I don’t think it’s going to

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	12.0	+8.0	0	0
Labour	34.1	+0.8	23	+13
Lib Dem	32.8	-9.7	24	-14
Green	17.3	+5.5	1	+1
Others	3.8	-4.6	0	0

LIB DEM LOSE TO NO OVERALL CONTROL

go to Labour – why should it? I should imagine that we will appoint a new mayor on the casting vote of the old mayor. The new mayor will cast their vote to appoint a Lib Dem executive.”

Labour having won the most votes hardly seems to figure in the discussion. This is not a party point, because Labour did exactly the same thing when the position was reversed in 1998. More than anything, Islington needs an electoral system that provides more stability and gives representation to the diversity of views among the local electorate.

Kensington & Chelsea

Kensington & Chelsea is the safest borough in London for any party, and the only one where a party's share of the vote exceeds 60 per cent. For many years it has also been very stable electorally, with no seats changing hands between 1978 and 2006 except because of boundary changes.

In 2006, however, the Conservatives gained the St. Charles ward from Labour and came fairly close behind Labour in two other North Kensington wards – Cameron's Conservatives did notably well in Notting Hill. But there is hardly any electoral competition in the borough other than the Conservative attempt to take Labour's northern redoubt. Other than St. Charles there are no wards vulnerable to capture by Labour on less than an 18 per cent swing, and the Lib Dems do not pose a threat to the Conservatives in any ward.

The lack of political competition in the borough cannot have helped electoral participation, with the local increase in turnout being only 2 per cent and turnout still hovering just below 30 per cent. This was a smaller increase and a lower rate of turnout than in many deprived inner-city boroughs such as Southwark and even Newham. Even the affluent electors of Kensington & Chelsea seem disinclined to vote if elections are purely ritual affairs.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	60.4	+3.1	45	+3
Labour	19.0	-7.0	9	-3
Lib Dem	15.5	-0.1	0	0
Green	4.4	+3.2	0	0
Others	0.8	0	0	0

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

Kingston-upon-Thames

Kingston voted for one party and ended up with another party in overall control. The Conservatives won the most votes but (barring by-elections and defections) sit out the next four years as the opposition to a Liberal Democrat majority on the council.

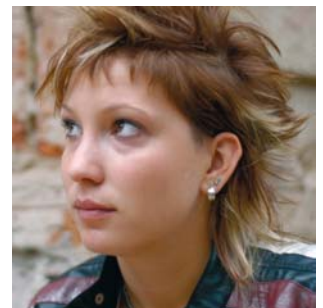
The Conservatives achieved some of their largest swings from the Lib Dems where it mattered least – by coming a close second rather than a distant second in wards such as Chessington North & Hook. The Lib Dem vote fell in 13 of the borough's wards and rose in only three, but in two of those three they managed to gain seats (three from Conservative in Berrylands and one from Labour in Norbiton). The Lib Dem retention of Kingston was a tribute to an effectively distributed vote, but hardly a vote of confidence in the administration.

Politics in Kingston is increasingly a two-party affair as Labour's seats have dwindled from 10 to two in the last two rounds of elections. Both Labour and the Greens were under-represented in the 2006 elections.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	40.8	+5.8	21	+6
Labour	9.8	-1.9	2	-1
Lib Dem	38.5	-8.9	25	-5
Green	8.2	+5.3	0	0
Others	2.6	-0.3	0	0

LIB DEM HOLD

Dana Butler
New Malden
Why are there so few women councillors? In my ward, every candidate from a party that had a chance of winning was a man so I had no chance to vote for a woman and make my vote count. I think that it's important for the council chamber to reflect the community, not just the political parties.



Lambeth

The local election result in Lambeth in 2006 was very unusual. It was the one council anywhere in the country that Labour gained. It was also gained despite Labour's vote actually *falling* a little since the last borough election in 2002.

Labour managed this feat by careful targeting. Their vote share fell sharply in several wards which were either already safe for the party (such as Ferndale), or where Labour stood little chance of winning (such as Gipsy Hill or Bishop's). Labour's vote rose most precisely where it could do the most good – in the marginal wards the party stood to gain.

The Conservatives and Greens were particularly hard done by. The Tories lost one seat despite their vote increasing across the borough, and the Greens' success with 15.3 per cent was rewarded with a single seat in Herne Hill.

Lambeth's recent elections have shown a considerable degree of instability, swinging between comfortable Labour majorities and hung councils. This has encouraged a short term tactical approach to local politics, focused on the next borough elections rather than on sorting out the borough's considerable long term problems. Despite the massive swings in seats, the voters of Lambeth do not seem to change their minds all that radically. A system that reflected this would encourage better government in the borough.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	17.5	+1.2	6	-1
Labour	35.6	-1.0	39	+11
Lib Dem	27.3	-6.0	17	-11
Green	15.3	+3.8	1	+1
Others	4.3	+2.0	0	0

LABOUR GAIN FROM NO OVERALL CONTROL

Mags Hutchinson
Brixton

How come in my area Labour got fewer votes than before but more seats? Surely that's unfair?

	Position in 2002	Change in Con	Change in Lab	Change in LD	Outcome
Stockwell	LD 18.8% over Lab	+4.8	+5.9	-19.1	3 Lab gains
Knights Hill	LD 13.2% over Lab	+3.3	+5.2	-10.3	3 Lab gains
Princes	LD 6.5% over Lab	+6.8	+4.4	-20.7	3 Lab gains

Lewisham

Labour's exaggerated majority won in 2002 on 39 per cent of the vote was cut down in 2006 and the party narrowly lost control of the borough as other parties, particularly the Liberal Democrats, made major gains. Having elected one councillor (Darren Johnson) in 2002 the Green Party made a further advance, winning five more representatives.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	18.1	+1.6	3	+1
Labour	32.7	-6.4	26	-19
Lib Dem	24.4	+5.8	17	+13
Green	19.1	+2.6	6	+5
Others	5.4	-3.6	2*	0

LABOUR LOSE TO NO OVERALL CONTROL

* Elected councillors are two Socialist Alliance.



Billy and Emma Fisher *New Cross*

We wanted our vote to count in the mayoral election. We are both Green Party supporters and so voted for that party first. In order to make sure our vote counted, we had to guess who would make it through to the second round. As it happened, we both guessed wrong. Why not have a voting system which does away with the need for guesswork?

Merton

Labour slipped from control of Merton council but the Conservatives did not win quite enough seats to enjoy a majority. The mayoral casting vote will determine control of the council.

There were several undesirable features of FPTP in operation in Merton. One was that, with the exception of the Merton Park Independents, the council battle is a two-party contest and has been since all three Liberal Democrat councillors lost their seats in 2002. Over 20 per cent of those voting chose Lib Dem or Green, but these views received no representation on the council. The Merton Park councillors benefited from being concentrated in one ward rather than, like Lib Dem and Green, spread throughout the borough.

FPTP has also accentuated divisions within the borough. All 27 of Labour's councillors come from the Mitcham and Morden half of the borough, while 27 out of the 30 Conservatives are from Wimbledon. Labour lost their last five Wimbledon councillors in 2006.

While the electoral system has given a small and purely local party a pivotal role, the signs seem to be that it intends to use that power wisely:

Councillor Peter Southgate of the Merton Park Independents said: "We want to see more effective ways of cross-party working. That could include decisions about forming a cross-party cabinet. I don't think the current two-party adversarial system is doing the people of Merton any favours."

(*Wimbledon Guardian* 11 May 2006)

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	39.9	+5.7	30	+5
Labour	31.6	-2.0	27	-5
Lib Dem	15.7	+1.5	0	0
Green	5.5	-4.6	0	0
Merton Park	2.6	-1.1	3	0
Others	3.9		0	0

LABOUR LOSE TO NO OVERALL CONTROL

Newham

Labour dominate the east London borough of Newham, with 90 per cent of the councillors – although in 2006 a little under 42 per cent of the vote.

Opposition parties have a great deal of trouble organising and consistently fighting seats because of the lack of success in council elections. The Conservatives are unrepresented despite a relatively significant share of the vote. Respect offered the most serious electoral challenge that Labour have faced for many years in Newham, but despite polling nearly a quarter of the vote they could win only one ward and therefore three seats, level with the Christian People's Alliance as the opposition to Labour in Newham. On some measures, Newham's election result was the least proportional in London.

Newham has a directly elected Mayor who is in charge of the administration, making the scrutiny and oversight functions of the council crucial. These are difficult to exercise effectively when the Mayor's party has 54 seats and the two minor parties have three seats each; the opposition is too small to be an effective check on the administration's power. Newham Labour group has tended to be fair-minded in using its power, but the electoral system perpetuates the party as the local establishment. Labour has run the borough ever since it was established in 1964 and before that had long-standing control of the predecessor authorities.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	14.4	-5.4	0	0
Labour	41.8	-7.2	54	-5
Lib Dem	2.9	-1.0	0	0
Green	5.3	-7.3	0	0
Respect	23.4	+20.9	3	+3
Chr. People's'	10.4		3	+2
Others	1.7		0	0

LABOUR HOLD

Jerry Blunt
East Ham
Why is it that Labour won almost all the seats in this borough but didn't even get half the votes? There won't be any proper scrutiny of their decisions and no real opposition holding them to account. If I'm going to vote, I want to know that the party I vote for will be fairly rewarded, whichever one it is.

Redbridge

Redbridge saw a Conservative majority returned to power on a reduced share of the vote, although their majority was not overwhelming. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats received shares of seats not far out of line with their shares of the votes. The principal anomaly in Redbridge was the representation of minor parties. The Greens won 4,222 votes, spread throughout the borough, and the BNP won 2,463 concentrated in one area (Hainault). As a result, the BNP is represented on Redbridge council and the Green Party is not.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	39.0	-3.3	34	+1
Labour	29.6	-4.6	19	-2
Lib Dem	19.9	+0.7	9	0
Green	5.6	+2.8	0	0
BNP	3.3	+4.4	1	+1
Others	2.6		0	0

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

Richmond-upon-Thames

The borough of Richmond-upon-Thames is a two-party battle between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, with Labour and the Greens only a minor influence on local electoral behaviour. Many wards in the borough are marginal between Lib Dem and Conservative, with the result that relatively small changes in votes can cause completely disproportionate swings in seats.

A very exaggerated swing of seats took place in 2006. The Lib Dems managed a healthy swing in their favour of over 6 per cent from the Conservatives, and certainly deserved to take the lead back from the Tories. But the number of councillors swung round from better than a two-to-one Conservative lead in 2002 to a two-to-one Lib Dem lead in 2006. The result effectively reversed what had happened in 2002, when a similar sized swing caused the Conservatives to knock out more than half of the Lib Dems.

Richmond produced the highest turnout in London in 2006 at 51.1 per cent, the only borough in which more than half the electorate voted. Richmond has traditionally enjoyed high turnout, as might be expected from its educational and social composition and its political marginality.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	39.2	-4.7	18	-21
Labour	5.6	-8.5	0	0
Lib Dem	44.9	+8.6	36	+21
Green	7.1	+4.0	0	0
Others	3.2	+0.6	0	0

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CONSERVATIVE



Geoff Seely
Richmond

Only a few votes changed hands at this election, but the whole council looks completely different. Huge changes are bad for the running of the council and don't reflect what voters wanted.

Southwark

The borough of Southwark remained under no overall control in 2006. The overall result between the parties was not particularly disproportional, other than the Greens' failure to be rewarded by more than one seat in 63 for getting more than one vote in 10.

However, there was a strong geographical pattern within Southwark. All six Conservative councillors were elected from the Dulwich (southern) end of Southwark. All but two of the 28 Labour councillors were elected in the Camberwell and Peckham part of the seat, and all but three of the Liberal Democrats were elected from the Bermondsey (northern) end.

	Votes	Share of Con vote in Southwark %	Seats	Share of Con seats in Southwark %
Bermondsey	3,656	34.9	0	0
Camberwell	2,649	25.3	0	0
Dulwich	4,170	39.8	6	100
TOTAL	10,475		6	

Six out of 10 of the Conservative votes in Southwark were polled in the centre and north of the borough but none of these elected a Conservative councillor.

	Votes	Share of Lab vote in Southwark %	Seats	Share of Lab seats in Southwark %
Bermondsey	7,001	27.6	2	7
Camberwell	14,390	56.7	26	93
Dulwich	4,004	15.8	0	0
TOTAL	25,395		6	

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	15.7	+2.7	6	+1
Labour	38.0	+0.7	28	0
Lib Dem	32.4	-5.2	28	-2
Green	10.5	+2.8	1	+1
Others	3.4	-0.7	0	0

NO OVERALL CONTROL

Over 40 per cent of Labour's vote was cast in areas where the party elected only two councillors.

	Votes	Share of LD vote in Southwark %	Seats	Share of LD seats in Southwark %
Bermondsey	11,251	52.1	25	89
Camberwell	7,094	32.8	0	0
Dulwich	3,264	15.1	3	11
TOTAL	21,609		28	

Nearly a third of the Lib Dem vote came from Camberwell, where the party won no councillors.

The electoral system has produced a situation where the Conservatives are effectively the Dulwich party, Labour the Camberwell party and the Lib Dems the Bermondsey party in terms of council representation but not in terms of votes. This hinders all the parties in attempting to govern in the interests of the entire borough.

Sutton

The Liberal Democrats held Sutton with a much-reduced majority after a swing to the Conservatives. Labour, however, lost their remaining ward of St. Helier to the Liberal Democrats and are now not represented on this council.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	41.4	+6.1	22	+13
Labour	8.3	-4.0	0	-3
Lib Dem	44.1	-4.8	32	-10
Green	2.7	-0.5	0	0
Others	3.5	+3.2	0	0

LIB DEM HOLD

Tower Hamlets

Labour's 31.9 per cent winning share in Tower Hamlets was the lowest share of the vote that gave a party overall control of a borough in 2006 – and indeed the lowest share of the vote that has given control of a London borough since the first elections in 1964.

In 2006 the Liberal Democrats were particularly harshly dealt with by the electoral system, in that they polled more votes than the Conservatives but won fewer seats. Their vote fell back worst in their previously strong areas and enabled Labour to make gains. The Conservatives won representation for the first time in an all-out election in this borough because their voters are now concentrated in the Docklands areas of Tower Hamlets.

The Tower Hamlets result was also notable for the number of split wards (i.e. those electing councillors from more than one party). Most unusually, a majority of wards had split representation (nine, to eight complete slates). A majority of the ruling Labour group represent split wards (14 to 12), a sign of how close and haphazard the result was. Small changes in the vote could have led to a large Labour majority or a virtual wipe-out for Labour. In one ward, Mile End & Globe Town, Labour won all three seats with 32.9 per cent of the vote. FPTP in Tower Hamlets produces chaotic results that fail to represent the votes cast.

As well as split representation, several wards saw large differences between the votes cast for candidates standing on the same party's slate.

Tower Hamlets was also notable for the level of rancour over the conduct of the election. Respect

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	16.4	+1.1	7	+7
Labour	31.9	-10.9	26	-9
Lib Dem	18.9	-10.9	6	-10
Green	3.9	-1.3	0	0
Respect	22.9	+22.9	12	+12
Others	6.0	-0.9	0	0

LABOUR HOLD

stood in every ward but one (St. Katharine's & Wapping) and in that ward the returning officer's decision to reject incorrectly completed nomination papers has been the subject of legal action. There were media reports of questionable postal vote applications during the election campaign, and there may be further litigation over the results in future.

Waltham Forest

Electoral competition in the borough of Waltham Forest is peculiar. The Conservatives have strongholds in the Chingford (north) end of the borough but no realistic prospect of breaking through in Walthamstow or Leyton, where Labour and the Liberal Democrats battle it out. There are essentially only two sorts of election result here – no overall control as in 2002 and 2006 or a slim Labour majority as in 1998. The geographical polarisation creates political difficulties. The principal electoral competition in the wards is between Labour and Lib Dem, but strangely these parties have governed in coalition since 2002.

The main electoral change in the 2006 elections was a sharp increase in voting for the Green Party, but despite polling 12.1 per cent of the vote the party won no seats. Although the Liberal Democrats slipped very slightly in the share of the vote, they added six seats to become the second party on the council.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	24.8	-1.7	15	-3
Labour	30.7	-4.2	26	-3
Lib Dem	29.8	-0.1	19	+6
Green	12.1	+7.0	0	0
Respect	1.4	-1.0	0	0
Others	1.3		0	0

NO OVERALL CONTROL

Wandsworth

Wandsworth council is securely under Conservative rule and with over half the vote the party deserves overall control. However, 51 per cent of the vote hardly justifies having 85 per cent of the seats and a vast majority that makes effective scrutiny of the council's executive extremely difficult. It is a textbook case of an exaggerated majority produced by the FPTP electoral system. The Liberal Democrats and the Greens are squeezed out, winning no seats despite appreciable public support, while Labour tend to have evenly spread support everywhere and are unable to win many seats.

In the 2006 elections a local Labour Party that is relatively dynamic despite its consistent lack of success in local elections managed to gain one seat in Graveney and lose two in Tooting. However, it would now take only a small swing for the remaining Labour councillors to be eliminated from Wandsworth altogether, perhaps giving the Conservatives 100 per cent of the seats or even giving the token position of council opposition to the fourth party, the Lib Dems.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	51.0	+1.7	51	+1
Labour	24.2	-6.8	9	-1
Lib Dem	10.7	-0.6	0	0
Green	13.1	+6.3	0	0
Others	1.0	-0.6	0	0

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

Westminster

Westminster, as it has for over 100 years, remained under Conservative control in 2006 and as in the previous four sets of elections the Conservatives polled a majority of votes cast.

Elections in Westminster have settled into an almost cosy non-competitive pattern, with no seats changing hands in 2006 and no real prospect of any doing so. Most of the borough is heavily Conservative, although there are four northern wards which are relatively safe for Labour and provide 12 opposition councillors. It would take more than an 8 per cent swing for the Conservatives to lose any of their council seats. It is not surprising that Westminster's turnout, at 29.8 per cent, is the second lowest of any in London and that its 2.4 per cent increase since 2002 is also second from bottom of the league. In each case, only neighbouring Kensington & Chelsea scored worse.

	Vote %	Change in vote	Seats	Change in seats
Conservative	56.4	+0.9	48	0
Labour	23.7	-4.3	12	0
Lib Dem	16.5	+3.0	0	0
Green	1.5	0.0	0	0
Others	2.0	+0.4	0	0

CONSERVATIVE HOLD

London

The political parties and the London result

Conservatives

The Conservatives increased their London-wide share of the vote by a small proportion, from 34.4 per cent in 2002 to 34.8 per cent in 2006. Although this is narrowly their highest share of the London vote in any election since 1992, they failed to break out of the band either side of 30 per cent support where they have been confined since 1994.

Despite this rather small increase in share of the vote, the Conservatives reaped a rich reward in terms of seats and councils. They added 132 councillors, making a total of 785, and became the largest party in London local government. They held seven out of the eight councils they controlled before the elections, losing only Richmond, and gained four from Labour (Bexley, Croydon, Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham) and three from no overall control (Harrow, Havering and Hillingdon) for a total of 14. They will also be able to run Merton where they won exactly half the seats. In terms of councillors and boroughs (though not votes) this was the best set of London borough elections for the Conservatives since 1982.

The principal explanation for the big rewards for a small increase in vote share was that Labour's vote fell across the board, so that there was an average swing of over 3 per cent from Labour to Conservative. This swing was also concentrated where it could do most to help the Conservatives – 10 per cent in Ealing, 8.4 per cent in Bexley, 8 per cent in Hammersmith & Fulham, 7.5 per cent in Hillingdon. These four boroughs alone account for 73 gains in terms of councillors, over half the net gains in all of London. In each of these cases there was an exaggerated swing of seats because so many

wards were marginal. In areas where the Conservatives were already secure, or were out of contention, their vote tended to rise a small amount or even fall, as in Enfield, Redbridge and Richmond, which the party gained in 2002. Another factor that affected the relationship between votes and seats was turnout. Turnout rose least in a number of safe Conservative areas, particularly Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea, and most in several areas where the Conservatives were weak such as Barking & Dagenham and Tower Hamlets. Therefore the total votes cast reflected Labour areas better than the vote totals did in 2002 when turnout was more skewed towards Conservative areas.

The low share of the vote, and small overall increase, must cast doubts on the strength of the Conservatives' progress in London despite strong swings in some marginal areas where Labour had vulnerable councils and still has vulnerable MPs. Analysis of the data at constituency level shows that the Conservatives were leading in 36 of London's 73 seats on new boundaries, up from 20 at last year's general election. It seems possible from these results that the Conservative vote is becoming more efficiently distributed, with the party making gains in suburban areas where they stand to win seats. The same pattern is evident in some of the local election results in marginal seats elsewhere (see page 98).

What appeared initially to be a very good night for the London Conservatives was on inspection a less impressive endorsement from the electorate. Despite gains in seats and councils, the party cannot feel too much satisfaction at its static London-wide vote share.

Labour

Labour's London-wide share of the vote fell sharply between the 2002 and 2006 borough elections, falling by nearly six percentage points to 27.9 per cent. In terms of seats, Labour shed 182 councillors, falling to 684. This was the party's worst showing since the all-time nadir of 1968. In terms of councils, Labour controlled 15 before the elections but only seven afterwards. The party lost Bexley, Croydon, Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham direct to the Conservatives, and Brent, Camden, Hounslow, Lewisham and Merton to no overall control, while gaining Lambeth from no overall control.

Labour had survived a falling vote in 2002 with remarkably little damage to its control of councils. In four authorities (Bexley, Croydon, Hammersmith & Fulham and Merton) Labour obtained a majority despite being outpolled by the Conservatives in that year. In other boroughs the party enjoyed a healthy majority on a minority vote, for example in Camden where Labour had just over a third of the vote but won two-thirds of the seats.

However, 2006 saw Labour's luck with the electoral system come to an end (except in Haringey where Labour retained control despite being outpolled by the Liberal Democrats).

In several boroughs there were signs of anti-Labour tactical voting, for example in Camden where Labour's share of the vote dropped less than the London average but the party lost half its seats. Voters in marginal wards lined up behind Lib Dem, Conservative or Green depending on which was the most realistic challenger. In Lewisham a similar movement also saw Labour's control of the council come to an end.

Labour suffered massive losses of seats to the Conservatives in boroughs such as Bexley and Hammersmith & Fulham – the party is now under-represented in these boroughs where it had too many seats in 2002. The electoral system magnified Labour's defeat in marginal areas.

Labour led in only 28 of London's constituencies (on new boundaries) in the 2006 local elections, compared to 45 at the general election – a loss of 18 seats and a gain of only one (many Labour supporters may take comfort that this was in Bethnal Green & Bow). The more relevant comparison may be with the 2002 local elections when Labour 'won' 37 seats – a net loss of nine in 2006. Compared to 2002, the Conservatives had taken the lead in seven more marginal seats (Brent North, Ealing Central & Acton, Ealing North, Eltham, Hammersmith, Harrow West and Hendon). Labour's parliamentary majority starts to look a lot more vulnerable.

The fate of Labour councils in some boroughs may be instructive. After all, the UK government was elected on only 35 per cent of the popular vote in 2005, comparable to the shares of the vote that gave Labour control of Bexley and Camden councils, and rather less than Lewisham or Hounslow, in 2002. The electoral system may have done Labour a favour in the previous election, but as these councils have shown, a party can reap a whirlwind at the next election. Even a small drop in Labour's overall share of the vote in Camden was enough to slash the party's holdings in seats because the previous result left the party defending lots of marginal seats and voters started to line up tactically against Labour. The lessons for the House of Commons are obvious.

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrat London-wide vote rose slightly between 2002 and 2006 (from 20.3 per cent to 20.7 per cent) but there were different patterns in different boroughs. In Richmond-upon-Thames the Lib Dems gained control from the Conservatives with a large increase (+8.6 per cent) in their votes, but in the two nearby councils they already control their vote fell significantly (-8.9 per cent in Kingston and -4.6 per cent in Sutton). They also slumped in Islington, Lambeth and Southwark (-9.7 per cent, -6.0 per cent and -5.2 per cent) where they had been in control or leading a council that was under no overall control. But these losses were balanced by gains in Brent (+11.0 per cent), Haringey (+8.6 per cent) and Lewisham (+5.8 per cent). Their total number of councillors was up a fraction at 317, compared to 309 in 2002 and 323 at their peak in 1994. There were 43 losses in boroughs they led, and 51 gains elsewhere.

As might be expected from such a patchy performance, in some places the electoral system benefited the Lib Dems, whereas in others it hampered them. In Kingston-upon-Thames they retained control of the council despite having fewer votes than the Conservatives, and in Islington they should be able to maintain control by the mayoral casting vote despite being outpolled by Labour. In Brent and Camden they became the largest single party on the council despite having fewer votes than Labour. In Haringey they beat Labour by a whisker (112 votes out of 57,856) but Labour retained an overall majority. In Harrow they elected only one councillor despite polling nearly 20 per cent of the vote, and in Croydon, Kensington, Merton and Westminster they won no seats at all despite getting between 13.1 and 16.5 per cent of the vote.

Green Party

The Green Party was systematically deprived of representation by the electoral system despite attracting considerable support from Londoners. Taking London as a whole, the Greens won 7.9 per cent of the vote – 168,918 votes. In return, they received 12 councillors out of 1,861, i.e. 0.6 per cent of representation.

Greens were elected in six boroughs, but only in one (Lewisham) did they manage to return a substantial group – six members. There were two elected in Camden and one each in Hackney, Islington, Lambeth and Southwark.

This contrasts with the votes cast by Londoners. The Greens polled over 10 per cent of the vote in 10 boroughs – the six where they elected councillors and four others where they are unrepresented, namely Barnet, Haringey, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth.

By tending to award all three council seats to the largest party in each ward, the electoral system hampers parties that have significant levels of support spread evenly across a borough, such as the Greens. The local electoral system could have been designed to do the party down.

British National Party

The BNP polled 23,675 votes in London, or 1.1 per cent of those cast. This of course underestimates its true level of support because relatively few Londoners had a BNP candidate standing in their area. But for this fringe-party vote it received 14 councillors, 12 (one temporarily held up because the declaration of the result was botched) in Barking & Dagenham, and one each in the neighbouring boroughs of Redbridge and Havering. The BNP elected two more councillors than the Greens despite receiving only one vote for every seven that were cast for the Greens.

The BNP benefited because its support tends to be concentrated in small geographical areas, making it possible for the party to win wards in council elections, particularly if the vote for other parties is evenly divided. In Gooshays ward in Havering, it got one of the three with 28.7 per cent of the vote because Labour and the Conservatives were nearly tied.

BNP success in the borough of Barking & Dagenham (and in particular the Barking section of the borough) is of perhaps a different kind. In that borough it only stood 13 candidates and (subject to confirmation) elected 12 of them. Had the party stood more candidates it would certainly have won more seats, perhaps enough to win a majority of seats in the Barking half of the borough as it led in all six wards in that constituency where it stood.

First-Past-the-Post is still the only electoral system in use in Britain that has given the BNP seats. It did a disservice to the people of Barking & Dagenham whose votes for other opposition parties have been ineffective for so long, and were so once again in

2006 when the Conservatives won only one seat despite polling more votes than the BNP. It is also the only system which creates the possibility of the BNP actually gaining control of a borough against the wishes of the majority of its inhabitants.

Respect

The Respect party did not stand in many areas. Its efforts were concentrated in the east London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets, where it put forward nearly full slates of candidates and won 23.4 per cent and 22.9 per cent of the vote. It elected three councillors in Newham and 12 in Tower Hamlets. Its best score in any other borough was 2.6 per cent in Hackney and its London-wide vote total was 38,657 – 1.8 per cent.

Respect suffered from the electoral system in Newham for the familiar reason that it tended to get a reasonable share of the vote everywhere, without getting enough to win except in one ward. In Tower Hamlets its vote was more concentrated and its representation was fairly much in line with its share of the vote.

Others

A number of smaller parties contested the London borough elections.

The **UK Independence Party** made a particular effort in Barking & Dagenham but was overshadowed by the BNP. UKIP did however get 13.2 per cent of the vote but ended up with no seats. It polled 4 per cent in Havering and 2.9 per cent in Croydon, and 20,895 votes (1.0 per cent) overall, for no seats.

The **Christian People's Alliance** fought across a broad front in Newham, receiving 10.4 per cent of the borough vote, and won three seats.

Two **Socialist Alliance** councillors were elected in Lewisham.

Independent and **Resident** parties or candidates were elected in several boroughs, including – crucially – in Merton where three Merton Park Independents hold the balance between 27 Labour and 30 Conservative councillors. Contrary to some expectations, Resident groups also retained a strong presence in Havering and form the principal opposition group to the Conservative majority. Two separate Community and Independent groupings won a total of eight seats in Hounslow and if they vote together, they hold the balance of power between Conservative and Labour. The Community Group became part of a ruling coalition with the Conservatives after the election.

London

How STV could improve London borough elections

Introduction

The Electoral Reform Society supports the Single Transferable Vote (STV) in multi-member wards for local elections. London already has multi-member wards and STV in three-member wards would be easy to introduce and involve no change in the structure of representation because there is no tradition of single member representation. In Scottish local government, changing the system meant also changing the number of representatives each elector would have.

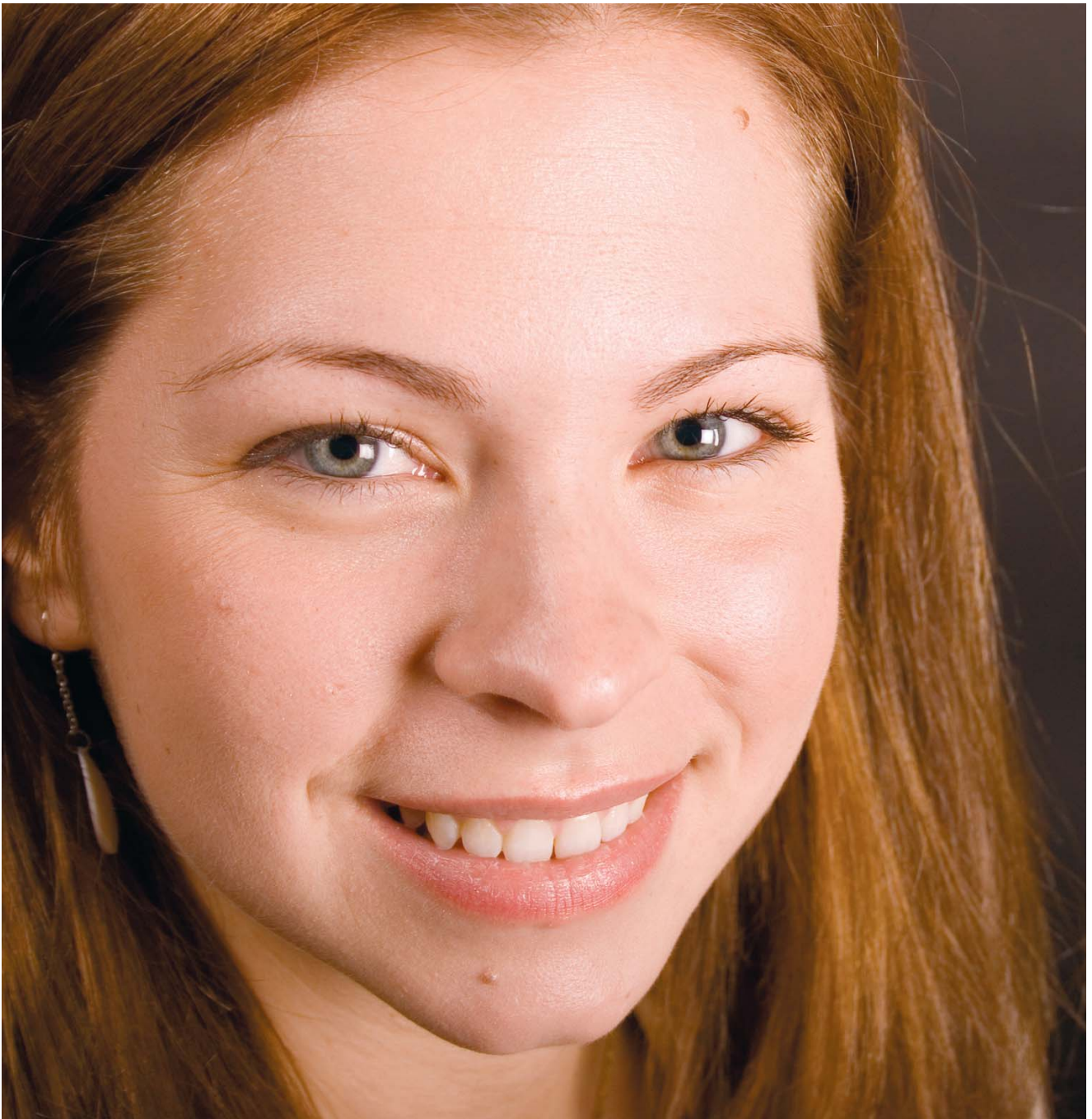
One of the advantages of STV is its flexibility – if a natural community was of the size to have four or five councillors, rather than three, that could be easily accommodated. Three-member STV is a rather restrictive form of STV. More members would mean a higher degree of proportionality. The quota for election with three members is 25 per cent, a very high threshold for a proportional system that would mean that some minority parties and candidates would not be represented. Nevertheless, simulations on London borough elections do show that STV in three-member wards would give a reasonably good degree of proportionality and broaden representation on councils. This section demonstrates for several London boroughs how STV would solve some of the problems we have identified with the election results in those boroughs.

Health warnings

Modelling outcomes under alternative electoral systems is a very approximate business and cannot produce absolutely precise results. The results in terms of seats given below are affected by the assumptions that have been made in the analysis. Different assumptions would produce different results, although it is unlikely that they would be too far from the figures given below.

Because STV offers greater voter choice than FPTP, simulations drawn from FPTP results cannot reflect the full effects of STV. For instance, many voters who have cast three X-votes in the London borough elections will have had a '1,2,3' preference order in their minds, and STV would allow the first preference to have more effect on the result. Some votes cast for smaller parties such as the BNP may in fact be more like third preferences, and therefore not translate across into first preference STV votes. STV elections can also be affected by the number of candidates put forward by each party, and this may differ significantly from the choices the parties make under FPTP. STV elections also mean that the share of votes between candidates of the same party, and the number of votes that do not follow the party ticket, can make important differences to who is elected and at what stage of the count.

Perhaps most significantly, voter behaviour would change under a new system. For instance, one of the boroughs analysed below, Richmond-upon-Thames, is a very two-party dominated borough with only the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats having much of a presence in local politics. Supporters of other parties, such as Labour, will tend to be aware that their votes may be wasted, and the Lib Dems in



Bev Sargent *Hornsey* I voted Green in Haringey and so did about one in seven of the voters here. But there isn't a single Green councillor to speak up for us. Why can't all parties be fairly represented on the council?

particular would make appeals to Labour supporters to vote tactically because Labour stands no chance in Richmond. However, under STV Labour supporters would be able to cast their first preference for Labour without fear of ‘letting in’ the Conservatives in their ward – if they wanted, they could give the Lib Dems their second preferences. Therefore, although the simulation shows no Labour candidates elected in Richmond, in a real STV election the votes cast may have given Labour a presence on the council.

With all those cautions in mind, and without wishing to insist with any precision on the numbers of councillors for a party in the simulation, the STV results do show that many of the problems of FPTP in the London boroughs could be solved by changing the electoral system.

Haringey

How STV could ameliorate wrong winners, regional differences and two-party dominance

‘Others’: Under three-member STV Respect candidates would probably have been elected in St. Ann’s and West Green wards, and Greens in Crouch End and St. Ann’s.

The STV result would stop a party from winning control on a share of the vote as small as 35 per cent, and also give the smaller parties a say in council business. It would solve the ‘wrong winner’ problem, first by denying a majority to a party with a low level of support, and secondly by relating seats more closely to votes. The Liberal Democrats would be likely to be level or slightly ahead in seats, as they were in votes. STV does not invariably remedy ‘wrong winner’ scenarios – three-member STV would still leave the Lib Dems the largest party in Kingston, for instance. But using larger districts with 4-6 members would bring most such cases into line.

There would be a healthier balance between the two halves of the borough within the political parties. Labour, instead of having five from Hornsey and 25 from Tottenham, would have eight and 16 from each part respectively. The Lib Dems would balance a bit and have 19 in Hornsey (rather than 25) and six in Tottenham (rather than two). Both main parties would have representatives from across the borough in their council groups.

	Vote share %				FPTP seats				STV seats			
	C	L	LD	G	C	L	LD	G	C	L	LD	O
Alexandra	8.8	20.5	55.9	14.8			3			1	2	
Bounds Green	9.0	39.6	39.6	11.8		1	2			1	2	
Bruce Grove	12.8	58.6	14.9	13.7		3				2	1	
Crouch End	13.1	17.5	54.3	15.0			3				2	1
Fortis Green	18.4	14.7	54.4	12.5			3		1		2	
Harringay	6.0	40.5	42.3	11.2		1	2			1	2	
Highgate	29.0	10.4	38.3	10.6			3		1		2	
Hornsey	6.0	32.1	47.8	14.2			3			1	2	
Muswell Hill	9.8	19.6	57.2	13.4			3			1	2	
Noel Park	9.1	41.0	40.6	9.4		1	2			1	2	
Northumberland Park	13.3	61.7	10.9	9.4		3				3		
Seven Sisters	27.8	46.4	12.7	13.1		3			1	2		
St Ann's	11.2	39.8	13.0	16.7		3				1		2
Stroud Green	5.8	26.5	48.9	18.8			3			1	2	
Tottenham Green	13.3	49.1	18.1	15.9		3				2	1	
Tottenham Hale	16.1	54.6	16.2	13.1		3				2	1	
West Green	12.2	38.6	13.8	15.2		3				1	1	1
White Hart Lane	27.5	51.0	12.3	9.2		3				2		
Woodside	9.2	42.7	38.6	9.4		3			1	2	1	
Haringey	13.5	35.0	35.2	13.1	0	30	27	0	4	24	25	4

Hackney

How STV could cut down exaggerated majorities, elect the right opposition party and give elected mayors better scrutiny

Under FPTP, the borough elections in Hackney produced an overwhelming Labour majority (77 per cent of seats) for only 40.5 per cent of the vote. It also failed to reflect the relative strengths of the other parties among Hackney voters, giving the most popular opposition, the Greens, only a single seat.

A three-member STV election in Hackney would have left Labour short of an overall majority, but with clearly the largest number of seats – as is only fair given that Labour was easily the most popular single party in the borough. The relationship between votes and seats would become more stable. Labour polled similar shares of the vote in 1998 and 2006, but the result in 1998 was no overall majority and in 2006 it was exaggerated Labour dominance.

STV would also have given the position of principal opposition to the correct party, with 15 Greens being the next largest group. STV would also have given a voice to some popular Independents in Haggerston, and seen the Conservative mayoral standard-bearer Andrew Boff re-elected in Queensbridge in south Hackney, giving some geographical diversity to the group.

Hackney is a borough with a directly elected mayor, Labour's Jules Pipe. A council composed on the basis of STV results would have made it perfectly possible for the mayor to get his programme through but it would have also offered a more effective degree of scrutiny than is possible under FPTP.

	Vote share %				FPTP seats				STV seats			
	C	L	LD	G	C	L	LD	G	C	L	LD	O
Brownswood	14.3	41.7	20.0	23.9		3				1	1	1
Cazenove	5.6	29.5	38.8	15.5			3			1	2	
Chatham	8.9	45.8	16.6	21.1		3				2		1
Clissold	6.4	36.2	11.2	38.2		2		1		1		2
Dalston	13.6	43.5	17.4	25.5		3				1	1	1
De Beauvoir	19.6	46.2	16.7	17.5		3				2		1
Hackney Central	8.5	43.3	18.7	20.6		3				1	1	1
Hackney Downs	10.3	46.3	14.1	29.3		3				2		1
Haggerston	9.8	39.5	10.8	14.3		3				1		2
Hoxton	20.7	38.7	24.1	16.5		3			1	1	1	
Kings Park	11.6	56.9	14.1	17.3		3				2		1
Leabridge	14.3	38.4	7.4	23.3		3				1		2
Lordship	39.9	26.9	12.4	20.7	3				1	1		1
New River	46.0	32.9	11.0	10.1	3				2	1		
Queensbridge	25.8	38.4	11.5	15.4		3			1	1		1
Springfield	42.9	27.6	10.2	13.5	3				2	1		
Stoke Newington C	9.0	45.3	16.8	28.9		3				1	1	1
Victoria	13.8	46.9	18.3	21.1		3				2		1
Wick	11.8	48.7	16.8	15.7		3				2	1	
Hackney	17.1	40.5	16.3	20.6	9	44	3	1	7	25	8	17

‘Other’ total includes 15 Green Party, one Hackney Independent (Haggerston) and one Respect (Leabridge).

Richmond

How STV could prevent wild swings in representation

In most wards in Richmond the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats got a high combined share of the vote and in a three-member STV election it would have been difficult for other parties to reach the threshold for election. Most wards would therefore elect two for the larger and one for the smaller of the two main parties locally, producing a Lib Dem majority group of 29 or 30, to 24 Conservatives and one or two Greens. The Liberal Democrats would therefore have a majority of three or five based on the 2006 elections in 3-member STV. In the previous borough elections the seats won would have been approximately Conservative 26, Lib Dem 22, Labour four, Green two.

Wandsworth

How STV could stop one-party states but still allow majority rule where the electorate wants it

The FPTP election in Wandsworth gave the Conservatives 85 per cent of the seats for 51 per cent of the vote. The 25 per cent of voters who did not choose Conservative or Labour had no representation.

A three-member STV election would have still given the Conservatives a comfortable majority in Wandsworth but that would also have provided a larger number of opposition members to scrutinise the council administration. It would also have represented more than one opposition party – the Greens and Liberal Democrats would have had a voice on the council. The Conservatives would have had around 36 seats, to 15 for Labour, six for the Greens and three for the Lib Dems, a Conservative majority of 12.

A six-member STV election in Wandsworth would have given a fairly similar outcome to a three-member election, with an estimated 34 Conservatives, 15 Labour, three Lib Dem and eight Green for a Conservative majority of eight. This was modelled using combinations of existing wards – in real elections, as in Scotland next year, new wards can be drawn with differing numbers of councillors to reflect real local community ties.

	Vote share %				FPTP seats				STV seats			
	C	L	LD	G	C	L	LD	G	C	L	LD	O
Balham	55.8	17.0	11.6	15.6	3				2			1
Bedford	44.4	24.7	11.8	17.0	3				2	1		
Earlsfield	61.7	22.8	0	15.4	3				2	1		
East Putney	60.4	13.2	12.1	14.3	3				2			1
Fairfield	55.5	17.8	11.0	15.7	3				2			1
Furzedown	41.1	40.7	6.4	11.8	1	2			1	2		
Graveney	22.3	34.2	27.5	10.8		3			1	1	1	
Latchmere	41.8	44.5	0	13.6		3			1	2		
Nightingale	49.4	18.2	13.6	18.8	3				2			1
Northcote	56.3	15.6	11.5	16.5	3				2			1
Queenstown	44.2	33.5	0	14.4	3				2	1		
Roehampton	49.8	33.9	8.6	7.7	3				2	1		
Shaftesbury	54.3	21.6	10.3	13.8	3				2	1		
Southfields	52.3	15.6	19.9	10.5	3				2		1	
St Mary's Park	56.5	19.4	9.8	14.3	3				2	1		
Thamesfield	60.0	14.5	12.1	13.4	3				2		1	
Tooting	38.9	37.4	9.1	11.5	2	1			1	2		
Wandsworth Common	59.9	14.1	11.8	14.2	3				2			1
West Hill	58.3	18.4	11.9	11.4	3				2	1		
West Putney	66.3	21.2	12.4	0	3				2	1		
Wandsworth	51.0	24.2	10.7	13.1	51	9	0	0	36	15	3	6

PUBLIC ROOMS

**POLLING
STATION**

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The local elections in the metropolitan boroughs

The local elections in the metropolitan boroughs

The metropolitan boroughs are major local authorities which govern the principal English conurbations outside London, i.e. West Midlands (Birmingham and around), Tyne and Wear (Newcastle and around), Merseyside (Liverpool and around), West Yorkshire (Leeds and around), South Yorkshire (Sheffield and around) and Greater Manchester. The larger boroughs such as Birmingham and Leeds are, in terms of budget, and the effect they have on people's lives and urban regeneration, among the most important local authorities in the country.

The ward boundaries for the metropolitan boroughs were changed in 2004 and as a result there was an unusual set of 'all-out' elections for these councils. The normal pattern of electing one-third of the council in each year was re-established in 2006. Of the three councillors elected for each ward in 2004, the one with the smallest majority faced re-election in 2006.

The metropolitan boroughs are among the most strongly Labour parts of England, containing as they do the principal concentrations of working class voters and ethnic minorities. However, Labour did very badly in these areas in 2004 – as a result the party had already taken the 'hit' in terms of support caused by the Iraq war. In 2006 there was a small upturn in the Labour share of the vote (+1.6 percentage points) and even a very slight swing (0.2 per cent) from Conservative to Labour compared with 2004. However, these elections were still among Labour's worst.

In context, the metropolitan results were bad but not disastrous for **Labour**. The result in votes showed a small recovery since 2004, with gains particularly in many of the core cities of the metropolitan areas

such as Manchester (+4.5 per cent), Birmingham (+3.7 per cent) and Liverpool (+5.8 per cent). There were rather poorer results in suburban authorities such as Sefton (-3.0 per cent), Solihull (-4.6 per cent) and Stockport (-2.1 per cent). In seats there was virtually no net change, masking seat gains such as Bradford and Liverpool and losses in seats (and council control) such as Bury and Oldham.

The **Conservatives** took an almost imperceptible step forward in the metropolitan boroughs, raising their share of the vote to 27.0 per cent from 25.8 per cent in 2004. However, they are still well behind their recent peak of 31.4 per cent under William Hague in 2000, and have not broken out of the low range in which they have usually been polling in these authorities. They also ended up very slightly ahead of where they had been in 2004 in seats as well. In terms of council control, depriving Labour of their majority in Bury and successfully defending Conservative control of Solihull against the Liberal Democrats were probably their best achievements. Their 'gain' of Coventry was purely technical – they already had half the seats and, thanks to the vagaries of which seats were up for election in which year, took place despite a small swing to Labour.

The Conservative performance was somewhat patchy, with generally reasonable performances in Greater Manchester and Merseyside balanced by bad results in Yorkshire and Tyne & Wear. They polled well in a number of the more suburban boroughs, including Bury (+ 6.2 per cent), Walsall and North Tyneside (+ 5.8 per cent in each). In the core cities the Conservatives fared miserably again, electing no councillors in Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield or Newcastle. In Manchester and Newcastle their vote fell appreciably in each (-2.2 per cent and -5.7 per cent respectively).

Metropolitan borough council elections 1982–2006

	T/O	Con		Lab		LD/ All		Green		Others	
		Vote	Seat	Vote	Seat	Vote	Seat	Vote	Seat	Vote	Seat
2006	NA	27.0	189	34.1	393	23.6	186	3.6	4	12.3	41
2004	40.4	25.8	182	32.4	394	25.4	198	4.2	4	12.2	37
2003	32.1	26.0	157	39.9	455	24.7	189	2.1	4	7.3	21
2002	33.1	26.2	133	43.1	520	23.3	150	1.9	4	5.5	20
2000	26.0	31.4	203	38.4	458	24.4	202	1.5	3	4.3	18
1999	26.1	25.6	116	44.8	532	24.5	172	1.4	2	3.7	14
1998	24.8	26.0	106	45.8	559	22.9	148	1.3	1	4.0	13
1996	30.5	22.7	72	53.1	615	20.1	125	1.0	1	3.3	14
1995	33.8	19.9	49	57.1	682	19.1	101	0.9	0	2.9	10
1994	38.9	22.7	76	51.4	635	22.8	132	1.1	0	2.1	7
1992	32.5	39.5	268	39.3	442	17.3	100	1.2	0	2.6	17
1991	40.8	31.8	182	45.1	519	18.6	107	1.8	0	2.6	18
1990	46.3	26.6	106	54.8	651	13.5	66	3.0	0	2.1	4
1988	38.8	31.6	172	51.0	578	13.9	69	0.8	0	2.8	8
1987	44.0	31.7	227	42.6	492	23.8	101			1.9	7
1986	39.3	26.5	138	48.1	586	23.3	96			2.1	7
1984	38.6	31.0	188	48.6	552	18.9	75			1.5	12
1983	41.2	33.5	234	44.7	525	20.1	59			1.7	9
1982	37.6	34.6	272	38.1	448	26.2	95			1.1	12

Before 1988 Greens are included under 'Others'.
Source: Rallings and Thrasher local election handbooks 1987-2003; own calculations 2004 and 2006. 1982 and 2004 seat figures are averages for multi-member elections.

In Manchester the Conservatives suffered a swing against them in Brooklands, the ward they had targeted to get a toehold on the city council.

The **Liberal Democrats** slipped back very slightly from 2004 in votes and seats. There were huge variations in their performance in different boroughs, from a loss of 11.5 per cent (Bolton) to a gain of 6.0 per cent (Oldham). In councils which were battles between Lib Dem and Labour, there was no general tendency – incumbents did both well (Lib Dem in Newcastle, Labour in Manchester) and badly (Lib Dem in Liverpool, Labour in Oldham).

The **BNP** increased its vote somewhat since 2004, polling 6.0 per cent in the metropolitan boroughs. However, movements in the overall BNP share of the vote were affected by the number of wards the party contested and when one compares the wards the BNP fought in both 2004 and 2006 a mixed picture emerges. The table shows the results in six areas of BNP activity.

In Sandwell the BNP increased their overall vote despite pulling out of some wards where they had polled relatively well in 2004. They successfully targeted three wards. In Oldham, previously a BNP

hotspot, their vote and organisation continued to decline in 2006. In Sunderland, where they fought every ward in both elections, their vote was more or less the same as it was in 2004. The BNP seems not to pose a national threat, but one that varies from locality to locality.

In general, the results emphasised the end of two- (or even three-) party politics in local government in much of urban England. In many authorities the leading party polled considerably less than 40 per cent and in three large cities (Birmingham, Leeds and Bradford) the leading party had less than 32 per cent. In two West Yorkshire councils, Calderdale and Kirklees, no party got over 30 per cent. In Kirklees, 2006 was the second borough election in which the party with the most votes got only 25 per cent. In one ward of Kirklees, Holme Valley North, the winning Conservative candidate had 24.9 per cent of the vote, and there was only one ward (Greenhead, for Labour) where the winner had the support of more than half the voters.

Turnout in many of the metropolitan boroughs was down on 2004. A major reason for this was the circumstances of the 2004 local elections, which were combined with the European Parliament election and in five of the six metropolitan counties

The BNP vote in six metropolitan boroughs

	BNP % share 2006	Change in BNP % share 04/06	Comparable wards	Change in BNP in % comparable wards
Bradford	13.4	+6.4	9/30	+4.0
Kirklees	18.5	+5.3	17/23	+3.0
Leeds	11.0	+3.2	19/34	+4.1
Oldham	5.8	-0.7	5/20	-2.5
Sandwell	12.4	+5.8	5/24	+10.2
Sunderland	14.6	+0.2	25/25	+0.2

Wrong winners in metropolitan boroughs 2006

	Votes %				Seats				Winner	
	C	L	LD	O	C	L	LD	O	Votes	Seats
Bolton	40.2	37.8	19.0	3.0	7	10	3	0	Con	Lab
Birmingham	26.1	31.5	22.4	20.0	17	15	8	0	Lab	Con
Bradford	31.6	30.4	21.1	16.9	11	14	3	2	Con	Lab
Kirklees	23.6	25.2	19.8	31.4	8	7	4	4	Lab	Con
Sheffield	15.0	33.7	34.0	17.3	0	14	13	1	LD	Lab
Wirral	37.3	27.5	27.1	8.1	7	8	7	0	Con	Lab

took place using all-postal voting. In some areas the decline was sharp despite competitive local elections, as in Bury (down from 48.3 per cent in 2004 to 35.8 per cent in 2006). Even in the West Midlands turnout tended to be down, even though the area did not have all-postal voting.

In six of the 36 metropolitan boroughs there was a **'wrong winner'**, in that the party that won most seats had fewer votes than another party.

There were several **electoral deserts** for parties in the metropolitan boroughs. There were also a number of authorities in which a party with a significant share of the local vote failed to elect any councillors. The Conservatives suffered this fate in Sheffield (although there are still two Conservative councillors elected in 2004 on the council) and Manchester, where they won 10.5 per cent. But the worst case was Oldham, where 21.4 per cent was not enough to elect anyone and, because they were similarly deprived of representation in 2004, there are no Conservative councillors. The Liberal Democrats won no seats in Coventry with 14.6 per cent of the vote, but they suffered worst in Rotherham, where 23.5 per cent, the second largest share of the vote after Labour, failed to net them any seats. The third-placed Conservatives managed to win two seats because their vote is concentrated in

particular geographical areas within the borough. There were also a number of **exaggerated majorities**. These are councils in which a winning party won a disproportionately high number of seats, creating a situation in which organised opposition is made difficult. This is a potential breeding ground for unresponsive local leadership that has in other areas led to the rise of the BNP or a pattern of poor council performance and even corruption.

In a multi-party local political environment, getting over 40 per cent of the vote can result in an overwhelming majority of seats that is bad for local democracy. In some of these councils this is a recurrent problem – in Rotherham in 2004, 38.2 per cent of the vote won Labour 53 out of 63 seats – 84.1 per cent.

Exaggerated mandates in 2006

	Party	Percentage vote	Percentage seats
Manchester	Labour	44.8	71.9
Rotherham	Labour	42.9	90.5
Salford	Labour	41.4	70.0
Sunderland	Labour	40.5	76.0
Tameside	Labour	47.0	78.9

PECKHAM
RYE



Unitary and district council elections

Unitary and district council elections

Unlike London and the metropolitan boroughs, which cover identifiable regions and group neighbouring authorities together, the other English local elections took place in an untidy patchwork of authorities. This makes it more difficult to deal with them together in a systematic fashion.

Unitary councils

The unitary authorities are the product of the local government review of the 1990s as a result of which the two-tier system introduced in the 1970s was revised in some areas. A few councils, principally the larger cities, gained independence from their surrounding county councils and became 'unitary', that is, providing all the local authority services in their area. In some areas, counties were entirely dissolved and replaced by several unitaries, as in the new counties of Avon, Cleveland and Humberside, and the more established county of Berkshire.

Most unitary councils had elections for a third of their members in 2006, although there are a few (such as the Isle of Wight, and Leicester) that have different cycles. The seats being defended in these councils were dependent on the most recent boundary review, being a mixture of 2002, 2003 and 2004.

Stoke-on-Trent has been ill served by the electoral system. In the first election for the unitary council, in 1996, Labour won every single seat on the council (although the party's vote was also very high, at 64.5 per cent). Labour's vote fell dramatically in 2000 and in 2002 the party lost control of the council and lost the first election for mayor. Labour recovered council control from 2004 to 2006, and the mayoralty in 2005.

Labour's share of the vote has been pretty static since 2000, but the party's share of seats has veered around from four out of 20 (20 per cent) to 13 out of 20 (65 per cent).

In the last couple of elections the BNP has been active in Stoke, with 12.7 per cent of the vote in 2006 (29.8 per cent on average in the eight wards where it stood) and three councillors elected. One of these elections, in the Abbey Green ward, illustrates the ability of FPTP to produce an unpopular minority winner – this time with 24.9 per cent of the vote despite the BNP's vote share remaining static since 2004.

Labour suffered a wipe out in **Peterborough**, despite polling 21.1 per cent of the vote in the wards that were up for election in 2006. The result was highly distorted. The council is dominated by the Conservatives with a scatter of other groups – 35 Conservatives to seven

Stoke-on-Trent council elections 2000–06

	Votes %				Seats			
	C	L	LD	O	C	L	LD	O
2000	24.3	33.1	20.7	21.8	4	4	4	8
2002	13.2	33.6	16.6	36.6	6	21	11	22
2003	16.1	33.8	15.2	34.9	2	11	1	6
2004	20.8	36.1	10.7	32.4	2	13	1	3
2006	19.7	32.8	11.6	35.9	2	6	3	9

Abbey Green ward, Stoke-on-Trent, 2006

Candidate	Party	Vote	Vote %	Change on 04
Walker	BNP	744	24.9	+0.1
Wallace	Labour	613	20.5	-20.3
Sutton	Socialist Alternative	508	17.0	+5.2
Costall	Conservative	424	14.2	-8.3
Lees	Independent	363	12.2	+12.2
Knight	Liberal Democrat	334	11.2	+11.2

Independents, five Liberal Democrats, five 'Minority Parties' (mainly Liberals) and four Labour, despite Labour having been the second placed party in both elections (2004 and 2006) which have determined the council's composition.

In **Reading** there was a 'wrong winner'. Labour shed two seats to the Conservatives and one to the Liberal Democrats, but held eight wards to five Conservatives and two Lib Dems. This was despite the Conservatives having more votes than Labour, with 35.0 per cent of the vote to Labour's 33.4 per cent. The electoral system for the borough of Reading is systematically skewed to Labour, partly because of low turnout in safe Labour wards and partly through advantageous boundaries. In 2004 Labour won 76 per cent of the seats on 35 per cent of

the vote and Labour control of the council is still fairly secure, with 32 seats to eight Conservatives and six Liberal Democrats.

In **Southampton** the election created an unusual situation. One seat changed hands as Labour recovered a ward that had gone to the Liberal Democrats because a councillor had defected, and the Conservatives confirmed a by-election gain from Liberal Democrat, which left a three-way tie with Labour, Conservative and the Liberal Democrats all level on 16 seats.

Overall conclusions about the unitary elections are difficult, but broadly the Conservatives did well and Labour badly, particularly in comparison with 2002. In general, the best Conservative results were in the south and the party made net losses in the few northern unitaries that were up for election. In some southern councils the Conservatives made big gains, as in Plymouth and Swindon (mainly from Labour) and Milton Keynes (mainly from the Liberal Democrats). Even in the authorities where the seats were last fought in 2004, Labour still posted a small net loss, although their performance was patchy. Labour lost seats in Reading, Peterborough and Warrington, but gained in Hartlepool and Slough. The Liberal Democrats had cause for disappointment, missing out on what looked like

Peterborough council election 2006

	Vote share %	Seats	Seat share %
Conservative	48.2	12	63.2
Labour	21.1	0	0.0
Liberal Democrat	14.5	3	15.8
Independents	9.9	3	15.8
Liberal Party	6.4	1	5.3

relatively easy gains of overall control in Bristol and Portsmouth and losing their majority in Milton Keynes. These elections gave the Conservatives some grounds for optimism about a number of marginal parliamentary seats, such as Swindon North, Swindon South and Portsmouth North.

Shire districts

District councils are the lower tier authorities in the parts of England which retain two-tier local government. Many district councils, particularly those in rural areas, have all-out elections every four years and are due to go to the polls in May 2007. A significant number, though, have annual elections in the same years as the metropolitan boroughs – these tend to be the more urban authorities, including the biggest towns that did not acquire unitary status – Norwich and Preston – and a number of marginal Lancashire authorities such as Pendle and Hyndburn. There were elections in 89 districts in 2006 (compared to 232 in the last all-out year, 2003). Most seats being defended were last contested in 2002, although there were some councils where there had been boundary reviews and one-off all-out elections in 2004 (Adur, Crawley; Penwith; Weymouth & Portland; Cambridge, Huntingdonshire, South Cambridgeshire; Norwich, Great Yarmouth; Redditch, Worcester, Wyre Forest).

The broad pattern of the results was for the Conservatives to make modest progress in seats and for Labour to fall back. The Conservatives gained Crawley direct from Labour even though the seats were last contested in 2004. They also made big gains in Bassetlaw (gaining from no overall control), Barrow (where Labour lost control), Ipswich (Conservatives became the largest party for the first

time since Labour gained the council in 1979) and other places. Shire district gains and losses contributed a lot to the national totals for each party.

The Liberal Democrats, in contrast to the larger authorities, tended to do quite well in the shire district elections, gaining control of St. Albans and South Lakeland outright, claiming the position of leading party in Oxford from Labour and depriving the Conservatives of control over Gosport and Harrogate. Their only severe losses of seats were in Brentwood and Norwich.

There were a number of results in individual local authorities that illustrate the faults of FPTP in local elections – wrong winners, unrepresented parties, exaggerated swings and one-party states. The following examples may be among the worst, but there were many more district councils whose composition is a very poor reflection of the wishes of the local electorate.

In **Nuneaton & Bedworth** there was an extremely unfair result. The Conservatives won 51.4 per cent of the vote and eight seats out of 17, but Labour won nine seats with 38.1 per cent of the vote. This is the second time in a row that Nuneaton & Bedworth has received a wrong winner, as the Conservatives won seven out of 17 in 2004 with 47.4 per cent of the vote and Labour won nine with 38.1 per cent. Nuneaton & Bedworth elects half its councillors every two years, so Labour has a majority of two on the council despite having lost the popular vote both times. The situation where a party wins more than half the vote and has a wide lead in votes (13.3 percentage points) but another party wins a majority is particularly indefensible.

In **Cambridge** the Liberal Democrats increased their majority and the last Conservative councillor was defeated. Four parties attracted significant levels of

Cambridge council election 2006

	Vote share %	Seats	Seat share %
Conservative	22.1	0	0.0
Labour	25.4	4	28.6
Liberal Democrat	38.4	10	71.4
Green	12.3	0	0.0

support but only two are represented – and one of those, the Liberal Democrats, is grossly over-represented. The Conservatives won no seats in 2006 for 22.1 per cent of the vote, and the Greens have no representatives despite 12.3 per cent of the vote. This pattern of election results in Cambridge is not an aberration. The all-out elections on new boundaries in 2004 gave the Conservatives one seat for 20.6 per cent of the vote, the Greens none for 14.6 per cent, Labour 13 for 24.1 per cent and the Liberal Democrats 28 (two-thirds) for 37.6 per cent.

Labour lost its last representatives on several councils, namely **Adur** (Sussex), **Rochford** (Essex) and **Runnymede** (Surrey), despite a continuing minority vote in those areas.

Tamworth council in Staffordshire illustrates the consequences of FPTP in areas where most wards are marginal and similar in political and social make-up. The Conservatives won 50.9 per cent of the vote but eight out of 10 seats (80 per cent); Labour, with 41.5 per cent of the vote, had to settle for the other two seats. This was still a bit less unrepresentative than 2004 when the Conservatives enjoyed the same 8-2 margin with 43.0 per cent of the vote to Labour's 37.3 per cent. If there is an even swing from the 2006 results, level votes would leave the Conservatives 7-3 ahead, but if Labour end up more than four points ahead, four more seats would flip and Labour would have a lopsided 7-3 lead. A Labour lead the same size as the Conservatives'

2006 margin of 9.4 per cent would give Labour a 9-1 landslide. These results exaggerate relatively small swings of opinion in an absurd fashion.

Broxbourne in east Hertfordshire is one of the most one-sided councils in Britain, being dominated by 35 Conservatives facing opposition from only two Labour and one BNP councillor – a Conservative presence of 92 per cent on the council. Although Broxbourne has given the Conservatives a large popular majority, with 68.9 per cent of the vote in 2006, the position on the council exaggerates the situation. Without a proper opposition there can be little political competition and scrutiny of council decisions. Labour's dominance of **Stevenage**, in the same county, is a little less extreme, but in 2006 46.4 per cent of the vote won Labour 11 out of 13 seats (84.6 per cent) and the party has 82.1 per cent of the seats on the council. In **Eastleigh** (Hampshire) the Liberal Democrats won 49 per cent of the vote and 13 out of the 16 seats available (81 per cent). The council now has 34 Liberal Democrats, seven Conservatives and three Labour.

Two seats ended up being determined by random selection. In **Crawley** Labour's run of bad luck continued when the party's candidate in Broadfield North ward, Thakordas Patel, was tied with Conservative candidate Adam Brown. The returning officer prepared two blank envelopes, one with a paper reading 'Elected' inside, and Patel chose the unlucky envelope. With Brown's 'election', the Conservatives gained a majority of one on Crawley council. Luck, however, went against the Conservatives in the Wheathampstead ward of **St. Albans**, where the returning officer drew straws – or, more exactly, pencils. Liberal Democrat Judith Shardlow picked the longer pencil and was declared elected.



Mayoral elections

Mayoral elections

Alongside the other local elections taking place on 4 May, there were elections for four directly-elected executive mayors. These included the three in London boroughs – Hackney, Lewisham and Newham – and one in Watford. A total of 15 local authorities have so far opted for this form of governance. On the same day, electors in Crewe & Nantwich decided not to join them. All four sitting mayors were re-elected. However, it is worth looking more closely at the way in which each of these elections worked owing to the use of the controversial Supplementary Vote (SV) system.

It is wrong to suggest, as newspapers are prone to, that the SV system is a proportional one. No system that elects a single position can be proportional unless the post-holder is going to be a job share of all the candidates.

The point of using the SV system (as opposed to using First-Past-the-Post) is to ensure that the person elected enjoys broader support among the electorate. Under FPTP, it is possible to be elected on a small minority of those who bother to turn out.

As an example, MPs have been elected with the support of only 26 per cent of voters. Instead of casting a single X-vote, electors are asked to cast an X for their first choice and a second X for their second choice. To calculate the winner, the first votes for each candidate are counted and if a single candidate has the support of a majority of those who voted, they are declared the winner. If no candidate has the support of a majority of those who voted then all but the top two candidates are excluded. The second choice votes on the ballot papers of these candidates are examined and, where a choice for one of the two remaining candidates has been expressed, they are added to that

candidate's total. The remaining candidate with the highest total of votes (both first choice and second) is declared the winner.

The Electoral Reform Society has criticised this system as failing in the objectives it sets itself. These criticisms are borne out by the outcomes of the mayoral ballots on 4 May.

Hackney

Andrew Boff	Conservative	7,454	1,331	8,785
Mima Bone	Green Party	4,683		
Monty Goldman	Communist Party of Britain	896		
Matthew Penhaligon	Liberal Democrats	4,882		
Hettie Peters	Independent	2,907		
Jules Pipe	Labour Party	20,830	3,403	24,233
Dean Ryan	Respect	2800		
Turnout 34.3%				

Jules Pipe was safely re-elected in Hackney, beating Conservative Andrew Boff by a clear margin. Liberal Democrat Matthew Penhaligon (the son of a former MP) came third. Mr Pipe narrowly failed to win on first choice votes, achieving 46.7 per cent of the vote. Once the second choice votes of defeated candidates were taken into consideration, Mr Pipe secured the support of a majority (54.4 per cent) of those who cast a valid first choice vote in the election. However, it is notable that almost three quarters (70.7 per cent) of the votes of the defeated candidates were not able to transfer. Either they had no second preference vote registered or the second preference was for a candidate other than those in the top two. In effect, therefore, the votes of these electors did not register in the election.

Under any fair system, Jules Pipe would have been elected as Mayor of Hackney. However, it would be advantageous to have a system whereby voters were able to mark their full preferences in the knowledge that if their first choice did not need their support or could not win then their vote would transfer to subsequent choices until such time as it reached a candidate for whom it could make a difference. It is arguable that using a full preference system – the

Alternative Vote (AV) – would have encouraged more people to vote. What is certain, however, is that more of those people who did cast a ballot would have seen their vote contribute to the result.

It is also worth noting that the rate of spoiled ballot papers was much higher than is usual in elections held under First-Past-the-Post. In single-member elections (such as those to the House of Commons) the spoilage rate is typically 0.2 per cent. In multi-member elections (such as those to London councils) the spoilage rate is typically around 0.4 per cent. In this election, the proportion of spoiled votes was 4.0 per cent.

Lewisham

Steve Bullock	Labour	22,155	2,974	25,129
James Cleverly	Conservative	10,790		
John Hamilton	Independent	4,823		
Michael Keogh	Green	7,168		
Chris Maines	Lib Dem	12,398	6,491	18889
Sinna Mani	LPA	1,366		
Turnout 33.8%				

Mayor Steve Bullock easily held off a strong showing from Liberal Democrat Chris Maines (former Leader of Bromley Council and parliamentary candidate in Orpington in 2005). Conservative James Cleverly came third. Mr Bullock won the support of 37.7 per cent of those voting on first preferences. Once second preferences were taken into account, Mr Bullock's share of the vote rose to 42.8 per cent, still well short of a majority of those who cast at least a valid first preference.

This highlights a significant failing of the SV system. With a restriction to just two preferences, in a multi-party contest electors must consider voting tactically in order to make sure that their choice will count. This involves correctly predicting which two candidates will make it through to the second round and choosing between them. As the incumbent, it was fairly certain that Mr Bullock would make the top two, but voters would have had to follow the election closely in order to see the chance that the Liberal Democrats might leapfrog the Conservatives into second place. Most voters either do not have such foresight or refuse to cast their vote tactically. In the event, more than three out of five (60.8 per cent) of the ballot papers which could have transferred did not. It is impossible to say that if the election had

been run under the Alternative Vote the result would have been different, but it is at least possible.

The proportion of spoiled ballot papers was 2.5 per cent.

Newham

Reza Choudhury	Conservative	8,822		
Alan Craig	Christian Peoples Alliance	6,559		
Anwar Hussain	Liberal Democrat	2,886		
Abdurahman Jafar	Respect	12,898	2,983	15,881
Robin Wales	Labour	28,655	5,406	34,061
Turnout 34.5%				

Sir Robin Wales was re-elected as Mayor of Newham, beating Respect candidate Abdurahman Jafar. The Conservatives came third with the Christian People's Alliance fourth and the Liberal Democrats fifth.

Sir Robin secured the support of 47.9 per cent of those who cast a valid first choice. When second preferences were taken into account, Sir Robin's vote share rose to 56.9 per cent and he therefore secured majority support.

The most extraordinary factor of this election was the incredibly high proportion of ballot papers that were not counted. A total of 4,879 (7.54 per cent of those cast) were treated as spoiled. Staff at the Council blamed this on a number of factors centring on the pilot that was held whereby electors were asked to vote preferentially (1,2) in a single column. Whilst a number of provisions were made to allow votes which included lower preferences (3,4 and 5) to be included in the count, there was a significant problem with electors casting multiple X votes in the mayoral election. These could not be counted. According to Council staff, this may have been due to a combination of less than clear voter information material, potentially misleading campaign material put out by at least one political party and a lack of experience of the system. In the only previous

Newham mayoral ballot, touch screen voting machines had been used which prevented spoiled ballots being cast.

It is worth noting once again that a majority (54.1 per cent) of the ballot papers of defeated candidates could not be transferred as they had either given no second choice or cast their second choice for another defeated candidate.

Watford

Dorothy Thornhill	Liberal Democrat	11,963
Stephen O'Brien	Conservative	4,838
Stephen Rackett	Green	2,522
Ruth Ellis	Labour	4,062
Turnout 39.2%		

Liberal Democrat Dorothy Thornhill was the only mayor to be re-elected on first choice votes alone – i.e. with the support of a majority of those who voted. Since the inception of the mayoral system, there have been a total of 24 mayoral elections in the UK. Of these, just three have resulted in first round victories. As a result of this first round success, it is impossible to tell what proportion of the ballot papers for the third and fourth place candidates would have transferred.

Dorothy Thornhill's success tends to support the idea of a mayor being a person identifiable to the population as a whole and who can rise above party politics on occasion. It is quite clear that she has considerable name recognition in the town and draws support from a wider base than her party can achieve. In borough elections on the same day, the Liberal Democrats won nine out of 12 seats on 42.7 per cent of the vote compared with Ms Thornhill's 51.2 per cent.

A significant factor in Watford was the rate of ballot papers which were declared to be spoiled. These totalled 986 ballot papers (4.0 per cent). Of these, 253 were void because the elector cast more than one first preference vote (i.e. they either placed two Xs or voted numerically in the first choice column). One paper had a signature on it and the remaining 732 were either unmarked or void for uncertainty. According to the electoral services officer for Watford, a huge number of these contained

only a mark in the second choice column and therefore could not be counted. The Electoral Reform Society believes that the SV system is a root cause of the casting of so many spoiled votes. However, if the Government is determined to retain SV, we believe that it is vital for an urgent review of ballot paper design and information provided to voters to be held.

The lessons of these mayoral polls echo those gathered from the two elections for the Mayor of London and those that have taken place in other local authorities since 2002. The key findings are that the SV system:

- results in a high number of spoilt ballot papers (roughly a tenfold increase)
- often requires electors to vote tactically in order to ensure that their vote counts
- requires a high degree of political acumen (or luck) even for those willing to vote tactically
- leads to a large number of votes not counting
- results in many mayors being elected with the support of less than half of those who vote
- fails to allow electors to express their true choices

For these reasons, the Electoral Reform Society believes that it is imperative that the voting system used to elect local authority executive mayors be changed to the Alternative Vote.



Women's representation

Women's representation

The 2006 local elections saw a small increase in the number of women on councils in England. However, the pattern was uneven across councils and across political parties and overall women remain under-represented in local government.

Election by thirds

With election by thirds, as in district, metropolitan and unitary authorities, it is more difficult to discern trends and one would expect change to be more gradual. The pattern is of progress in some places being mirrored by a reduction in the number of women elsewhere. The overall effect was no significant overall change in women's representation on those local authorities with elections.

Among the unitaries, for example, Derby, Reading and Southampton saw increases of 5 per cent or more, while Southend-on-Sea, Portsmouth and Bristol saw reductions of the same order. Similarly, in metropolitan boroughs, Bury, Barnsley and Liverpool saw significant improvement in gender balance, while St. Helen's, Coventry and Bolton representation moved away from gender balance.

Noteworthy among the district councils is Tamworth; now with only three women it has become the worst council in England in this respect, with only 10 per cent women. The proportion of women fell on Cheltenham, Wyre, Burnley and Castle Point councils, while it rose on Watford and Mole Valley.

Redcar and Cleveland, where no elections took place this year, remains the only council outside London with more women than men.

London Boroughs

London's all-out elections resulted in more progress in terms of women's representation than on those councils with election by thirds. Overall the capital elected an extra 50 women, an increase of three percentage points since 2002. The difference in the electoral systems is part of the explanation. All-out elections mean change is less gradual, while the dynamic of the selection process differs between choosing one candidate or a team of candidates. Where parties put forward three candidates, it becomes more obvious if the list is male-dominated and women are under-represented. Where election is by thirds, selectors choose one candidate at a time for a three-member ward, thereby removing the pressure towards diversity usually inherent in multi-member wards. It also becomes easier for those parties which so choose, to implement positive action measures where they are selecting more than one candidate per ward.

London highlights and Low points

Tower Hamlets was the council with the poorest gender balance going into the election and despite an increase of four in the number of women, it remains bottom of the London league table for women's representation. Next is Kingston-upon-Thames which saw a 15 per cent drop. The Conservatives gained six seats here yet saw their number of women fall by two; women now make up just under 10 per cent of their group. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats lost five seats in Kingston and a net loss of five women, though women still make up 36 per cent of their party group.

Camden also saw a fall in the number of women, slipping from 40 per cent to 31 per cent, falling below the London average. The Liberal Democrats made significant gains in Camden, but in terms of gender they had a net increase of 13 men and no women. Sutton, Harrow, Brent and Bromley also saw a reduction in the proportion of women, Brent and Bromley falling back to just one in four women on their councils.

Islington is the only London council with more women than men. Two-thirds of the Liberal Democrat group and 40 per cent of Labour's councillors are women. Hammersmith is second in the capital, following a 15 per cent rise in the proportion of women on the council. Both the Conservative and Labour groups are very close to gender balance with the Conservatives adding 10 women among their gains. Lambeth and Barnet are the only other councils with more than 40 per cent women.

Hounslow and Wandsworth also saw significant increases in the number of women, with both Conservative groups including a number of women councillors among their gains. Haringey also moved up the league table from 28 per cent to 36 per cent with both Liberal Democrat and Labour groups increasing their proportion of women.

Gender and the parties

Party	Number of women	Per cent of party councillors	Change
Conservative	234	30	+ 2.6
Labour	242	36	+ 5.0
Liberal Democrats	102	32	- 4.0

While the Conservatives are slightly behind Labour and the Liberal Democrats in terms of the proportion of women councillors, the party's record is much better at local government than in Parliament. The Conservatives saw an increase in both the number and proportion of women among their councillors, now at 30 per cent. Yet the rise is not that dramatic, given that significant gains in seats for a party can often be coincident with a leap in women's representation. Women can be elected without having to displace incumbents and women selected to challenge presumed safe seats can benefit from larger than expected swings.

The proportion of Conservative women rose on 17 councils (including three where there were no Conservative women before the election) but has fallen on nine councils, six of them where the party made gains in terms of seats. Party leader David Cameron has made commitments to increase the number of women in elected positions though no specific measures have been announced for local government.

Labour managed an increase of 5 per cent in the proportion of women councillors, while losing seats in London overall. On 15 councils where Labour lost seats, the proportion of women increased, though it fell on Islington and seven

other councils where the party experienced losses. On Barnet and Kensington & Chelsea councils, Labour has more women than men.

These are the first London borough elections since Labour introduced positive action for local council candidates. The policy was to select at least one-third women in multi-member wards, only excluding wards in special circumstances and with an end goal of one-third of elected councillors being women. In all-out elections, this means the equivalent of one candidate in a member ward (though with flexibility allowed for incumbency). At 36 per cent Labour has exceeded this target. Where councils have election by thirds, the party aims to select one woman out of every three candidates, either over a number of wards or over several elections. There has been progress here too, though more slowly.

While Liberal Democrats made tiny gains in the number of councillors overall, both the number and proportion of women dropped. Unlike the Conservatives, the Lib Dems did not manage to accompany significant gains in seats with more gender balanced council teams in Brent and Camden. Small increases were achieved in Haringey, Lewisham and Richmond. The proportion of women Liberal Democrat councillors rose on nine and fell on eight councils.

Across London, there was a 4 per cent drop in the proportion of women Lib Dem councillors at a time when the other parties were seeing increases. This should give the party pause for thought as they seek to increase diversity in their representation at all levels, without using all-women shortlists.

Among small parties, the Green party saw eight women and four men elected (the party did not use

positive action). Respect picked up 15 seats in Tower Hamlets and Newham; just two went to women. Four women were elected to represent the BNP in Barking & Dagenham, out of a London-wide total of 14 BNP councillors.

Women and the electoral system

Multi-member First-Past-the-Post, as operated in London, does little to help women. In wards where parties select a team of three candidates, it does make it easier to spot under-representation, for example if a party puts forward three men and no women. However, voters are reliant on parties to select more women, and this is not always the case. The system offers limited voter choice and flexibility. Women's representation is only a little better in London's three-member wards than in the rest of the country where election takes place by thirds under a straightforward First-Past-the-Post-system.

Voters are just as likely to support female candidates as male candidates. Although most voters stick to party lines with their three votes, given the inflexibility of the system, in the small number of cases where people vote across party lines, it is clear that women are not disadvantaged. Looking at split wards, where more than one party was elected, as well as the difference in share of vote between candidates for the same party, women were not disadvantaged by voters splitting their ballot. For instance, in the borough of Enfield, the share of the party vote achieved by male and female candidates from each party, in each ward shows no real sign of any electoral gender disadvantage.

Women candidates received 101.5 per cent of the average vote for each party, while male candidates received 99.1 per cent. This is not a big enough difference to be significant.

A more proportional system would favour women by giving parties an electoral incentive to select a balanced team of candidates and give voters the chance to prioritise women candidates. Scotland will elect its local councillors by the Single Transferable Vote from next May, and it will be interesting to see the effect on women's representation.

Selectors sometimes argue that it is hard to get women to stand for local government, citing the image of local government, timing of meetings, pay and conditions as possible factors which may particularly deter women. In Scotland, reform of the voting system has been accompanied with a review of council working arrangements and remuneration.

The Scottish Executive has announced that councillors will receive a higher basic allowance of £15,424 for councillors while a working group made recommendations on the timing and number of meetings and administrative and technical support for councillors.

LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK ELECTION OF BOROUGH COUNCILLORS

The following is a statement as to persons nominated for Election as Councillors for the

BRUNSWICK PARK WARD

STATEMENT AS TO PERSONS NOMINATED

Date of Election : 4th May 2006

1. The following persons have been nominated

Name of Candidate	Home Address	Description (if any)	Names of Proposer (*), Seconder (**) and Assentors	Decision of Returning Officer that Nomination Paper is Invalid or other reason why a person nominated no longer stands nominated
AL-SAMERAI Anood	27 Tyers Est Bermondsey St SE1 3JG	Liberal Democrat Focus Team	Samantha L. McDonough (*) Caroline V. Pidgeon Paul G. Miles Daudi Turya Christopher N. Haigh	Mohammad Zabair (**) Lorraine Zuleta Haleema Bibi Rodney J. Hedley Terence R. Larkin
BRISBY Tania Alexandra Teofana Beatrice	43 Camberwell Grove London SE5 8JA	The Conservative Party Candidate	Roger A. Bambrrough (*) Oliver H. Wooller Clive T. Manning Irene J. Manning Gladys C. Baxter	Sally S. Bambrrough (**) Christopher T. Baxter Stephen Willis Walter J. Bowman Charles Firbank
CARVALHO Joao Carlos Machado De	8 Carlton Cottages New Cross Road SE15 5BE	Green Party	Lourna Stennett (*) Stephen Swaray Ebenezar Oreyelu Gary P. Bendell Alan Baldwin	Modupe Mateola (**) Jessie Paul Akeem O. Salami Lynda Urhobo Honorable Avenue
CLARK Florence Iris June also known as PODOY	90 Havil Street London SE5 7RS	Liberal Democrat Focus Team	Samantha L. McDonough (*) Caroline V. Pidgeon Paul G. Miles Daudi Turya Christopher N. Haigh	Mohammad Zabair (**) Lorraine Zuleta Haleema Bibi Rodney J. Hedley Terence R. Larkin
GRIMSDITCH Adrienne	2 Langford Green Champion Hill Camberwell SE5 8BX	Green Party	Lourna Stennett (*) Stephen Swaray Ebenezar Oreyelu Gary P. Bendell Alan Baldwin	Modupe Mateola (**) Jessie Paul Akeem O. Salami Lynda Urhobo Honorable Avenue
JENKINS Ben	4 Roseway London SE1 7JT	Green Party	Lourna Stennett (*) Stephen Swaray Ebenezar Oreyelu Gary P. Bendell Alan Baldwin	Modupe Mateola (**) Jessie Paul Akeem O. Salami Lynda Urhobo Honorable Avenue
MCGOVERN Alison	18C Valmar Road Camberwell London SE5 9NG	The Labour Party Candidate	Nicholas P. George (*) Clare A. O'Dempsey Brian Wiltshire Carl Anderson Edward W. Easen-Thomas	Kate Folarin (**) Richard Thomas Declan J. O'Dempsey Christopher Page Tai Hassengators
MITCHELL Andrew Michael	214 Croxted Road London SE24 9DG	The Conservative Party Candidate	Roger A. Bambrrough (*) Oliver H. Wooller Clive T. Manning Irene J. Manning Christopher T. Baxter	Sally S. Bambrrough (**) Gladys C. Baxter Stephen Willis Walter J. Bowman Charles Firbank
O'KEEFE Gemma	18A Urlwin St London SE5 0NF	Liberal Democrat Focus Team	Samantha L. McDonough (*) Caroline V. Pidgeon Paul G. Miles Daudi Turya Christopher N. Haigh	Haleema Bibi (**) Lorraine Zuleta Mohammad Zabair Rodney J. Hedley Terence R. Larkin
POPOV Julian Georgiev	43 Camberwell Grove London SE5 8JA	The Conservative Party Candidate	Roger A. Bambrrough (*) Oliver H. Wooller Clive T. Manning Irene J. Manning Gladys C. Baxter	Sally S. Bambrrough (**) Christopher T. Baxter Stephen Willis Walter J. Bowman Charles Firbank
RHULE Sandra Dean	Flat A 20 Maude Road Camberwell London SE5 8NY	The Labour Party Candidate	Nicholas P. George (*) Clare A. O'Dempsey Brian Wiltshire Carl Anderson Edward W. Easen-Thomas	Kate Folarin (**) Richard Thomas Declan J. O'Dempsey Christopher Page Tai Hassengators
WINGFIELD Robert Ian also known as IAN	24 Barforth Road Peckham Rye London SE15 3PS	The Labour Party Candidate	Nicholas P. George (*) Pauline Martin David J. Smith John A. Chaple George White	Allen Russell (**) Elsie I. Aird Beverley Blake Rupert N. Maas Richard Thomas

The persons above, where no entry is made in the last column, have been and stand validly nominated.

Dated : 5th April 2006

Central House
Southwark Town Hall
Peckham Road
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SE5 8UG

Deborah Holmes
Returning Officer

Printed and published by the Returning Officer

Constituency projection of the 2006 local elections

Constituency projection of the 2006 local elections

Of the 200 most vulnerable Labour MPs, we have compiled local election results in 121 of their constituencies, allowing for forthcoming boundary changes. In the remaining constituencies there were either no local elections at all (as in Scotland and Wales) or local elections in only a small part of the constituency and therefore not enough data for a projection.

Of the 121 seats that are most at risk, Labour would hold only 31 on the basis of the 2006 local elections. The Conservatives would gain 71 seats, the Lib Dems 18 and one would disappear in boundary changes.

The losses are nearly total among Labour's most vulnerable ultra-marginals.

Of all of the top 100 marginal Labour seats that had local elections on 4 May (60 seats out of 100), Labour held on in only three. The riskiest seat successfully 'defended' by Labour on 4 May was Andrew Smith's Oxford East (20th most marginal Labour seat), where the Lib Dems came close in 2005 but seem not to have made much progress since then. The next two were Stevenage (64th) and Bradford West (72nd). If this loss rate is typical Labour would hold on to only five of its 100 most marginal seats.

The picture is still pretty bleak further down the table. Of the next 100 most marginal seats, the ones that

make a difference between a defeat and a rout, 61 had local elections this year and Labour were outpolled in the majority of them, 'holding' 28 and 'losing' 33. If this loss rate is typical of the others that did not poll this year, Labour would lose 54 seats in the next tranche and hold 46.

Assuming for the moment no further Labour losses in the safer seats, this means a drastic decline in Labour's position in Parliament. 355 Labour MPs were elected at the 2005 election. If the picture painted in the local elections is representative of the whole of Britain, Labour would surrender 149 seats, taking the party down to only 206 seats. This is even worse than 1983, when Labour had 209 seats.

Some of the safest Labour seats are being abolished in the boundary changes, such as Tyne Bridge and Eccles, so the Labour position is likely to be a little worse even than this projection suggests. There are also a few seats even safer than the top 200 which would have gone to other parties on the basis of the 2006 results, such as Lewisham West & Penge, and Wallasey.

The Conservatives would win over 100 seats from Labour on this basis – perhaps as many as 120 – putting them, with new seats created in the boundary changes, on the verge of an overall majority. There were not many areas up for election this time in which the Conservatives and Lib Dems

Marginal seats	Seats at this level of marginality which had local elections on 4 May 2006			Labour losses if these areas typical	
	Total	Con gain	Lab hold		LD gain
1-50	23	19	1	3	48
51-100	37	26	2	8	47
101-150	31	20	7	4	39
151-200	30	6	21	3	15

were competing, so it is difficult to make much of a projection of what might have happened in many of these seats. The evidence we have, in London in particular, is of modest Conservative gains in seats such as Sutton & Cheam and Richmond Park.

Having admitted all the necessary caveats and health warnings (see below), these figures do show that Labour has the potential to lose a very large number of seats unless, as a matter of urgency, they can regain some of their past support. The loss of seats suggested by this analysis would easily be enough to see them forced from office. As Hazel Blears, the new Chair of the Labour Party, told a conference convened by Progress, the analysis should 'serve as a wake up call'.

In our view, the Labour Party needs to embrace electoral reform as soon as possible. A change in the voting system could lessen the huge impact that relatively small swings can have in a First-Past-the-Post election. It would not enable Labour to hang on to power unfairly, but could prevent the sort of wipe-out situation which is possible under FPTP. One only has to look at what happened to the Conservatives in the London borough of Richmond last week. From a two-to-one seats advantage over the Lib Dems, a swing as small as 5 per cent was enough to put them at a two-to-one deficit in seats.

A fair voting system would also have the benefit of getting rid of many of the other failures of the current system. There would be no safe seats and so this disincentive to vote would go. In addition, there would be no no-go areas for the major parties. Last week the Conservatives again failed to gain representation in Newcastle, Manchester and Liverpool, thus denying many thousands of their voters proper representation.

At last year's general election, Labour said that they would review the voting systems used in the UK. With the civil service element of this review now ending, we believe that the Government must move forward to a national debate on how best to engage the public through the ballot box.

Notes to constituency projection

General health warning

Local elections are not equivalent to general elections. Local elections normally attract about half the turnout that general elections do, and therefore the results can be affected by differences in morale and motivation among the parties' supporters. The government party normally does rather worse than its national standing might suggest in local elections. When Labour are in power, they have particular problems in persuading their vote to turn out in local elections.

Electors can vote differently in different types of elections. A dramatic illustration is in Liverpool, where the Liberal Democrats led in all the city's constituencies in the 2004 local elections but Labour held on comfortably everywhere in 2005.

Wandsworth is another example, where the Conservatives poll better in local elections, and there are other less striking cases across the country. In some urban areas, where one ward is a significant proportion of the total constituency, the personal vote of a councillor can distort the constituency projection. In some places, voters have behaved tactically at one level but not another.

Electors often have a different choice of candidates at different elections. For instance, in areas where one of the major parties is weakly organised, their vote may be artificially depressed because they have stood few candidates in the available wards (the Lib Dems did not stand in much of Barrow and several Lancashire towns). Minor parties and independents can be more important factors at a local level than they are nationally.

Specific health warnings for this table

Boundaries

The results are given on the basis of the new constituencies drawn up by the Boundary Commission, which will come into effect at the next election. 'Notional' results for the new seats are not currently available and the seats are listed in the order of the marginality of their *current* equivalent at the 2005 election. Boundary changes can affect the safety or marginality of seats to a considerable degree. The principal cases are noted in the table. One seat (Birmingham Sparkbrook & Small Heath) is dissolved into neighbouring seats and has no direct successor.

When assessing the composition of an imaginary House of Commons on the basis of 2006 voting behaviour, it is worth adjusting further to take account of several new constituencies that are introduced and others that will be abolished. This may be worth something of the order of a net 15 on the balance between Labour and Conservative MPs, in favour of the Conservatives. Particularly significant boundary changes are noted in the table. A description of 'adverse' or 'helpful' refers to the effect of the boundary changes on Labour's efforts to hold the seat.

Estimates

In some constituencies only a portion of the wards included in the constituency had local elections in 2006. Provided that the bulk of the constituency did have elections, a result has still been estimated in most cases. The basis for these estimates were the local election results in the wards not contested this year when they were last fought, mostly in 2004 but occasionally in 2003.

When there has been a noticeable trend in local public opinion since 2004, this is reflected by tweaking the result a little. A full working has been done in the cases where the party lead was in question (e.g. in Hyndburn). Estimated results are indicated as such in the table and (unless the uncontested ward is very small) they are given in round numbers to avoid bogus precision.

64	Stevenage	Barbara Follett	7.5% Con	35.2% Lab hold	41.4%	20.5%	1.9%	0.8%
64	Stevenage	Barbara Follett	7.5% Con	35.2% Lab hold	41.4%	20.5%	1.9%	0.8%

	Constituency	MP	Second party	Boundary effects	Result 2006	Con % 06	Lab % 06	LD % 06	Green % 06	BNP % 06	
65	Warrington South	Helen Southworth	7.5% Con		LD gain	27%	24%	47%	2%	0%	Two small wards estimated
66	Bedford	Patrick Hall	8.0% Con		Con gain	36%	27%	26%	3%	0%	Estimate
68	Milton Keynes South West	Phyllis Starkey	8.1% Con	Successor seat Milton Keynes South	Con gain	39%	27%	20%	0%	0%	Estimate
69	Gloucester	Parmjit Dhanda	8.2% Con		Con gain	43.3%	24.6%	28.3%	2.0%	0.0%	
70	Rossendale and Darwen	Janet Anderson	8.3% Con		Con gain	40%	35%	14%	3%	3%	Estimate
71	Oldham East & Saddleworth	Phil Woolas	8.3% LD		LD gain	18.5%	19.5%	43.6%	5.0%	3.5%	
72	Bradford West	Marsha Singh	8.3% Con		Lab hold	24.9%	38.1%	21.9%	6.1%	9.0%	
73	Derby North	Bob Laxton	8.6% Con	Major, helpful	LD gain	28.1%	31.1%	37.3%	2.2%		
74	Birmingham Sparkbrook SH	Roger Godsiff	8.6% Resp	Seat abolished	Abolished						
75	Halifax	Linda Riordan	8.6% Con		Con gain	28.5%	26.3%	21.6%	1.4%	16.0%	
77	Norwich South	Charles Clarke	8.7% LD		LD gain	18%	23%	31%	27%	0%	One ward estimated
80	Eltham	Clive Efford	9.3% Con		Con gain	35.5%	30.4%	21.4%	3.8%	3.4%	
81	Harrow East	Tony McNulty	9.3% Con	Major, adverse	Con gain	48.1%	32.8%	17.5%	2.6%	0.0%	
82	Wirral South	Ben Chapman	9.4% Con		LD gain	35.7%	19.6%	37.9%	4.8%	0.0%	
85	Brentford and Isleworth	Ann Keen	9.6% Con		Con gain	31.0%	26.4%	17.3%	10.9%	0.0%	
86	Elmet	Colin Burgon	9.6% Con	Successor seat Elmet & Rothwell	Con gain	38.8%	31.4%	15.4%	3.2%	11.0%	
87	Tynemouth	Alan Campbell	9.7% Con		Con gain	56.4%	33.0%	6.6%	0.0%	0.0%	
88	Hampstead and Highgate	Glenda Jackson	9.8% Con	Successor seat Hampstead & Kilburn	LD gain	28.5%	22.3%	36.4%	11.8%	0.0%	
89	Bradford North	Terry Rooney	10.2% LD	Successor seat Bradford East	LD gain	23.9%	32.2%	33.8%	0.0%	10.2%	
91	Keighley	Ann Cryer	10.5% Con		Con gain	37.7%	33.1%	16.1%	0.0%	13.1%	
92	Halesowen & Rowley Regis	Sylvia Heal	10.5% Con		Con gain	55.3%	38.2%	3.6%	1.0%	0.0%	
93	Plymouth Sutton	Linda Gilroy	10.8% Con	Successor seat Sutton & Devonport	Con gain	38.4%	28.8%	20.0%	8.8%	0.0%	
94	Dudley South	Ian Pearson	10.8% Con		Con gain	39.0%	31.0%	25.9%	0.0%	0.0%	
96	Newcastle-u-Tyne Central	Jim Cousins	11.1% LD	Major, helpful	LD gain	10.5%	39.6%	39.8%	3.3%	5.7%	
97	Bolton North East	David Crausby	11.1% Con		Con gain	44.7%	37.4%	13.9%	2.1%	0.0%	
98	Reading West	Martin Salter	11.1% Con		Con gain	39%	33%	21%	6%	0%	Estimate
99	Amber Valley	Judy Mallaber	11.1% Con	Helpful	Con gain	44%	43%	9%	0%	5%	Estimate
104	Wakefield	Mary Creagh	11.9% Con		Con gain	34.3%	32.9%	17.5%	3.5%	10.3%	
105	Waveney	Bob Blizzard	11.9% Con		Con gain	41%	27%	14%	10%	0%	Estimate
107	Dewsbury	Shahid Malik	12.0% Con		Con gain	27.5%	25.9%	13.1%	9.2%	21.4%	

Constituency	MP	Second party	Boundary effects	Result 2006	Con % 06	Lab % 06	LD % 06	Green % 06	BNP % 06
108 Lincoln	Gillian Merron	12.5% Con		Con gain	47%	37%	8%	0%	Estimate
109 Pudsey	Paul Truswell	12.6% Con		Con gain	39.4%	25.7%	19.3%	4.9%	9.9%
110 Leeds North East	Fabian Hamilton	12.7% Con		Con gain	33.3%	32.4%	25.8%	3.4%	0.0%
111 Ipswich	Chris Mole	12.7% Con		Con gain	38.7%	31.7%	26.0%	2.7%	0.0%
113 Tooting	Sadiq Khan	12.9% Con		Con gain	44.9%	27.8%	11.7%	14.1%	0.0%
114 Derby South	Margaret Beckett	13.0% LD		Lab hold	21.8%	43.1%	30.2%	1.7%	0.0%
115 Dudley North	Ian Austin	13.1% Con		Lab hold	31.7%	32.7%	8.1%	0.0%	17.0%
116 Blaydon	David Anderson	13.7% LD		LD gain	8.3%	41.0%	49.1%	0.0%	0.0%
118 Exeter	Ben Bradshaw	13.9% Con	Helpful	Con gain	32%	29%	25%	7%	0%
119 Ealing Acton and Shepherds Bush	Andrew Slaughter	13.9% Con	Successor seat Hammersmith	Con gain	41.8%	37.7%	16.8%	2.0%	0.0%
120 Holborn & St Pancras	Frank Dobson	13.9% LD		Lab hold	20.7%	34.6%	24.0%	17.0%	
124 Lancashire West	Rosie Cooper	14.1% Con		Con gain	51%	41%	0%	3%	Estimate
126 Hyndburn	Greg Pope	14.2% Con		Lab hold	45%	46%	6%	0%	Estimate
130 Thurrock	Andrew McKinlay	14.6% Con		Lab hold	36%	38%	7%	2%	One ward estimated
131 Liverpool Wavertree	Jane Kennedy	14.7% LD		LD gain	5.3%	25.2%	54.8%	7.2%	0.0%
132 Batley & Spen	Mike Wood	14.8% Con		Lab hold	21.7%	28.2%	18.5%	4.3%	26.5%
133 Burnley	Kitty Ussher	14.8% LD		LD gain	17.8%	28.8%	37.5%	0.0%	14.1%
134 Regents Park and Kensington North	Karen Buck	15.1% Con	Successor seat Westminster North	Con gain	48.7%	30.0%	17.8%	0.0%	0.0%
135 Ealing North	Stephen Pound	15.2% Con		Con gain	41.4%	34.2%	18.0%	3.4%	0.0%
137 Coventry South	Jim Cunningham	15.4% Con		Con gain	41.5%	30.5%	12.5%	3.3%	6.9%
138 Chorley	Lindsay Hoyle	15.4% Con		Con gain	44%	34%	11%	0%	Estimate
139 Ellesmere Port & Neston	Andrew Miller	15.4% Con		Con gain	47%	37%	11%	1%	Estimate
142 Brent North	Barry Gardiner	15.8% Con	Helpful	Con gain	37.8%	32.8%	23.8%	5.6%	0.0%
143 Carlisle	Eric Martlew	16.1% Con		Lab hold	37%	38%	17%	1%	One ward estimated
145 Crosby	Clare Curtis-Thomas	16.1% Con	Successor seat Sefton Central	Con gain	42.5%	23.5%	33.0%	1.0%	0.0%
146 Crewe & Nantwich	Gwyneth Dunwoody	16.3% Con		Con gain	44%	32%	12%	0%	Estimate
148 Barrow & Furness	John Huiton	16.5% Con		Con gain	49%	28%	5%	1%	Estimate
149 Birmingham Hall Green	Stephen McCabe	16.5% Con	Major, helpful	LD gain	12.9%	28.7%	29.2%	4.0%	4.4%
152 Southampton Test	Alan Whitehead	16.8% Con		Lab hold	27.3%	31.7%	29.2%	7.9%	0.0%
157 Newcastle North	Doug Henderson	18.3% LD		LD gain	9.4%	31.5%	54.9%	1.6%	1.4%
158 Poplar & Canning Town	Jim Fitzpatrick	18.3% Con	Successor seat Poplar & Limehouse	Lab hold	23.4%	33.8%	14.0%	2.3%	0.0%

	Constituency	MP	Second party	Boundary effects	Result 2006	Con % 06	Lab % 06	LD % 06	Green % 06	BNP % 06
159	Feltham & Heston	Alan Keen	18.3% Con		Lab hold	29.8%	34.2%	19.8%	2.5%	0.0%
161	Streatham	Keith Hill	18.4% LD		Lab hold	13.9%	34.2%	33.1%	13.9%	0.0%
164	Bristol North West	Doug Naysmith	18.9% Con	Major, adverse	Con gain	37.9%	22.0%	29.3%	7.9%	0.0%
165	Blackburn	Jack Straw	19.2% Con		Lab hold	23.7%	37.6%	24.8%	0.0%	9.6%
166	Birmingham Hodge Hill	Liam Byrne	19.2% LD		Lab hold	8.7%	42.7%	32.7%	3.1%	11.0%
169	Plymouth Devonport	Alison Seaback	19.3% Con	Successor seat Plymouth Moor View	Lab hold	33.1%	35.0%	19.9%	1.3%	0.0%
172	Walsall North	David Winnick	19.9% Con		Lab hold	28.0%	32.4%	20.7%	4.3%	7.1%
173	Manchester Gorton	Gerald Kaufman	19.9% LD		Lab hold	6.4%	40.1%	38.0%	9.4%	0.7%
174	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Paul Farrelly	20.4% Con		Lab hold	29%	30%	28%	2%	0% Estimate
175	Birmingham Perry Barr	Khalid Mahmood	20.4% LD		Lab hold	18.9%	37.7%	23.1%	4.0%	11.3%
176	Birmingham Ladywood	Clare Short	20.5% LD		Lab hold	8.8%	51.3%	27.5%	5.1%	4.8%
178	Liverpool Garston	Maria Eagle	20.6% LD	Successor seat Garston & Halewood	LD gain	8.9%	36.1%	44.8%	2.9%	1.0%
179	Stretford & Urmston	Beverley Hughes	20.6% Con		Lab hold	42.4%	44.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
180	Leyton & Wanstead	Harry Cohen	20.6% LD		Lab hold	19.5%	35.8%	29.5%	13.5%	0.0%
183	Birmingham Northfield	Richard Burden	20.8% Con		Con gain	37.6%	30.1%	10.1%	5.4%	16.9%
184	Stalybridge & Hyde	James Purnell	23.6% Con		Lab hold	34.9%	46.8%	1.7%	8.6%	5.7%
185	Dulwich & W Norwood	Tessa Jowell	21.0% LD		Lab hold	28.5%	32.2%	21.0%	14.6%	0.0%
186	Hartlepool	Iain Wright	21.1% LD		Lab hold	12%	33%	23%	0%	2% Estimate
187	Slough	Fiona McTaggart	21.2% Con		Lab hold	31.7%	48.4%	19.3%	0.7%	0.0%
188	Birmingham Selly Oak	Lynne Jones	21.2% Con	Adverse	Con gain	34.0%	28.7%	18.4%	7.5%	10.9%
189	Islington North	Jeremy Corbyn	21.3% LD		Lab hold	9.3%	36.0%	32.6%	20.2%	0.0%
190	Cannock Chase	Tony Wright	21.4% Con		Lab hold	35%	37%	25%	0%	3% Estimate
191	Coventry North West	Geoffrey Robinson	21.4% Con		Con gain	39.9%	33.5%	16.3%	0.0%	6.6%
194	Southampton Itchen	John Denham	21.5% Con		Con gain	36.6%	34.5%	22.0%	1.3%	2.1%
195	Ilford South	Mike Gapes	21.6% Con		Lab hold	29.1%	40.2%	20.2%	3.1%	2.0%
196	Lewisham East	Bridget Prentice	21.7% Con		LD gain	23.3%	29.2%	29.5%	12.1%	0.0%
200	Walsall South	Bruce George	22.5% Con		Con gain	37.0%	32.0%	13.2%	6.2%	0.0%

Hold31

Con gain71

LD gain18

Abolished1



Conclusion

Conclusion

This report has dwelt on the many failings of the electoral system used to elect English local authorities.

- It often elects the wrong winner – in 15-20 per cent both of London boroughs and metropolitan councils the party that won most seats did not actually have the most votes.
- It often gives power to parties without broad public support, for instance a share of support as low as 31.8 per cent in one London borough. In modern multi-party politics few council elections produce more than 50 per cent of the vote for a party.
- It produces absurdly exaggerated majorities, including 90 per cent or larger domination of some councils. Competition, it is argued, drives up standards in public services, and this also applies to leadership. Uncompetitive councils can become complacent, out of touch and in the past have become corrupt and dominated by cliques.
- It can produce exaggerated swings of seats on the basis of small swings in votes, hindering long term policy making.
- It can fail even to give a voice to opinions held by significant proportions of the electorate, including in some instances over 20 per cent of local voters.
- It can give a monopoly of local representation to a party that has a low share of the vote, meaning that the diversity of views in a ward is not represented.

This conclusion offers some ways forward from the situation revealed in the 2006 local elections.

Multi-member elections in London

Electing multiple candidates by FPTP (a system sometimes called the Multiple Non Transferable Vote, or MNTV) has little merit as an electoral system. It has several undesirable properties such as exaggerating swings and majorities, giving dominance of a ward to a party with only a third of the vote, and confusing electors. Sometimes casting all three votes can be against the interests of the candidate the voter most strongly favours. Suppose two Green supporters live in a ward where the Greens only have one candidate, and use their other votes for Labour candidates.

Labour 1	600		Elected
Labour 2	500	+2	Elected
Labour 3	401	+2	Elected
Green	400	+2	Defeated

If they vote for the 'wrong' Labour candidate, as they do in this example, they help to defeat the candidate whose cause they really favour.

There are few willing to defend multi-member FPTP as a fit and proper system for electing councillors. None of the various reviews and inquiries into local government electoral arrangements has favoured it. Its continued existence in London is at least partly the consequence of unclear government policy-making on local electoral arrangements. The February 1998 Green Paper *Modernising Local Government – Local Democracy and Community Leadership* floated the idea of annual elections for London borough councils, which would necessitate

a pattern of three-member wards. The subsequent July 1998 White Paper, *Modernising Local Government – In Touch with the People* proposed election by thirds for all unitary authorities including London boroughs. The Local Government Commission for England worked during its review of London ward boundaries between 1998 and 2002 to produce a pattern of wards that would permit annual elections. The government dropped the plan to introduce annual elections, but its consequences are still there in the map of London's wards. Government thinking now seems to be more inclined towards all-out elections for local authorities, which raises the possibility that the failed London electoral system will spread to other areas.

If MNTV is abandoned there are two logical possibilities – single-member FPTP or STV. Single member FPTP would reduce some of the exaggerative qualities of MNTV, but it would create some additional problems. In some authorities the wards would be very small – with perhaps fewer than 2,000 electors – and might encourage an overly parochial approach by representatives. Social geography in cities might mean that smaller wards would be based almost entirely on one social group or other and would be likely to be safe for one party or another. This could create uncompetitive local elections and ossify local political structures. Single-member FPTP would also remove one of the few positive features of MNTV – the incentive for parties to represent women and different ethnic groups on their slates of candidates in a multi-member election. In single-member wards imbalance is not as noticeable to the electorate because they would only encounter one candidate, but if, say, all three local candidates are white men, that sends a signal to the local electorate.

Neither MNTV nor single-member FPTP would do anything about most of the faults revealed by the 2006 local elections, including wrong winners, exaggerated mandates or unrepresented parties. The solution is a more serious measure of electoral reform.

It seems intolerable that those who run our local services should be elected by such an erratic voting system as FPTP. If we are to achieve a greater level of public engagement in local democracy and greater respect for our local councils, we need a better voting system.

Electoral reform for English local government

Many of the most common objections to electoral reform simply do not apply in the case of local government.

There is no issue of changing an established link between a single politician and his or her patch, particularly in London. Local government in much of England, particularly urban England, already has multi-member representation. In London and the metropolitan boroughs there is a (nearly) universal pattern of three-member wards. In London the normal pattern ever since the boroughs were established in 1964 has been for several candidates to be elected in the same election from the same ballot paper. There is nothing in terms of the mechanics of representation that would have to change should STV be introduced for these authorities. The only difference to the process from

the voters' eye view would be that instead of giving three X-votes, they would give preferences 1,2,3 (and more if they liked).

The idea (always shaky) that FPTP promotes strong government is a concept with no relevance at all in councils where there is an elected mayor responsible for running the executive and the council is essentially a scrutiny body and a pool of talent for the formation of the mayor's cabinet.

Strong government arguments are also misplaced in the majority of councils that do not have elected mayors. FPTP often does not produce a single-party majority. It tends in many areas, thanks to multi-party politics, to produce chaotic results that bear little relation to the wishes of the electorate. Also, the number of councils under no overall control has tended to rise, and some councils are irretrievably 'hung'.

Sefton has been under no overall control since 1986 and there is no sign of a single-party majority emerging there. Councils with no overall control vary greatly in the nature and stability of the arrangements that are made and it is a subject of extensive academic research. The experience in many authorities has shown that British politicians are perfectly capable of pragmatic adaptation and good government through co-operation rather than single-party rule. In some councils there are even all-party executive coalitions; in others there are stable arrangements between two or more parties; in yet more there are minority administrations. With the cabinet executive system it is possible for a minority or coalition administration to give a firm lead, subject to scrutiny and checks and balances from the full council.

Co-operation in local government also comes in many political flavours. In some areas Liberal

Democrats and Conservatives have formed alliances, as in Birmingham (and Leeds, where the alliance also includes the Greens). In others Liberal Democrats and Labour are partners, as in Harlow, or the Greens allow a minority Labour administration as in Norwich. There are sometimes agreements between Labour and Conservative, such as the recent coalition in Rochdale and the pact in Derby. Local politicians generally adapt to situations when they arise, and the most satisfactory co-operation is often established when it seems to be a permanent situation, because parties bidding for an overall majority may decide not to co-operate when they are a minority.

In Scotland, from May 2007 onwards, local elections will be conducted using STV, as local elections in Northern Ireland have been since 1973. STV will offer Scottish voters more choice and fairer representation of their views, not only in terms of party but also on what views candidates take on local issues, and allow voters to affect the representation of women and ethnic minorities.

One of the advantages of STV is its flexibility – if a natural community was of the size to merit four or five councillors, rather than three, that could be easily accommodated. Three-member STV is a rather restrictive form of STV. More members would mean a higher degree of proportionality. The quota for election with three members is 25 per cent, a very high threshold for a proportional system that would mean that some minority parties and candidates would not be represented. Nevertheless, our simulations on London borough elections do show that STV in three-member wards would give a reasonably good degree of proportionality and broaden representation on councils.

The government is quite rightly looking at the whole

question of modernising local government and supporting representative local institutions and effective and accountable local political leadership. Reforming the electoral system would have a valuable part to play in the modernisation of local government and we commend the idea to the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Electoral reform for the House of Commons

What the 2006 local election results might mean for future elections, and especially the next general election, is an inevitable question. The results are of course affected by the particular time and place in which the elections took place – several years before the next election and after a bad patch for Labour in national government, and in 176 different authorities each with its own local peculiarities. However, some general trends can be discerned.

It would be foolish for the parties to ignore the picture provided by the local election results, and for Labour it is a fairly bleak picture. Local elections were held in 60 of Labour's 100 most marginal seats: if the same votes had been cast in a general election, then Labour would have lost all but three of them. If we look at Labour's 200 most marginal seats, Labour would have held only a quarter of them where there were local elections. Such a swing could take the Conservatives close to an outright majority in Parliament, and Labour down to around 200 seats.

These extrapolations are not a forecast of what will happen in a few years time, but an indicator of the electoral trouble in which Labour now finds itself. The

reduced Labour majority in the Commons, the number of highly marginal seats and the forthcoming boundary changes all make the disappearance of that majority at the next election a strong possibility.

However, even with a very beneficial conjunction of circumstances in 2006, the Conservatives would still not be projected to have a workable Commons majority. They still have a mountain to climb and cannot expect such an abject display by their opponents just prior to a general election as they had in April 2006.

Unless there are big changes in the parties' fortunes, it would be rational to all of them to devote some thought and planning for the case of a hung parliament after the next general election. With no party able to claim that it is the clear choice of the electorate, it is particularly important that who governs the country is not left to the vagaries of our electoral system. If we were to have a hung parliament, it is very likely that electoral reform for the Commons would be part of any coalition agreement. But rather than waiting until compelled by circumstances to reform our voting system, we urge the Government to address the issue now and prepare for the referendum promised in 1997.

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Electoral Reform Society