
Local authority elections in England

3 May 2007

Report
and
Analysis



☐ Electoral
☐ Reform
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Summary

This report outlines the outcome of the 2007 May elections, the implications for the political parties and, especially, focuses on how the electoral system performed. The results show that the failings of the voting system continue: 15 wrong winners, 42 councils where parties with significant shares of votes did not get seats, few majority wins and a high level of disproportionality in most councils. The trend of a rise in votes for small parties and a continued high number of councils in no overall control further adds to the case for reform of the system.

- 76 out of 312 councils changed political control after the May elections. A majority of these had previously not been controlled by a single-party administration.
- The Conservative Party made most gains as they received 38 per cent of the vote, 51 per cent of the seats and controlled 53 per cent of the councils. Most of the Conservative Party's gains came in councils which previously had no party in overall control.
- Labour received 22.2 per cent of the vote, a fall which saw the party poll fewer votes than the Liberal Democrats in this election in the areas being contested. Shaken but not crushed, the party still managed to hold on to most of its seats in the metropolitan boroughs and the North East of England.
- The Liberal Democrats gained 23.6 per cent of the vote. The party received more votes than Labour in the areas being contested, but lost votes compared to the local elections in 2003. The Liberal Democrats did not make any substantial gains at this election.
- There were more councils under no overall control than councils controlled by Labour and the Liberal Democrats put together.
- The 2007 elections continued the trend of voters increasingly casting their votes for smaller parties: 16.2 per cent of votes went to smaller parties, a net increase of 3.9 per cent since 2003.
- The Green Party increased its votes and seats, while UKIP and the BNP increased their votes but not their seats. The increase in votes for these two parties was mainly a result of fielding more candidates this time than at previous elections.
- The Conservative Party continued to dominate southern England but did not make a real breakthrough in the north where Labour's disillusioned voters chose smaller parties rather than the Conservatives.
- Metropolitan boroughs and Unitary Authorities (UA) saw a higher proportion of votes going to smaller parties than district councils. In urban areas voters expressed a wider range of preferences than in rural areas.
- Councils with no party in overall control saw a closer contest between parties and, consequently, a more proportional result.
- Despite the fact that First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) is a system which generally favours the main party, the number of councils with no overall control was high. If voters continue to diversify their votes, coalitions will be inevitable, even under this electoral system.
- There were 15 councils with wrong winners (i.e. the party with most votes failed to get the most seats), 42 councils where parties gained no seats despite receiving a substantial percentage of the vote and 30 councils with a high number of uncontested seats.

- Labour was the party which most frequently found itself losing out on seats and gaining no representation despite having a considerable vote in some local authorities.
- Wrong winners mostly prejudiced the Conservative Party, which lost out in ten elections this way. Conversely, the control of four councils was lost to the Conservatives due to this flaw in the voting system.
- The average DV score – an index used to measure deviation from proportionality – was 20 in this election, whilst the median was 19. This indicates that the results were a poor reflection of the votes cast in each local authority. In Scotland, where the Single Transferable Vote was used in 2007, the median DV score was 10.4. In 2003, when Scotland still used FPTP for its local elections, the DV score was 20.9. This clearly indicates that a different voting system would guarantee a more representative result.
- Fewer than a fifth of local authorities saw a party win more than 50 per cent of the vote. Most of these councils were controlled by the Conservatives.
- The Conservative Party's net gain in votes since the 2003 election was 3.5 per cent but its gain in seats came to 9.8 per cent. In comparison, Labour lost 4.8 per cent of its vote and 5.9 per cent of its seats, while the Liberal Democrats lost 2.5 per cent of the vote and 3 per cent of its seats.
- 35 per cent of the Conservative-controlled councils were won with a 20 per cent difference between votes and seats. This meant that over a third of the wins were made with a significantly higher allocation of seats than the vote had merited. Winning parties under FPTP generally have a 'winner's bonus' but many of these were excessive.
- Labour-controlled councils displayed a similar tendency of over-representation as all Labour-controlled councils gave the party a higher proportion of seats than votes.
- The South East was the only region where a party came close to winning a majority of the votes when the Conservatives gained 48 per cent of the total vote. Yorkshire & the Humber had the most fragmented vote as no party received 30 per cent of the vote. In four regions, the Conservative share of seats was over 50 per cent, despite the fact that the party's vote only came close to 50 per cent in one region.
- The smaller parties were the overall losers with FPTP as they failed to translate their votes into seats.

Introduction

Elections took place in 312 local authorities across England on 3 May 2007. At the same time, elections for the National Assembly were held in Wales, while Scotland held elections for the Scottish Parliament and for local government. The local elections north of the border presented an additional feature this time, as Scotland saw a new electoral system being introduced: the Single Transferable Vote (STV). On the English side, however, it was business as usual as the electorate went to the polls using the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system once again.

Although local elections are not as high profile as general elections, they are often used to estimate the likely outcome of the next general election, adding an extra spin to the results. This time, there were several parties and political leaders needing to prove themselves.

The Conservative Party were keen to see proof of substantial improvements in the number of votes since David Cameron took over the Conservative leadership in late 2005. The media consensus was that winning 40 per cent of votes in the local elections would indicate that the party had a real chance of winning the next elections for Parliament. Would the Conservative Party achieve this share of the vote and would they make a breakthrough in the north of England, where Labour had a long-standing hold on power?

For Labour it was also an election which put the party to the test. It was to be Tony Blair's last election as leader of the Labour Party, supporters were keen to see how this would affect the Labour vote. There was a fear that Labour would suffer a backlash in the local elections due to national policies, particularly because of contentious issues such as the war in Iraq. As Tony Blair had come to embody a majority of these unpopular decisions in the popular con-

ception, there were calls among some party activists for him to stand down prior to elections but he did not. Would Labour manage to hold on to their voters or would they find themselves victims of a further 'Labour retreat'?

The Liberal Democrats also had a relatively new leader to put to the test. Menzies Campbell had become leader in March 2006 and the party was keen to put divisions behind it and consolidate its relatively high share of the vote in the 2005 election by winning local seats. The Liberal Democrats also had a better opportunity to make an impact on local level as they already controlled several councils and had a chance to increase their hold even more.

Smaller parties also had high hopes as many of them were slowly establishing themselves in many local authorities. Several parties also fielded a record number of candidates as they targeted councils across England. ■

Overview of the general results

Voters in approximately 80 per cent of English local authorities were encouraged to go to the polls as all regions apart from London prepared themselves to hold elections on 3 May 2007.

There were 231 council elections in district councils, 36 were held in metropolitan boroughs, while 45 Unitary Authorities also went to the polls. Local council elections in England are either by third or all-out elections. Fifty-seven per cent of councils held elections in all their wards (178) while 43 per cent of councils had one of three councillors in a ward standing for election or a more complicated pattern (134).

Council control

After the elections, the political map remained largely unchanged as only a quarter of councils saw a change-over of political control. In 2003, following an extensive boundary review, and a considerable shift of opinion since the 1999 elections in which Labour performed relatively well, the changes in administration had been more visible, with nearly a third of local authorities changing hands. The boundary changes in 2007 were fewer and had less impact on the election results. This also made it possible to make more accurate comparisons between the 2007 elections and those in 2003.

The Conservatives made substantial gains, ending up with control over 165 local authorities, a net gain of 40 councils. Labour lost control of eight councils, now controlling 34 compared to the previous 42. The Liberal Democrats also lost councils, four in total, giving them control over a total of 23 councils. Other parties, which included both Residents Associations and Independents, managed to maintain control of five councils. Councils where no party had overall control (NOC) were reduced in numbers from 113 to 85.

Although the Conservative Party made the most gains, it would be an exaggeration to call it a resounding success as many of the councils holding elections were in traditionally Conservative parts of rural England and some less favourable areas, like the London boroughs, did not hold elections. The Conservative Party gained control over 53 per cent of the councils after the May election, but had previously held 40 per cent of the councils so it was already the dominant party. Most of the party's gains came from councils where there had previously been no party in overall control.

In fact, many of the gains were made in areas which had been solidly under the control of Conservatives before the mid 1990s. In some of these areas there was also a continuing decline of Independent candidates, indicating that party politics were becoming more of a factor in local politics. The Conservatives' gain of Oswestry in this election was an example of this trend.

The vote

In the local authorities where elections took place, the Conservatives won 38.1 per cent of the vote, Labour 22.2 per cent and the Liberal Democrats 23.6 per cent. The Green Party won 3 per cent of the vote, the BNP 2.6 per cent, UKIP 1.1 per cent, Independent candidates took 6.2 per cent and other parties 3.3 per cent.

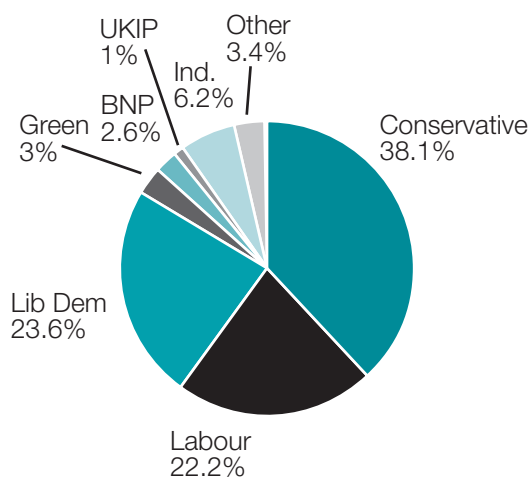
If compared to the figures from the local elections in 2003, it became apparent that Labour had lost a significant number of votes. In fact, Labour had ended up as the third largest party, with the Liberal Democrats overtaking them in votes. The only real winners, however, were the Conservative Party with a net gain of 3.5 per cent of the votes and the Green Party with 1.1 per cent more of the votes.

**Distribution of vote in 2007 and 2003
in percentage**

Party	2007	2003	Difference
Con	38.1	34.6	+ 3.5
Lab	22.2	27.0	- 4.8
LD	23.6	26.1	- 2.5
Green	3.0	1.9	+ 1.1
BNP	2.6	1.0	+ 1.6
Ind	6.2	6.8	- 0.6
Other	4.4	2.6	+ 1.2

UKIP included in 'Other'

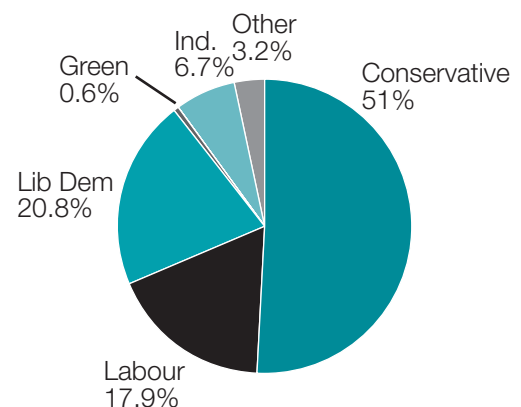
Comparing the results in the table above, the vote seemed to have become more fragmented, with smaller parties gaining a larger proportion of the vote than in 2003. This would confirm the long-standing trend of voters increasingly diversifying their votes.

**Distribution of vote in the
2007 elections**

The percentages are rounded, may not add up to 100

Seats

In terms of seats, the situation looked quite different: Conservatives won 51 per cent of the seats, Labour 17.9 per cent and the Liberal Democrats 20.8 per cent. The Green Party gained 0.6 per cent of the seats, The BNP 0.1 per cent, UKIP 0.05 per cent, Independents 6.7 per cent and other parties received 3.1 per cent of the seats.

**Distribution of seats in the
2007 elections**

The percentages are rounded, may not add up to 100

The number of seats obtained through the vote, as per First-Past-The-Post, varied quite substantially. The Conservatives, as the party with the highest number of votes, saw the most disproportional results in their favour, gaining or holding on to 44 councils with a 25–40 per cent difference between vote and seats.

The party's net gain in votes compared to the 2003 election had been 3.5 per cent while its

gain in seats came to 9.8 per cent. In comparison, Labour lost 4.8 per cent of its vote but 5.9 per cent of its seats while the Liberal Democrats saw their vote reduced by 2.5 per cent and their seat allocation by 3 per cent.

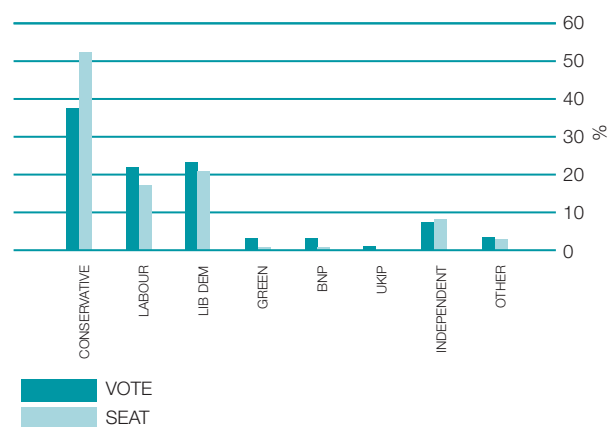
Allocation of seats in 2007 and 2003 (%)

Party	2007	2003	Difference
Con	51.0	41.2	+ 9.8
Lab	17.9	23.8	- 5.9
LD	20.8	23.8	- 3.0
Green	0.6	0.4	+0.2
BNP	0.1	0.1	0.0
Ind	6.7	8.7	- 2.0
Other	3.2	2.2	+ 1.0

The smaller parties were the main losers with FPTP as they failed to translate the total of their vote into seats. For example, the Green Party had made a gain of 1.1 per cent of votes since 2003 but only 0.2 per cent of seats. As far as smaller parties were concerned, disproportional results in individual authorities never worked in their favour.

The Conservative Party was the main winner in terms of votes and seats, but also in terms of disproportional wins in their favour. This does not mean that the Conservatives would always be the winner. In fact it is the system, FPTP, which guarantees the winner a disproportional majority.

Comparing vote and seat allocation in the 2007 elections



Turnout

It has not been possible at the time of publishing this report to produce a proper average of the overall turnout as many of the councils did not publish this information on their websites. An estimated average was mentioned in the recently published House of Commons research papers on the 2007 local elections, indicating that the turnout was 38 per cent. Figures so far obtained for this report show a similar result with the average turnout being 39.1 per cent (with figures from 109 out of 312 councils).

The turnout can be calculated in different ways, either using the average of the turnout in the wards holding elections or summing up the total vote in a council and dividing it by the total electorate. In this report we have calculated the turnout from the total vote divided by the total electorate. The two methods normally give very similar results.

If the estimated turnout of 38 per cent is correct that would mean an increase in turnout since the 2003 election which saw a 35.6

per cent turnout. The turnout is, however, still considerably lower than the 2005 parliamentary election (61.3 per cent) but similar to the European Parliament election in 2004 (39.5 per cent).

Women

Taking only the metropolitan boroughs, there was a modest increase in the number of women elected, 0.7 per cent, which meant that 31.4 per cent of councillors were now women. This was still a low figure compared to the total female population but a constant as far as local elections were concerned as the number of women elected for office has constantly been close to 30% at the last couple of elections.

Nearly half of the councils had increased the number of women elected, while 30.6 per cent of local authorities had the same numbers and 22.2 per cent of councils saw the number of women reduced. Most councils in question remained controlled by the same party as prior to the elections.

Analysing by party, using a very small sample – the ten metropolitan boroughs in Greater Manchester – it appears as if Labour was most likely to field female candidates and have them elected. The average percentage of women elected for Labour was 32.4 per cent. The Green Party came second with an average of 27.5 per cent while the Liberal Democrats had 24.8 per cent and the Conservatives 19.3 per cent. The findings coincide with the ERS report on the local elections in 2006 and with the figures in the UK Parliament, where Labour has the highest proportion of female MPs, followed by the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives.

Bolton was the council that lost most female candidates, while Tameside achieved the highest number of newly elected female candidates. The highest proportion of women, 41.7 per cent, was found in North Tyneside, while Bolton had the lowest proportion of women in the metropolitan boroughs, with 16.7 per cent. ■

The effects of the electoral system on the results

Like the UK general elections, the English local elections are held using the First-Past-The-Post system (FPTP). This system operates on the basis that the candidate who gets the most votes will be declared the winner, regardless of the number of votes received and regardless of how many votes the runner-up receives.

First-Past-The-Post, like any electoral system, has its specific advantages and disadvantages. FPTP has some particular characteristics, notably the tendency to give the winning party a comfortable majority of seats. The nature of the system also creates some more unwanted effects and has led to a particular brand of party tactics establishing themselves across the country. It has also allowed a specific political culture to develop which affects the very core of democracy and the way we understand politics. This report will start by looking at some of the more problematic issues surrounding FPTP and how the electoral system affected the results of the 2007 election.

Disproportional results and unfair majorities

One of the main reasons for advocating FPTP is that it provides a large majority to the party with most seats, the logic being that a strong majority provides a stable government. The assumption would be that a one-party government would always be preferred to a coalition government.

All electoral systems (except large-number pure list systems) can to some extent be non-proportional in the distribution of seats relative to votes. FPTP, however, produces particularly disproportional results. As a rule, and this can

be seen in other systems to a lesser extent, the largest party sees the main disproportionality in their favour. The main party will end up receiving more seats than votes while the smaller parties normally receive fewer seats than votes, making the results biased towards the winner. So rather than favouring a specific party, the system favours the main parties while the smaller parties lose out.

FPTP in local government introduces a further distorting factor in the all-out elections with the introduction of multi-member wards, an electoral system called 'block FPTP' or Multiple Non-Transferable Vote. This system tends to magnify the distortions in the relationship between votes and seats, particularly if people vote along party lines. Just as in single member wards there is a tendency of the winner to 'take it all', in multi-member wards that means one party gaining three seats instead of one on a relatively low vote.

If the 2007 election is considered, all main parties, Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats, lost out and won to some extent in this lottery, a disproportional gain in one council was accompanied by a disproportional loss in another. This does not mean that the main parties should be complacent about this phenomenon. On the contrary, this election was mainly fought in the councils where there had previously been no party in overall control (NOC). The margins for change of total control of these councils were much smaller, so a series of disproportional wins in these councils could lead to one party winning far more councils than the vote indicated. Needless to say, from a democratic perspective it is worrying that those who vote for small parties do not have the same say in the democratic process. We live in an increasingly diverse society, a diversity which is not always reflected in elections. To increase political engagement we

need to make sure that people can express their choices appropriately as well.

In the FPTP system there are no guarantees that the allocation of seats to a party will correspond to that party's vote. This election provided us with plenty of examples of councils where the difference between the votes a party received and the seats the party was allocated was worryingly large. The larger the difference between votes and seats, the more disproportional was the result.

All large parties made significant disproportional gains as the seats they were given often outweighed the actual vote. The Conservative Party won control of 37 councils with a 20–29 per cent difference between votes and seats in their favour and gained a further 21 councils with 30–39 per cent difference. Having taken control over 165 councils, these disproportional wins represented 35 per cent of the party's total wins.

Labour-controlled councils showed a similar pattern, in fact, all Labour-controlled councils were gained on a disproportional vote. Taking all the 34 Labour-controlled councils into account, the smallest difference between Labour's vote and seats on a council was 29 per cent. Quite a few Labour-controlled councils saw the party win with a 40 per cent difference between vote and seats.

The Liberal Democrats, who after the elections controlled 23 councils, had less 'luck' with the disproportional result being in their favour. Six councils were gained with a 20–29 per cent difference between votes and seats, while two more were gained with an even higher difference.

Overall, smaller parties won consistently fewer seats than votes in councils. The Independent

candidates' vote would vary enormously depending on the area. In some councils there were no Independent candidates standing and in others they controlled the authority. Therefore the distribution between votes and seats for Independent candidates would be more disproportional, and in their favour, if the vote was large.

Where the competition for votes was more intense and no party had overall control, the results were less disproportional. The councils with NOC appeared to have more proportional results. Perhaps this was not very surprising as FPTP is designed to give a disproportional majority to the winner, so, with no winner, results stayed more proportional.

Looking at the cases where councils had changed from NOC to a single party administration, the following could be observed: the Conservative Party made 35 gains from NOC: ten with a difference between 20 and 29 per cent and two cases with over 30 per cent. That meant that the Conservative Party made about a third of their gains from NOC councils through disproportional gains. Labour made two gains from NOC, both with more than a 20 per cent difference between votes and seats. The Liberal Democrats again were not so favoured by disproportional results. The party only gained one out of four councils from NOC on a disproportional result with more than 20 per cent difference between votes and seats.

Further to the disproportionality per party, let us look at the disproportional results through the DV score (see Appendix 1). Deviation from Proportionality (DV) is a method of measuring over- and under-representation of parties. The higher the DV score, the greater the disparity between votes cast and seats awarded. The maximum DV score is generally estimated to be around 50.

This year's English local elections saw a mean DV score of 20 and a median DV score of 19. The Scottish contest, using STV for the first time, had a median DV score of 10.4. In 2003, when Scotland was still using FPTP for local elections, the DV score was 20.9, so there is no doubt that the change in voting system reduced the disproportionality.

As seen in the table below, nearly half of the English councils had a DV score of 20 or more, while a quarter of these even had a DV score of 25 and above.

Councils by their DV score

DV score	Total	%
0–9.9	28	9.0
10–14	71	22.6
15–19	60	19.2
20–24	69	22.1
25–29	41	13.1
30–40	39	12.5
over 40	4	1.3

The most disproportional results, those with a DV score of over 40, were Eastleigh, Kennet, Tameside and Tunbridge Wells. Two were controlled by the Conservatives, one by Labour and the other was a Liberal Democrat council. None of the councils changed hands during the election and all but one were situated in areas deemed to be safe. All the winning parties received about 50 per cent of the vote and around 70–80 per cent of the seats. Not surprisingly, in three of these councils there were parties with a substantial vote which did not get any representation.

There were 39 councils with a DV score of 30 to 40. The East Midlands and Eastern region had most of these councils, which were mainly

located in safe areas. Around a third of the councils had cases of uncontested seats and unrepresented parties. Labour-controlled councils were slightly more prone to have councils with a DV score of 30 to 40. Again, NOC councils had the lowest number of councils with such a high DV score.

Looking at DV score by party control, Labour emerged as the party in control of most councils with a high DV score. Around two-thirds of councils controlled by the party had a DV score of 20 and over compared to 58.2 per cent of Conservative-controlled councils and 56.5 per cent of Liberal Democrat councils. Councils with no overall control had the lowest DV score: only 22.4 per cent had 20 or more. The difference between NOC councils and single-party-controlled councils became even more marked the higher the DV score became: only 5.9 per cent of NOC councils had a DV score of 24 or more compared to 30–40 per cent of single-party-controlled councils.

DV score by party control (%)

DVscore	Con	Lab	LD	NOC	Other
0–9.9	6.7	2.9	8.7	14.1	40
10–14	17.0	20.6	4.3	41.2	0
15–19	18.2	8.8	30.4	22.4	20
20–24	24.2	26.5	26.1	16.5	0
25–29	17.0	14.7	17.4	3.5	20
30–40	15.8	23.5	8.7	2.4	20
over 40	1.2	2.9	4.3	0.0	0

The DV score in councils with other dysfunctional features of FPTP, such as uncontested seats or unrepresented parties, was also remarkably high. About 87 per cent of councils with unrepresented parties had a DV score of 20 or more, while 63.3 per cent of councils with uncontested seats had a DV score of 20 or more. In the case

Knowsley saw Labour take control with 56 per cent of the vote but gaining 78 per cent of the seats. The Liberal Democrats came second with 31 per cent of the votes and 22 per cent of the seats.

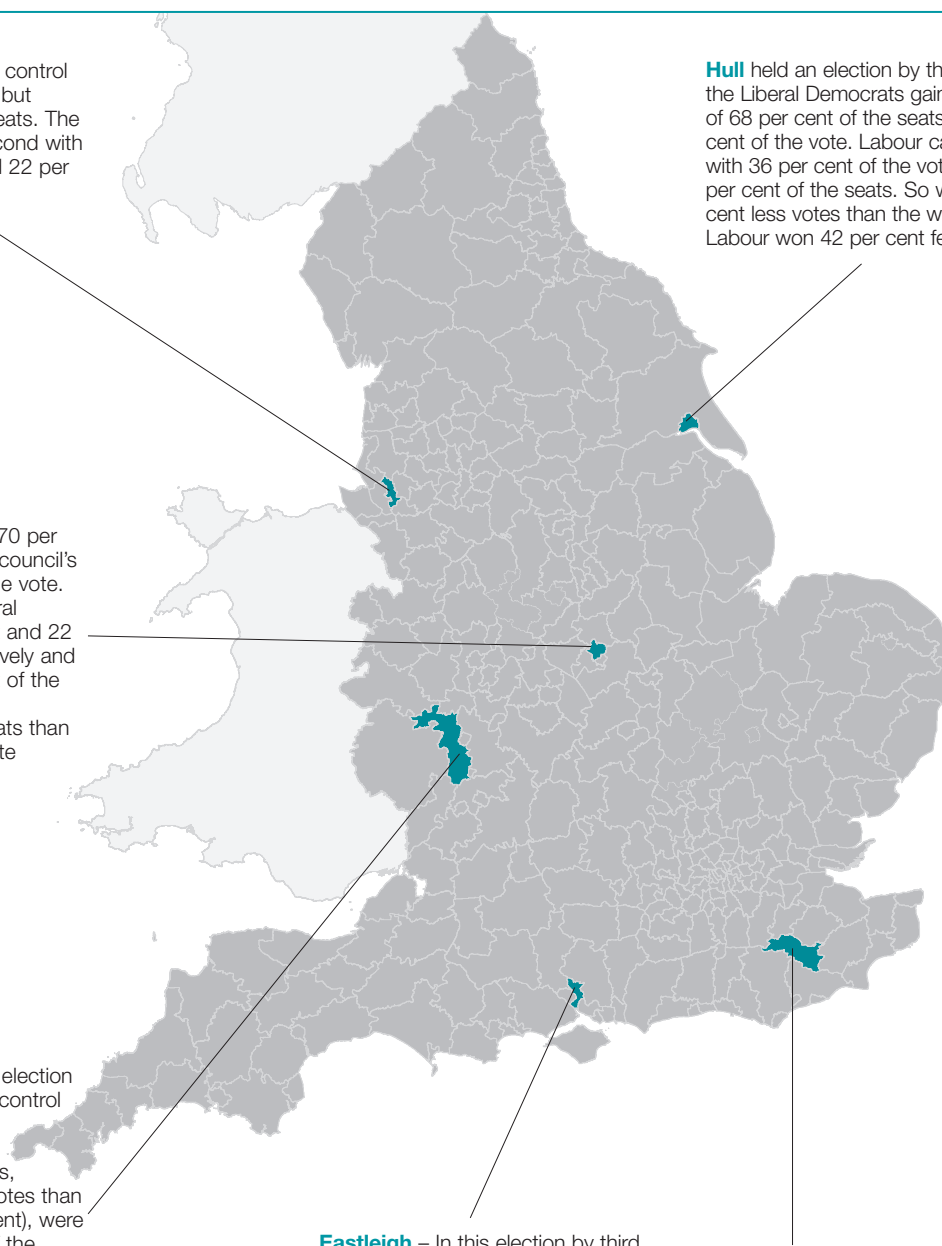
Hull held an election by third where the Liberal Democrats gained control of 68 per cent of the seats with 46 per cent of the vote. Labour came second with 36 per cent of the votes and 26 per cent of the seats. So with 10 per cent less votes than the winner, Labour won 42 per cent fewer seats.

Leicester – Labour gained 70 per cent of the seats in this city council's all-out with 39 per cent of the vote. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats took 19 per cent and 22 per cent of the vote respectively and 15 per cent and 11 per cent of the seats. Yes, in that order: Conservatives won more seats than the Liberal Democrats despite receiving fewer votes.

Malvern Hills – This all-out election saw the Conservatives gain control from NOC with 46 per cent of votes and 76 per cent of seats. The Liberal Democrats, who won 10 per cent less votes than the Conservatives (34 per cent), were only awarded 13 per cent of the seats. The Green Party was left with no representation despite gaining 9.4 per cent of the vote. A large number of councillors never even had to canvass for votes as they were re-elected unopposed.

Eastleigh – In this election by third, the Liberal Democrats gained 93 per cent of the seats with 51 per cent of the vote, while the Conservatives won no seats with 29 per cent of the vote and Labour, with 12 per cent of the vote, also failed to gain representation.

Tunbridge Wells – with 58 per cent of the vote, the Conservatives won all the seats in this council which held elections by third. This was despite the Liberal Democrats receiving 27 per cent of the vote.



of councils with wrong winners, however, the DV score was only high in 20 per cent of the cases and the total average was 16. This was probably due to the fact that councils with wrong winners often saw a close competition for votes and seats, with the differences between parties being smaller, hence the allocation of seats in relation to votes would turn out to be more proportional.

The disproportional results were higher in areas deemed safe or very safe for a particular party due to the tendency of FPTP to exaggerate a majority mandate. Nearly 75 per cent of very safe areas had a DV score of 20 or more, while 58.9 per cent of safe areas also had a high figure. Councils situated in areas which were deemed marginal, and therefore saw a more even competition for seats among parties, had the lowest DV scores.

Wrong winners

We have previously looked at the high number of disproportional results produced after the May 2007 elections and wrong winners are the most intuitively unacceptable cases of disproportionality. These are the cases where the

winners of the vote receive fewer seats than the runner-up.

In total, there were 15 cases of wrong winners, which represented around 5 per cent of the councils up for election. Although a rather small number, it is a very serious defect of the FPTP because it ignores the wishes of the electorate, awarding the majority to the wrong party. In four councils holding all-out elections, control of the council passed to the wrong party, leaving the winner of the vote without the opportunity to run the authority. Five of the wrong wins occurred in metropolitan boroughs, which meant that the effects of the wrong results would impact on a large number of people. One of the wrong wins occurred in Birmingham, England's second largest city.

Wrong winners in elections by third and all-out elections

Five of the wrong winners could be found in all-out elections and 10 in elections by third.

There was no party in overall control in any of the councils with elections by third where the May elections produced wrong winners.

Wrong winners in elections by third

Authority	Type	Winner by vote	Winner by seat	Council control	Previous control
Birmingham	Met	Lab	Con	NOC	NOC
Bolton	Met	Con	Lab	NOC	NOC
Bury	Met	Con	Con & Lab	NOC	NOC
Craven	District	Con	Ind	NOC	NOC
Ipswich	District	Con	Lab	NOC	NOC
North Tyneside	Met	Lab	Con	NOC	NOC
Portsmouth City	UA	Con	LD	NOC	NOC
Sheffield	Met	Lab	LD	NOC	Lab
St Albans City	District	Con	LD	NOC	LD
Wirral	Met	Con	Lab	NOC	NOC

In terms of elections by third, the Conservative Party lost out in six cases where it received most votes but failed to gain most seats. Labour lost three elections in the very same way. It is particularly interesting to note the case of Sheffield, where the results gave the Liberal Democrats the most seats despite Labour winning most of the votes. Labour therefore lost administrative control of the whole council and, after the May elections, Sheffield had a council with no party in overall control.

The 'wrong winner syndrome' was even more apparent when it was found in all-out elections. Labour managed to hold on to Darlington, despite Conservatives gaining most of the votes. The Conservative Party also lost control of two councils, Hinckley & Bosworth and North Lincolnshire, despite being the winner in votes.

It is undeniable that this not only creates an unfair result but also affects the overall results of the elections, giving the false impression that Labour, in this case, held on to or took two local authorities from the Conservatives while this was not actually the case. Wrong winners not only take away the voters' say, they also create a false impression among party activists and can mean that the success or failure of a particular party is under-estimated.

There may be a few cases in which the calculation method used to establish parties' total vote might affect whether a council counts as a wrong winner or not. In this work we have used the standard 'top vote' definition as used in our report on the 2006 elections and the University of Plymouth's *Local Elections Handbook* series.

Unrepresented party

'Unrepresented party' here refers to those cases where a party receives a high number of votes, at least 10 per cent of the vote, but fails to obtain any seats. It is one of the more problematic aspects of FPTP, as the system creates unfair majorities at the cost of other parties.

There were 42 councils where there were clear examples of voters being cheated in this way. In 21 of these cases, parties even received 15 per cent or more of the vote without gaining any seats. Nine cases could be found in metropolitan boroughs, three in Unitary Authorities and 30 were located in district councils.

Twenty-two councils held all-out elections, yet failed to give seats to parties with 10 per cent or more of the vote, while 20 councils holding elections by thirds did the same. In 15 of the councils holding elections by third and in six

Wrong winners in all-out elections

Authority	Type	Winner by vote	Winner by seat	Council control	Previous control
Darlington	UA	Con	Lab	Lab	Lab
Hinckley & Bosworth	District	Con	LD	LD	Con
North Cornwall	District	LD	Ind	NOC	NOC
North Lincolnshire	UA	Con	Lab	Lab	Con
Vale of White Horse	District	Con	LD	LD	LD

all-out elections, the unrepresented party gained 15 per cent or more of the vote.

The councils with unrepresented parties were spread across England, but most were located in the Eastern region of England (12). In addition, there were five cases in the East Midlands, four in the North East, five in the South East, four in the South West, six in the West Midlands and six in Yorkshire & the Humber. The North West region had no cases of unrepresented parties. This region was mainly made up of metropolitan boroughs, where competition for votes was high and the vote fragmented.

Labour lost out in 12 councils where the party ought to have had representation judging by the vote the party received. All of these cases except one were councils controlled by the Conservative Party. Labour even won 15 or more per cent of the vote in five of these councils. The Conservatives lost out in four councils in total. In three authorities the party did so despite having polled a quite considerable vote. In Eastleigh, for example, the Conservatives received 29 per cent of the vote and in Cambridge it achieved 24 per cent of the vote without gaining any representation. The councils where Conservatives lost out were controlled by the Liberal Democrats or were NOC. The Liberal Democrats also missed opportunities to influence local politics as they failed to gain any seats in five Conservative-controlled councils, despite winning a good share of the vote.

Smaller parties also tended to lose out on seats. The Green Party failed to gain seats in five councils. The BNP missed chances to gain seats in ten councils. The BNP won a substantial number of votes in certain areas, particularly in Thurrock (previously run by the Conservatives), but a relatively high BNP vote could also be found in some Labour-controlled councils.

UKIP, which gained only five council seats in this election, received 10 per cent or more of the vote in six cases. More locally based parties failed to gain representation in several cases as well, among them the English Democrats.

It appears as if Labour turned out to be the party with most failed opportunities to gain seats. The majority of local authorities where Labour did not get any representation were Conservative safe areas with a seat allocation of about 80 to 100 per cent to the winning party.

It should also be noted that six of the councils with unrepresented parties also had a high number of uncontested seats.

Marginal and safe areas

FPTP has a tendency to divide the electoral districts into areas which are considered safe for a particular party, impossible for other parties, and other areas which are seen as marginal.

The so-called safe councils are local authorities where the same party has won control of the council over several elections. Since FPTP guarantees a large majority of seats to the main party, the other parties in these councils often gain very little or no representation. There will be little incentive for political participation in these councils as the outcome is clear beforehand. In general elections safe constituencies are regularly overlooked by parties, as they feel no need to campaign in an area they will win anyway.

Safe councils lead to lack of competition and no minority representation, for example, in Daventry's election by third, the Conservatives gained 68.6 per cent of the vote while Labour managed to win nearly a fifth of the vote but no

seats. Instead, all seats went to Conservative candidates and all but one were incumbents. Councils with many safe wards are often deemed so impossible for other parties that they hardly put up any candidates, so reducing the choice for voters. In Bolsover, a safe Labour council, the Conservative Party had no candidates standing at all. Labour gained nearly 75 per cent of seats on about 50 per cent of the vote.

So, in practice, in many councils across England a considerable number of people were not able to have a proper say in the elections as their preferred party did not have any candidates standing, or had no real chance of winning seats.

The marginal councils are those where the political position is more closely balanced and councils tend to change hands regularly. Marginal councils often have no single party in overall control, or the main party wins with a small majority of votes. As margins are smaller and the possibilities for parties to gain seats or total control in these councils are much higher, parties tend to concentrate their resources in these areas. These tactics become much more prominent in parliamentary elections, as a handful of marginal constituencies can make the difference between forming a government or not, but much of the malaise filters down to the local level as well: fewer candidates standing in safe areas, tactical voting and a lack of choice.

The concept of safe and marginal areas was re-confirmed at this election, as all parties managed to hold on to their safe councils. No party made any significant gains in their opponents' most loyal areas.

There was, however, one major change in the relation between marginality and party control since 2003. The areas that were seen as local

authority (LA) marginal areas and/or parliamentary and LA marginal areas had increasingly become Conservative-controlled areas.

Although the Conservatives had increased their representation in previously relatively safe councils, the most notable change could be found in LA marginal areas. Prior to the 2007 election, the seat distribution between Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats was quite equal, with all parties holding between 10 and 15 per cent each of the local authorities in which control was seriously contested in 2007. After the May election, the Conservatives increased their control of marginal councils from 13 per cent to 33.3 per cent, while Labour lost out, now only controlling 8.9 per cent, and the Liberal Democrats had 4.4 per cent of the LA marginals.

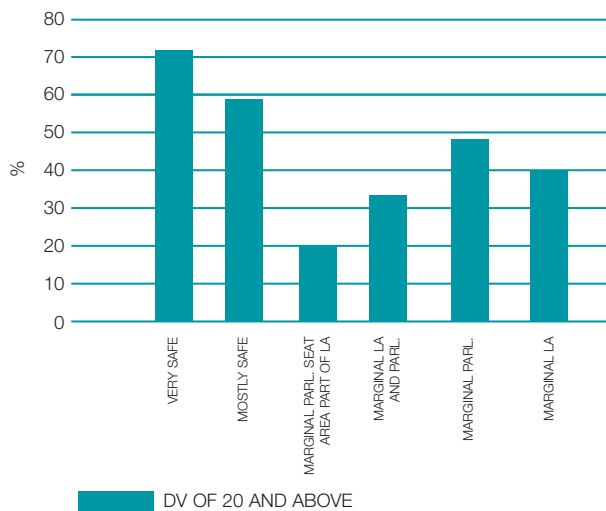
This result should be encouraging for Conservatives as it seemed to indicate that, where a proper contest was possible, the party managed to live up to expectations, making substantial gains.

The competition between parties could have been more exciting had there been no safe areas, but the current voting system failed to give the electorate in all councils a contest of similar nature.

The tendency of FPTP to allocate a disproportionate number of seats to the main party produced a high DV score in safe councils, as shown in the chart below. Marginal councils, on the other hand had the most proportional results. The results also show that the concept of safe and marginal areas would become irrelevant under a more proportional system, as smaller parties would translate their vote into seats and there would not be such a thing as safe councils. Even in places such as Bolsover and Easington, Labour's majority might be threatened in bad

years for the party, and the same would be true in Conservative strongholds.

The DV score in safe and marginal councils



Uncontested seats

The concept of uncontested seats refers to councils where 20 per cent or more of the wards had no elections. There were 30 councils which fulfilled this criterion in the 2007 election. Eight of these councils had 40 per cent or more uncontested wards, while two councils, namely Rutland and Hambleton, had 60 per cent and over.

Most uncontested seats could be found in councils with all-out elections, which mostly use multi-member wards. Looking at these wards in more detail, it was apparent that, although the councils mostly had multi-member wards, the uncontested seats could mainly be found in the few single-member wards that also existed in these councils. In fact, in 16 out

of the 30 councils, more than 70 per cent of the wards were single-member wards.

District councils were much more prone to have uncontested seats while metropolitan boroughs had none. This result confirmed a pattern seen in previous elections. Conservative-controlled councils were most prone to have uncontested wards: 63 per cent of the councils with uncontested wards were controlled by the party. Only five of the councils with a high number of uncontested seats changed hands at the elections in May, mostly NOC councils which became Conservative. Labour held on to three councils with a high number of uncontested seats while the Liberal Democrats had none.

Voters increasing their choices

Voters' tendency to vote outside the two-party system is once again confirmed as the smaller parties increased their number of votes since the 2003 election.

As many as 16.2 per cent of voters chose to vote for a smaller party in this election compared to 12.3 per cent in 2003. If the Liberal Democrats were to be included, the figures would increase to 39.8 per cent and 38.4 per cent respectively.

This phenomenon is not limited to local elections, but is part of a trend which extends to the general elections. The growth in votes for a third and fourth party has been sustained since the 1970s and the different proportional electoral systems introduced at the end of the 1990s have further cemented the trend, as smaller parties become more and more established.

It is interesting to note that in the elections which have introduced a proportional element, voters are more likely to vote for a wider variety of parties. In the 2004 European election, 19.6 per cent of votes were cast for parties other than the Conservatives, Labour or Liberal Democrats. In fact, in all elections since 1999 both Conservative and Labour have seen their

support diminish, whereas parties such as UKIP, the Green Party, Respect, the SNP and BNP have increased their share of the vote.

It seems that when the electoral system allows it, voters use the chance to express a wider range of opinions by voting for a range of different parties.

Allerdale

Allerdale District Council is situated in Cumbria in the North West of England. It has a predominantly white population, rather high rates of people in long-term unemployment and a third of the population between 16 and 74 years old has no qualifications according to the 2001 Census.

The council holds all-out elections every four years. In the 1990s Allerdale was a Labour-controlled council, but since 2003 no party has had overall control of the council. The May elections did not change that as the authority continues to have no majority administration. The distribution of seats between Labour (21) and Conservatives (19) was very close. The Liberal Democrats managed to gain four seats, while Independents had 12. If the vote is taken into account, the situation changes as the Conservatives gained seats at the expense of the other parties which all had a negative disproportionality, be it only by a couple of percentage points. The Conservatives received 23.8 per cent of votes

and 33.9 per cent of seats, while Labour obtained 39.9 per cent of votes and 37.5 per cent of seats.

The turnout in Allerdale was 43 per cent, a higher turnout than the national average. Despite a close contest between parties and a higher than average turnout, 25 per cent of the wards were still uncontested. So although there was a viable chance for one party to take control over this council, no party seemed to have managed to make the most of this election. In fact, several parties did not even field any candidates in some wards.

The Liberal Democrats only fielded candidates in six of the 31 wards (plus one extra uncontested seat in a three-member ward). The Conservatives only had candidates standing in 12 wards (plus five uncontested seats – four of which were in one-member wards). Labour had no candidates in three wards which saw elections, while five wards were lacking Labour candidates due to seats being uncontested. All in all, many voters in Allerdale therefore saw an election with little choice.

Vote and seat distribution in Allerdale in 2007

	Con	Lab	LD	Green	BNP	UKIP	Ind
Vote in %	23.8	39.9	9.4	1.8	4.9	0.0	20.2
Seat in %	33.9	37.5	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.4

FPTP constrains the voters' choice significantly, but despite this the vote is fragmenting, perhaps a hint that the current system in use is becoming antiquated and unsuitable for modern voters, with their multiple alliances. It is impossible to confirm that the only factor restricting further fragmentation of the vote is the FPTP system, but it cannot be denied that there is a growing tendency towards a wider voting preference, despite the current system working against it.

The May elections gave the Conservative Party control over the highest number of councils, however there were still more councils with no party in overall control than councils controlled by Labour and the Liberal Democrats put together. This indicates that, across English local authorities, minority administrations and coalitions are already in place, once again, despite the intention of the current electoral system. ■

Political parties and party control

Conservatives

The Conservative Party once again made the most gains in this election, just as they had done in 2003. The party gained control of more councils than any other party, receiving the highest number of votes (38.1 per cent) and the largest number of seats (51 per cent). The party also made the largest net gain in votes as they polled 3.5 per cent more votes in this election. The Green Party was the only other party to come close to such an increase in votes, while the rest of the main parties lost votes.

The May elections were held in many traditional Conservative strongholds so an overall Conservative advantage was to be expected. The challenge for the party did not lie in becoming the largest party in the elections but in gaining councils outside its safe areas, particularly in the metropolitan boroughs where Labour traditionally did well and where the Labour vote had fallen considerably in the 2003 elections.

Looking at the results from the 2007 elections, it cannot be said that the party made a real breakthrough in Labour strongholds such as the North East or in metropolitan boroughs. Labour did lose votes, but they did not go to the Conservatives but to smaller parties. Instead, the Conservatives mostly increased their vote in areas where they already had an important presence.

The mechanics of FPTP were again apparent in the logic of the wins as they gave the Conservatives a boost in their so-called safe areas, hindered progress in the areas deemed impossible and put inevitable focus on the marginal areas, as they once again became crucial for estimating the progress of the parties.

The Conservatives may not have made any further advances in the metropolitan boroughs,

but they did manage to retain Coventry, the only marginal metropolitan local authority within their control. However, they lost Solihull and failed to gain seats in Manchester.

All in all, the Conservative Party managed to gain six councils from Labour: **Blackpool, Gravesham, Lincoln, North West Leicestershire, Plymouth and South Derbyshire**. Only one of the gains from Labour was in the north of England (Blackpool) and, as previously noted, none were in a metropolitan borough. Labour's failure to choose Blackpool for the location of the super-casino was assumed to be one of the main factors which led to Labour's defeat.

The most disproportional gain from Labour came in North West Leicestershire where Conservatives gained 71 per cent of the seats with 43 per cent of the vote. Labour received 29 per cent of the vote and 13.2 per cent of seats, while the Liberal Democrats won 13 per cent of the vote and 7.9 per cent of seats. The BNP went close to gaining three seats in this council but ended up with only two seats. Considering the BNP only gained ten seats in total across England, it was quite a substantial gain for that party. The BNP's entire vote in this council came from three wards, where the party won just above 25 per cent of the vote – enough to gain it two seats.

The Liberal Democrats lost six councils to the Conservatives: **Bournemouth, North Devon, South Norfolk, Torbay, Uttlesford and Windsor & Maidenhead Royal**. Torbay was the most disproportional gain as it gave the Conservatives 70 per cent of the seats with 48 per cent of the votes while the Liberal Democrats gained 36 per cent of the vote but only 27 per cent of the seats.

Thirty-six councils which previously did not have a single-party administration passed to the Conservatives at the May elections; these are listed in

Appendix 2. Most of the party's gains were to be found in the Midlands and in the South East. The gains were, however, not always made with a convincing majority. In five local authorities, the Conservatives gained control with under 40 per cent of the vote, while only seven councils were gained with a majority of the vote.

The Conservative Party gained **Warwick** on 34.1 per cent of the vote but was awarded 52.2 per cent of the seats. Labour, however, gained 24.9 per cent of the vote while the Liberal Democrats won 21.9 per cent. Both parties received just under 20 per cent of the seats.

Staffordshire Moorlands became a Conservative Party-controlled council with 34 per cent of votes. The Conservatives were awarded 51.8 per cent of the seats on this vote, while Labour won less than a tenth of the seats on 14.6 per cent of the vote.

In both of these councils the entire electorate was called to the polls.

In contrast, the Conservatives managed to secure nearly 60 per cent of the vote in **Waverley** and gained almost 90 per cent of the seats, while the runner-up, the Liberal Democrats, won 27.4 per cent of the vote but only 5.3 per cent of the seats.

Analysing the Conservative-controlled councils by marginality, the most notable progress was the number of gains of marginal local authorities. The Conservatives managed to take control over far more marginal local authorities than any other party at this election. Most of the marginal councils which became Conservative after the May election had previously had no single party in control. In terms of inter-party contest over marginal councils, the Conservatives were much more prone to fight the Liberal Democrats than Labour. Consequently, the

party made most of its gains in southern England, particularly in the South East.

Labour

Labour made some losses, as expected; in fact, the party's total vote was reduced by 4.8 per cent, leaving the party with 22.2 per cent of the vote and 17.9 per cent of the seats. Labour managed to take control of three new councils; however, this could not quite serve as a consolation as the party also lost 12 councils.

Labour made one gain from the Conservatives: **North Lincolnshire**. The win was, however, only in seats as the Conservatives actually took more votes than Labour (43.1 per cent versus 38.5 per cent). So celebrating a victory here against the Conservatives would be rather premature as Labour only won under the epithet of being a wrong winner.

Labour did not take any councils from the Liberal Democrats but did gain sole control over two councils that previously had no single party in administration. **Leicester** City council became Labour – a quite disproportionate win as the party won 39 per cent of the vote and 70 per cent of the seats. **Luton** was gained on 33.6 per cent of the vote, while the Liberal Democrats came close second with 29.9 per cent. The seat distribution did not quite reflect the close fight between the parties as Labour was allocated 54.2 per cent of the seats while the Liberal Democrats gained 35.4 per cent of the seats.

As previously noted in the section about the Conservative Party (p. 29), Labour lost six councils to the Conservatives.

In a further five councils, Labour lost its majority to see these councils end up with no party in overall control: **Ashfield**, **Blackburn**, **Old-**

ham, Sheffield and Wear Valley. Although no longer in control, Labour continued to have the largest vote in all councils but one, Oldham, where the Liberal Democrats won slightly more votes. In Sheffield, the party was allocated fewer seats than the Liberal Democrats despite receiving more votes.

Labour held on to 34 councils, but only gained a majority of votes in three councils, most notably in **Easington** where the party polled nearly 60 per cent of the vote. The party was not as successful in the rest of the councils; in fact, in 11 councils held by Labour, the party won less than 40 per cent of the vote. In **Darlington** the party held on to power with only 29.3 per cent of the vote, while the Conservatives achieved 39 per cent of votes.

Looking at how the party fared in terms of marginality it is clear that Labour lost out in the more marginal authorities while it held on to its safe councils. The marginal local authorities where the party lost out passed over to the Conservative Party. Labour did manage to hold on to some marginal councils, albeit with a rather unfair result at times.

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats seemed to have failed to benefit from the perceived anti-Labour sentiment as the party made no significant gains in the May elections. Losses were not as extensive as Labour's as the party made a total loss of four councils. The party lost in total 2.5 per cent of its vote as it polled 23.6 per cent of the vote and took 20.8 per cent of the seats.

In total, the Liberal Democrats gained control of six new councils, but lost ten which they had previously controlled. All in all, the party held on to 23 councils.

The party won two councils from the Conservatives: **Eastbourne** and **Hinckley & Bosworth**, although the latter was only a win in seats as Conservatives polled 40.5 per cent of the votes compared to Liberal Democrats' 36.5 per cent.

No councils were taken from Labour but the Liberal Democrats managed to take control of four councils which previously had no party in overall control: **Caradon**, **Hull**, **Northampton** and **Rochdale**. The vote which gained the party these councils was less convincing than the allocation of seats would have indicated. In Northampton the party gained control of the council with 37.3 per cent of the vote while 38.2 per cent was enough to gain Caradon despite the Conservatives achieving 34.6 per cent of the vote.

As noted, the Liberal Democrats lost six councils to the Conservatives and an additional four councils became NOC: **Carrick**, **Restormel**, **St Albans** and **York**. All of these councils saw an increase in the Conservative vote at the expense of the Liberal Democrats.

The party re-affirmed its hold of 17 councils: five of these were won with a majority of votes while two councils saw the party hold on to control with the support of only a third of the electorate. Among the councils they retained was **Durham**, a surprise loss for Labour in 2003. In **Pendle** the Conservatives came very close to winning with 34.5 per cent of the vote, while the Liberal Democrats received 34.8 per cent. The bias within the FPTP system, however, ensured the Liberal Democrats a comfortable majority of 52.9 per cent of the seats. **Cambridge** remained Liberal Democrat on an even smaller vote, 34.3 per cent. There was a stark competition for votes as Labour polled 26.3 per cent of the vote and Conservatives gained 24.2 per cent. The distribution of seats

was a different matter though, as Liberal Democrats received two-thirds of the seats, Labour took a third and the Conservatives completely lost out as no seats were allocated to the party.

In terms of marginality, the Liberal Democrats had few safe councils, and the number of marginal local authorities where the party was involved in a close battle for control was fewer than the for other two main parties.

The Green Party

The Green Party increased its vote by 1.1 per cent since 2003, as the party achieved 3 per cent of the total vote. However, as FPTP is not a system favourable to smaller parties, the Greens only gained 0.6 per cent of the seats.

The party continued to gain representation on councils, increasing its representation from 40 seats in 2003 to 63 in 2007. The party was more likely to gain seats in metropolitan boroughs than in other electoral districts. The South East and North East had the lowest representations of the Green Party, while Yorkshire & the Humber had the highest number of Green councillors. The party's largest gains came in **Brighton & Hove** and **Lancaster**, where the party gained 12 seats in each council's all-out elections.

The Green Party gained one seat on 13 councils: **Bradford**, **Castle Morpeth**, **East Lindsey**, **Herefordshire**, **Leeds**, **Liverpool**, **Malvern Hills**, **Mid Bedfordshire**, **North Somerset**, **Sheffield**, **South Shropshire**, **Watford** and **Waveney**.

The party managed to gain two seats in nine councils: **Braintree**, **Kirklees**, **Leicester**, **Mid Suffolk**, **Rushcliffe**, **Scarborough**, **Torridge**,

Wealden and **York**, while four seats were secured in **Norwich** and **Stroud**.

The total vote for the Green Party was at its highest in urban areas as 80 per cent of councils in metropolitan boroughs and 70 per cent of UAs had people giving their votes to the Green Party, while 59.7 per cent did so in district councils.

The Green Party received votes across England as about two-thirds of councils in all regions gave votes to the party. The main exception was the North East, where the party only received votes in one-third of the councils.

There were more chances of the party receiving votes in marginal councils than in safe ones. This is again most probably related to the urban voter base which the Green Party has, as most marginal areas were located in UAs and metropolitan boroughs.

The Green vote varied according to party control as the Liberal Democrat-controlled councils were more likely to have a Green vote in their councils than other parties. This suggested that the two parties tended to draw support from similar areas and similar voters in local elections.

British National Party (BNP)

The BNP had made a conscious effort at this election to expand their support base and fielded candidates in many areas where they had previously had nobody standing. The tactics were not as successful as the party would have hoped, as the number of its seats fell from 13 to 10. The party did, however, see a 1.6 per cent increase in its vote, up to 2.6 per cent,

although this was mainly due to the fact that more BNP candidates were standing this time.

In fact, the party doubled the number of candidates standing in this election compared to previous years, and increased its presence in local authorities across England by fielding candidates in 145 local authorities compared to 71 councils in 2003.

As the BNP tried to make a breakthrough in southern England, the party lost votes and representation in the north. The party failed to retain most of the council seats it had gained in 2003, with **Stoke-on-Trent** the only local authority where the BNP saw its vote being increased. The highest BNP vote, 16.5 per cent was, however, registered in **Burnley**.

In total the BNP managed to gain seats on seven councils: Stoke-on-Trent (3), **North West Leicestershire** (2), **Bradford** (1), **Broxtowe** (1), **Burnley** (1), **Charnwood** (1) and **Staffordshire Moorlands** (1).

This can be compared to its gains in 2003: **Burnley** (7), **Sandwell** (2), **Calderdale** (1), **Dudley** (1), **Stoke-on-Trent** (1), **Broxbourne** (1).

The May elections saw the BNP gain seats on five new councils, while failing to retain seats in four authorities. In **Burnley's** election by third, the BNP lost six seats, taking the total number of representatives to four. The total vote for the BNP was also reduced from 29.6 per cent in 2003 to 16 per cent in 2007. Admittedly, the party stood in 10 out of 15 wards this time, compared to 13 wards in 2003, but the reduction in vote was still significant. The BNP vote in **Burnley** came principally from seven wards, where the party gained around 30 per cent of the vote per ward.

At this election, the party introduced itself to voters in 87 new councils, mainly in the South

East and the Eastern region. The party also tried to consolidate itself in Yorkshire & the Humber, where it doubled the number of candidates standing in almost every council going to the polls.

The BNP may have achieved representation in councils where it had no presence before but that did not mean that the party had established itself properly in new areas. In fact, 71.8 per cent of the vote for BNP came from voters in councils which already had BNP candidates in 2003.

So even though the BNP increased the number of candidates and made seat gains in new councils, it was unable to retain most of its 2003 gains or expand its core supporters.

The BNP was more prominent in urban areas than in rural ones as almost all metropolitan boroughs had some BNP candidates standing for election (94.4 per cent). Two-thirds of UAs (66.7 per cent) and one-third of district councils (35.1 per cent) also had BNP candidates. The region with most votes for BNP candidates was Yorkshire & the Humber, where 85.7 per cent of councils had BNP candidates running for elections. The North West also had a relatively high number of BNP candidates (67.4 per cent), while the South East, South West and Eastern regions had the lowest figures, with about a third of councils having BNP candidates.

Councils operating on an election by third basis were slightly more likely to have BNP voters (54.8 per cent). This was probably due to the high BNP vote in metropolitan boroughs, which all use elections by third.

The BNP vote was much more prominent in Labour-controlled councils as 70.6 per cent of Labour-controlled authorities had votes cast for the BNP.

The BNP did field candidates in councils with a high black and minority ethnic (BME) population but did not really win seats: 87 per cent of councils with 20 per cent or more BME population saw BNP candidates; 60 per cent of councils with a 15–19 per cent BME population also gave votes to the BNP.

The BNP also targeted white working-class areas, which the party perceived could be prone to vote BNP. One such example was Sunderland, where the BNP put up numerous candidates both in 2003 and in 2007 but failed to gain seats in both elections.

A high BNP vote seemed more often to be linked with a perceived threat from ethnically different groups than real inter-communal problems. In fact, the average BME population where the BNP won seats was 7.1 per cent.

Bradford was the only council with a high BME population (21.7 per cent) where the BNP gained a seat. Staffordshire Moorlands, with a 0.7 per cent BME population, also saw a BNP councillor, as did North West Leicestershire, with a BME population of 1.22 per cent, where the party won two seats. Stoke-on-Trent, which had the highest number of BNP seats (three), had a 5.21 per cent BME population.

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

UKIP also used the May elections to field the highest number of candidates to date, as over a thousand hopefuls were to campaign for seats across the country. The party aimed to move away from the single issue of Europe to

concentrate on issues such as local referendums and lowering the council tax.

The increased number of candidates did lead to an increase in the vote as UKIP moved from 0.5 per cent of the vote in 2003 to 1 per cent of the vote in 2007. Considering the seats gained, however, it was clear that the party did not make any real wins as it only managed to get five councillors elected, one less than in 2003.

In 2003, the party gained four seats in the South West: **Kennet**, **North Devon**, **West Devon** and **Torridge**; and two in the West Midlands: **North Shropshire** and **Oswestry**. All gains came in district councils.

In 2007, UKIP gained one seat in **Carrick**, **Kennet** and **Staffordshire Moorlands** while the party had two councillors elected in **Newcastle under Lyme**. UKIP only retained the seat in **Kennet**, so although the party failed to establish a more permanent presence on most councils, its core support seemed to remain in district councils in the South West and West Midlands, where all the five seats were gained.

On a very different note, it is interesting that both UKIP and the BNP gained a seat in Staffordshire Moorlands, albeit in different wards.

In 2003 UKIP fielded candidates in 105 councils and had a presence in 323 wards in total. Compared to other small parties, UKIP was more inclined to put up candidates in all wards in a council, sometimes even several candidates per ward. The BNP for example had a different approach as it only contested a few wards. This meant that UKIP had a more stable number of votes across the council wards, while the BNP had a high vote in a few selected wards.

Voters in district councils were most prone to give UKIP a vote, as almost half of the districts did, while 40 per cent of UAs did and only 3 per cent of metropolitan boroughs. There were slightly more councils with all-out elections voting for UKIP than those with elections by third. This was probably linked with the higher vote in districts and UAs, which had a substantial number of councils holding all-out elections.

Almost two-thirds of councils in the South West and Eastern England gave votes to UKIP, while 57.4 per cent of councils in the South East also did so. The regions where UKIP won the fewest votes were the North West and Yorkshire & the Humber.

Conservative-controlled councils were most likely to have a UKIP vote, around half of them, while 43.5 per cent of Liberal Democrat-controlled councils registered votes for the party, and only 23.5 per cent of Labour-controlled councils had a UKIP vote. This suggested a relationship between the sources of support for the Conservatives and UKIP that resembled that between Liberal Democrats and Greens.

Independents and other parties

The vote for Independent candidates came to 6.2 per cent, continuing the trend of a decreasing vote for Independents while other parties went up to 3.4 per cent. The proportion of seats gained was quite proportional, with Independent candidates being allocated 6.1 per cent of the seats while other parties won 3.1 per cent of the seats.

The overall number of councils controlled by Independents or other parties remained the same, as five councils in total continued to be controlled by other parties or Independents.

The electorate in five councils chose to elect local parties and Independent candidates as **Boston** went from NOC to Boston Bypass Independents; in **Epsom & Ewell**, the Residents Association held on to the council as did Mansfield Independent Forum in **Mansfield** and Teesdale Independent Association in **Teesdale**. In **West Somerset**, the Conservatives lost out to Independent candidates.

In **Eden** and **Torridge** Independents lost their hold of the councils as these no longer had a single party in overall control.

Independents came in many varieties. The old-fashioned rural Independent had been in decline for decades, but in recent years local political parties and Independents who have split from major parties had increased in significance.

Councils with no party in overall control

Eighty-five councils remained with no party in overall control (NOC) after the May elections. This was a reduction by 28 councils and the Conservative Party was the main beneficiary of this development.

There were more councils with no party in overall control than councils controlled by Labour or the Liberal Democrats. This could indicate that there were many councils where there was no natural majority winner. In many hung councils the largest party received a higher vote than parties which gained control of entire councils. In **Salisbury** for example, the Conservatives gained 40 per cent of the vote but did not achieve full control of the council, while Labour was able to retain control of **Darlington** with 29 per cent of the vote.

East Hertfordshire

A traditionally Conservative district council in the Eastern region of England, which features many of the problematic issues with FPTP such as uncontested seats, unrepresented parties and disproportional gains. The Conservatives remain in control of the council with 47.1 per cent of the vote, almost exactly the same vote as the party received in 2003. Despite not getting more

votes, the party was still awarded two more seats, all in all taking 84 per cent of the council seats. Six wards were uncontested, all with Conservative candidates. The vote for Independent candidates increased, while the Liberal Democrats' and Labour's votes were reduced. The allocation of seats, however, remained similar to 2003: Labour, despite winning a considerable vote in this council had not seen this translated into seats in 2003, and likewise failed to gain any representation in 2007.

Distribution of vote and seats in E. Hertfordshire elections

% of vote	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Ind	Other
2007	47.1	11.4	18.8	2.8	17.5	2.2
2003	47.8	18.2	23.2	2.6	8.2	0.0
% of seats						
2007	84.0	0.0	8.0	0.0	8.0	0.0
2003	80.0	0.0	17.5	0.0	6.0	0.0

The Conservative Party lost five councils to NOC: Salisbury, **Scarborough**, **Solihull**, **Taunton Deane** and **Thurrock**

Labour lost five councils to NOC as previously seen: Ashfield, Blackburn, Oldham, Sheffield and Wear Valley. It was perhaps slightly worrying for Labour that these were all in the north of England apart from Ashfield.

Again, as noted in the Liberal Democrat section of this report (p. 31), four councils were lost to NOC by the Liberal Democrats: Carrick, Restormel, St Albans and York.

Independent candidates lost control of Eden and Torridge.

Several councils passed from minority administrations or coalitions to a single-party administration. Thirty-six councils became Conservative, two were Labour after the elections, while four were in the hands of the Liberal Democrats and one passed over to an Independent party. ■

Electoral districts

The Local Government Act 1972 states that London boroughs and English county councils should hold whole-council elections on a four-year cycle, while metropolitan boroughs should hold elections by third. Shire district councils as well as Unitary Authorities have the option of using either method of electing members.

The shire districts are those local authorities which continue to share local government functions with a county council. Their ward distribution varies slightly, but most are made up of a majority of three-member wards with some single-member wards or/and two-member wards. Metropolitan boroughs have three-councillor wards of which one is elected every three out of four years. In practice, this generally means that in all-out elections several councillors tend to be elected per ward whereas under elections by thirds only one councillor is elected at a time unless there is a by-election in a ward.

As seen below, most district councils have opted for all-out elections while Unitary Authorities have an almost even split between whole elections and elections by third.

English local elections are now always held on Thursdays and the date is also set, unlike general elections. The last all-out election was held in 2003 while the last election by third was held in 2006 although the same wards in elections by third were up for election in May 2007 as in 2003.

Electoral cycle per region

	District	Met	UA	Total
Whole	153	0	25	178
Third	78	36	20	134
Total	231	36	45	312

* Lincoln and North Hertfordshire normally have elections by third but this year held all-out elections due to boundary changes, hence their inclusion in the whole-council election column.

Impact of system on electoral districts

Most wrong winners were located in metropolitan boroughs, while most uncontested seats could be found in districts (29 out of 30). Councils with unrepresented parties were equally distributed between metropolitan boroughs and district councils.

District councils tended to be the areas where Conservatives made most of their disproportional gains at the expense of the other main parties. District councils were also home to most of the Conservatives' safe councils. As previously stated, the safer the councils the more disproportional the results.

Smaller parties were winning more ground, especially in metropolitan boroughs and in UAs, often benefiting from the lost Labour and Liberal Democrat vote.

The DV average score per electoral district was very similar, 20 for district councils and UAs and 21 for metropolitan boroughs. Incidents of high disproportionality, i.e. a DV score of 25 or above, could be found in 33.3 per cent of UAs, 26 per cent of district councils and 25 per cent of metropolitan boroughs.

The Unitary Authorities were deemed the most marginal while metropolitan boroughs presented a more varied picture with half the councils being marginal and half being safe. The district councils were the safest areas with almost 60 per cent of councils deemed safe.

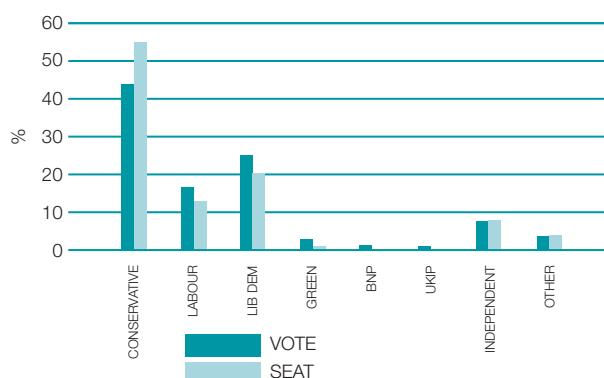
District councils

The Conservatives remained the main party in the district councils and also achieved most of

their gains here. Labour and the Liberal Democrats lost voters, who appeared to have moved over to the Conservative Party. The Conservatives obtained more votes than any other party (44.1 per cent), but gained an even larger proportion of the seats (55.3 per cent). The party also controlled most of the district councils. The Conservatives saw by far the largest increase in votes as the party achieved a net gain of 4.7 per cent of the vote. District councils had the highest votes for Independent candidates, the lowest votes for the BNP and the Green Party, and the highest vote for UKIP. The vote in district councils was less fragmented than in other electoral districts. The vote concentrated around the Conservative Party to a larger extent than in other electoral districts, giving the party a more marked lead in district councils than any other party managed in metropolitan boroughs or UAs.

Conservatives traditionally fared well in district councils and this year's result further confirmed this as seen above.

Comparing vote and seat allocation in district councils



Percentage of the vote in district councils in 2007 and 2003

Party	2007	2003	Difference
Con	44.1	39.4	+ 4.7
Lab	15.8	20.7	- 4.9
LD	24.5	26.0	- 1.5
Green	2.4	1.5	+ 0.9
BNP	1.2	–	N/A
UKIP	1.4	–	N/A
Ind	7.5	9.2	-1.7
Other	3.2	3.2	0.0

Metropolitan boroughs

Labour still dominated the metropolitan boroughs, with 34.4 per cent of the votes and 48.3 per cent of the seats. The difference between Labour's vote and seats was the most disproportional for a winner in any electoral district. Although the electoral system provided Labour with an advantage, the party should not be complacent as its vote has dropped steadily and quite steeply in the last couple of elections in what have traditionally been Labour areas.

Labour had lost votes since the 2003 local elections (5.5 per cent) and so had the Liberal Democrats (2.6 per cent). Most of their lost votes had not gone to the Conservatives, however. Instead they appeared to have gone to smaller parties. The Conservatives made their smallest gain in the metropolitan boroughs, only 1.2 per cent compared to, for example, a 4.7 per cent gain in district councils and 3.5 per cent in UAs.

This might have been the smallest gain for the Conservatives, but it was important as the party had less traditional support in metropoli-

tan boroughs than in other districts. The Conservatives were ahead of the Liberal Democrats in votes but once again lost out in the distribution of seats. This had been a pattern throughout the last couple of elections, apart from in 2000, when the Conservatives did manage to gain more seats than the Liberal Democrats.

The number of councils with no single party in overall control increased from 13 to 15 as voters chose increasingly to vote for a more varied range of parties, while support for the traditional main parties decreased. The metropolitan boroughs not only contained some of the most diverse populations, but were also home to a large proportion of the total population so this trend is worth noticing.

The table below does not allow for comparison with BNP and UKIP vote in 2003, but nevertheless it can be affirmed that the vote for these parties must have increased as the category 'other' plus BNP surpasses the percentage of 'other' in 2003. The Green Party also made gains, so it was evident that there was no longer a clear race between two or three parties, the contest had become much wider.

Percentage of the vote in metropolitan boroughs in 2007 and 2003

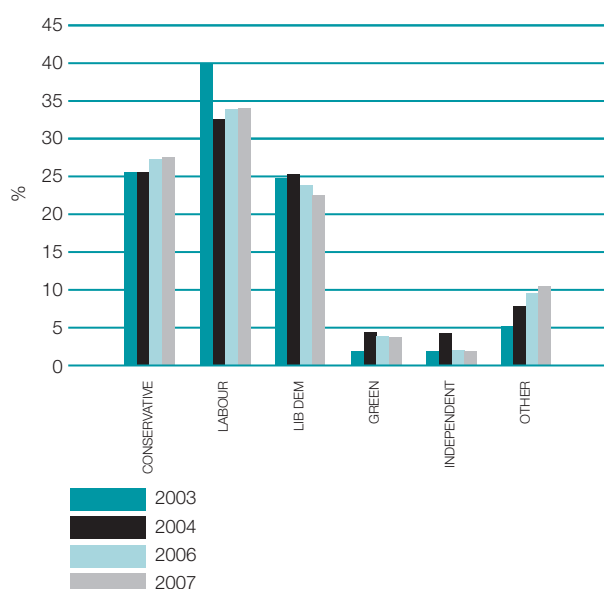
Party	2007	2003	Difference
Con	27.2	26.0	+ 1.2
Lab	34.4	39.9	- 5.5
LD	22.1	24.7	- 2.6
Green	3.5	2.1	+ 1.38
BNP	6.2	–	N/A
UKIP	0.6	–	N/A
Ind	2.2	2.0	+ 0.2
Other	4.0	5.0	- 0.6

Labour's loss did not become the Conservatives' gain. The disappointment with Labour seemed instead to have translated itself into votes for other smaller parties. The increase in votes for the BNP, together with a loss in support for Labour, may appear to be interlinked, but research has shown that the matter is not that simple. It seems instead that many BNP votes, rather than coming from disenchanted Labour voters, are coming from voters who previously did not participate in elections.

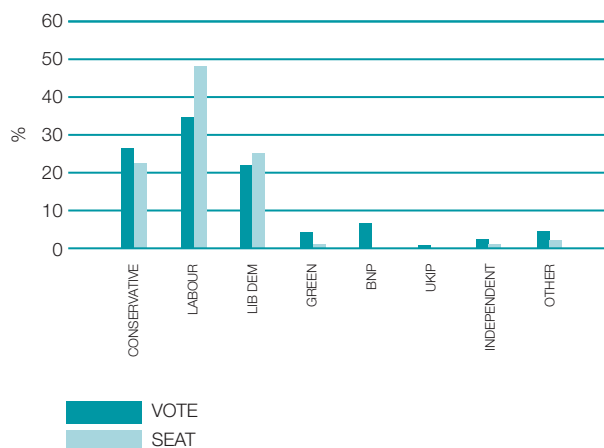
The BNP vote was at its highest in metropolitan boroughs, about 4 per cent more than in other electoral districts. The Green vote was higher than in district councils but not as high as in UAs.

Looking at results from all metropolitan elections since 2003, it was clear that Labour had made a modest recovery as the party had increased its vote in the 2006 and 2007 elections compared to 2004. The party's vote was, however, nowhere near its result from 2003 when it had held almost 40 per cent of the vote. The Conservatives also increased their vote slightly. Both parties regained ground from the 2004 elections, when voters chose to vote for other parties than the two main ones. The Liberal Democrats profited from that trend in 2004 but now saw their vote reduced. All in all, the vote in 2006 and 2007 gave pretty similar results to all parties.

Percentage of vote for parties
in metropolitan boroughs in
2003–2007



Comparing vote and seat allocation
in metropolitan boroughs



Unitary Authorities

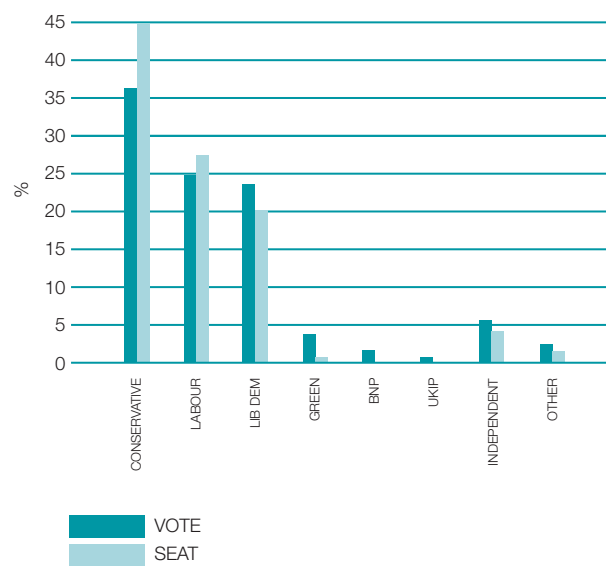
The Conservatives remained the main party in UAs, gaining votes since 2003. The Liberal Democrats made most losses, losing their place as the second biggest party in UAs to Labour.

The Conservatives seemed to have gained from former Liberal Democrat and/or Labour voters, but other parties also made gains; for example the Green Party saw their vote nearly double, while the category 'other parties', which included the BNP and UKIP, also increased their vote. The Greens made their largest gain in any electoral district, winning 4 per cent of the vote. Just as in the metropolitan boroughs, the tendency among the electorate to vote for a broad range of parties was very much present in UAs.

Percentage of the vote in Unitary
Authorities in 2007 and 2003

Party	2007	2003	Difference
Con	36.0	32.5	+ 3.5
Lab	24.8	27.8	- 3.0
LD	23.4	28.0	- 4.6
Green	4.0	2.4	+ 1.6
BNP	2.1	N/A	N/A
UKIP	1.0	N/A	N/A
Ind	6.0	6.8	- 0.8
Other	2.7	2.5	+ 0.2

Comparing vote and seat allocation in Unitary Authorities



Results by government region

This report has previously looked at the voting results in the different electoral districts, in this section we will be looking at voters' choices by region.

The English regions differ significantly in their socio-economic realities and in their proportion of rural-urban areas. This has an important effect on the choices voters make and on the voting trends emerging. Likewise, the negative effects of the voting system has dif-

ferent impacts according to the structure of the region.

The electoral cycle varies throughout the regions. Councils in the East Midlands, North East, South East and South West all have a majority of all-out elections.

Councils in the Eastern, North West, West Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber regions mostly hold elections by third.

Electoral districts by region

	District	Met	UA	Total no. of elections	Total no. of councils	% of LAs holding elections
East Midlands	36	0	4	40	45	88.9
Eastern	44	0	4	48	54	88.9
North East	13	5	5	23	25	92.0
North West	24	15	4	43	46	93.5
South East	50	0	11	61	74	82.4
South West	34	0	9	43	51	84.3
West Midlands	23	7	3	33	38	86.8
Yorkshire & Humber	7	9	5	21	22	95.5
Total	231			312	388	80.4

Wrong winners and uncontested seats by region

	Wrong win	High no. of uncontested seats	Total councils	% wrong winners	% uncontested seats
East Midlands	1	8	40	3	20
Eastern	2	5	48	4	10
North East	2	2	23	9	9
North West	2	2	43	5	5
South East	2	1	61	3	2
South West	1	3	43	2	7
West Midlands	1	6	33	3	18
Yorkshire & Humber	4	3	21	19	14
Total	15	30	312		

The impact of the system on regions

The Eastern and East Midlands regions are mainly made up of district councils, while the North West is home to most of the metropolitan boroughs and most Unitary Authorities are based in the South East. Four regions completely lack metropolitan boroughs.

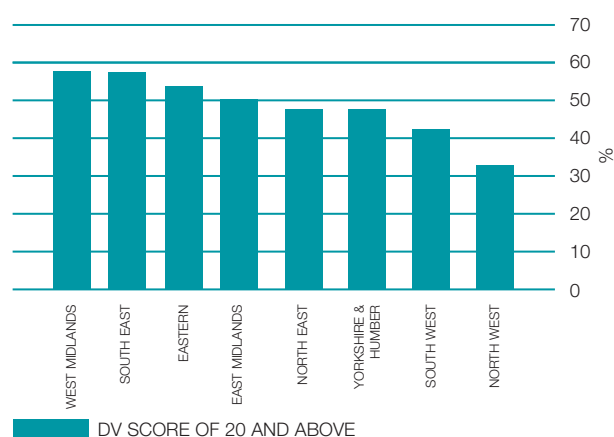
The cases of wrong winners were spread across the country, indicating that cases of high disproportionality could occur everywhere with FPTP. Yorkshire & the Humber, however, did see a considerably higher proportion of councils with wrong winners, particularly considering that the region had the smallest number of councils holding elections.

East Midlands was the region with the highest proportion of uncontested seats while the South East saw a proper competition in most of its wards. Yorkshire & the Humber also had a high number of uncontested seats besides wrong winners.

In terms of safe areas for parties, the North East region and the South West had most of the safe councils, benefiting Labour in the north and the Conservatives in the south.

The number of highly disproportional results was spread across all regions, but the West Midlands and South East stood out, as nearly 60 per cent of councils in these regions had a DV score of 20 or more. The North West had the most proportional results as it included most of the metropolitan boroughs, where fragmentation of the vote and consequently competition for the vote was higher.

Disproportional results per region



Socio-economic indicators

In terms of diversity, the North West and West Midlands, with their many metropolitan areas, had some of the most ethnically diverse councils, with about 15 per cent of councils having 10 per cent or more BME population. The South West was the region with the smallest BME population, as 83 per cent of councils had a non-white population of under 2 per cent, followed by the North East with 74 per cent.

The North East had the highest number of people with no qualifications: 48 per cent of councils had more than 30–35 per cent people with no qualifications and the highest number of people in routine occupations. The North West and South East had the highest number of full-time students. The South East had the highest number of highly qualified people and the highest number of people working as higher professionals.

In general, the main differences between regions in terms of socio-economic indicators could be found in the South East and North East, with the South East being the richest region and the North East the most deprived. Other regions which

scored relatively low on socio-economic indicators were East Midlands and Yorkshire & the Humber.

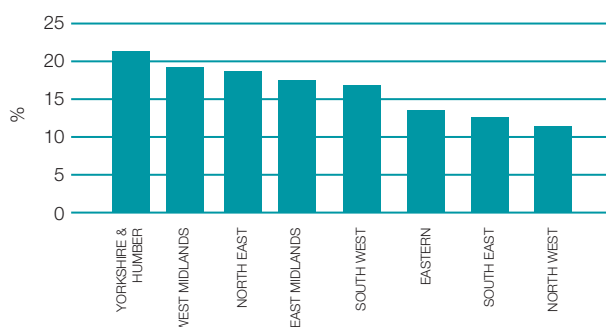
Considering the socio-economic indicators, it was apparent that the tendency to vote according to class, ideology and tradition had not died out; traditional party politics still had a major role to play.

In the poorest region, the North East, Labour gained its highest proportion of the vote (36.2 per cent), while the Conservatives came third with 21.6 per cent. The gap was even larger in the richer region of the South East, home to the largest number of Conservative voters (48.1 per cent), where Labour managed to poll just over 10 per cent of the vote.

Fragmentation of the vote: voters increasing the choice

Although traditional party politics still had a role to play, by no means did this mean that local politics was based on a two-party system. The fragmentation of the vote could be found in all the regions as smaller parties, such as the Green Party, UKIP or Independent candidates, won more than 10 per cent of the vote in all regions. In three regions (Yorkshire & the Humber, the North East and East Midlands) the vote for small parties even increased to 20 per cent of the total vote.

Percentage of vote for smaller parties by region



In some regions, such as Yorkshire & the Humber, not only was the vote for smaller parties high, but the competition between the main parties was also very close. This region saw the Conservatives gain 28.5 per cent and Labour 28.7 per cent, while the Liberal Democrats won 21.7 per cent of the vote.

Although the North West had the lowest vote for smaller parties, voters' behaviour differed substantially from the second lowest region, the South East. The North West presented a rather even contest between the three main parties, with no party getting more than a third of the vote, while the South East gave nearly half its votes to the Conservative Party and 12.6 per cent to Labour, the same amount as all the small parties put together.

East Midlands

Forty councils held elections in the East Midlands, most of which were all-out elections in district councils (35). The East Midlands saw the Conservative Party hold on to its position as the largest party in the region, and even gaining control over nine additional councils. Conservatives now controlled 60 per cent of councils in the region, while gaining 37.4 per cent of the vote and 48.4 per cent of the seats. Labour, which had controlled six councils, saw this number reduced to three councils. The party did, however, come second in the number of votes and seats, 26 per cent and 22.1 per cent respectively. The Liberal Democrats gained two councils, now controlling five with 19.4 per cent of the vote and 16.1 per cent of the seats. The BNP managed to gain four seats in this region while the Green Party gained five. Despite gaining one more seat, the Green Party received a lower vote (1.8 per cent) than the BNP which received 2.4 per cent.

Most of the Conservative Party's gains came from councils which had previously had no party in overall control (NOC). The total number of NOC councils was reduced from 13 to 4. The Conservative Party also managed to take three councils from Labour (Lincoln, North West Leicestershire, South Derbyshire). The Liberal Democrats gained Northampton from NOC and, more controversially, gained Hinckley & Bosworth from the Conservatives despite receiving fewer votes than that party.

Distribution of vote and seats in the East Midlands

Party	Total vote	% of vote	Total seat	% of seat
Con	432,817	37.4	741	48.4
Lab	301,087	26.0	338	22.1
Lib Dem	224,967	19.4	247	16.1
Green	21,009	1.8	5	0.3
BNP	27,989	2.4	4	0.3
UKIP	11,142	1.0	0	0.0
Ind	98,058	8.5	123	8.0
Other	41,124	3.6	73	4.8

East Midlands was a region where most councils were considered to be safe for a particular party, that party mostly being the Conservative Party.

The Conservative Party presented a high disproportional result in 11 councils; for example it had five councils with a 30–39 per cent difference in their favour between votes and seats. Labour and the Liberal Democrats had four councils each where the number of seats surpassed by far the number of votes received. The smaller parties: the Green Party, UKIP and the BNP, all had more proportional results, although the distribution of seats in accordance to votes would always make them under-represented. This was, as previously observed, a recurrent pattern for smaller parties. In the case of Independent candi-

dates the disproportionality varied more depending on the number of votes received. Independent candidates as well as locally based parties could in some cases receive a very high vote and in other cases a very low vote, which would lead to the difference between votes and seats being sometimes in their favour and sometimes not.

Eastern

There were 48 councils up for elections in this region. Twenty-six councils held elections by third (54 per cent) while 22 councils (46 per cent) were all-out elections. The vast majority of councils were district councils (92 per cent).

The Conservative Party ended up controlling a majority of councils, in total 33, which gave the party a net gain of five councils. This meant that the Conservatives were in control of 69 per cent of the councils up for election. The Conservatives received the highest vote by far, with 44.9 per cent. The Liberal Democrats came second with 24.5 per cent and Labour third with 17 per cent. The seat distribution looked quite different as the Conservatives gained nearly two-thirds of the seats, the Liberal Democrats took nearly a quarter while Labour only gained 9.8 per cent of the seats.

Labour gained one council from NOC, Luton, taking the party's total control of councils up to two. The Liberal Democrats lost three councils, one to NOC and two to the Conservatives, now only controlling four councils. The number of councils with no overall control fell from 12 to 9, with most of these councils passing to the Conservatives. The Green Party fared quite well in this region, gaining 4 per cent of the vote.

Distribution of vote and seats in the Eastern region

Party	Total vote	% of vote	Total seat	% of seat
Con	616,714	44.9	920	63.2
Labour	233,295	17.0	142	9.8
Lib Dem	336,478	24.5	291	20.0
Green	55,062	4.0	11	0.8
BNP	21,531	1.6	0	0.0
UKIP	13,729	1.0	0	0.0
Ind	63,495	4.6	45	3.1
Other	34,616	2.5	46	3.2

Party allegiances were quite stable in the Eastern region as a relatively high number of councils were considered safe for one party or another.

The disproportionality between votes and seats was again highest for the largest party, the Conservative Party. Forty-two per cent of Conservative-controlled councils (14) presented a 25 per cent or more difference between vote and seats. Nine of these councils even showed a disproportionality of 30–39 per cent.

Labour only had two cases of high disproportionality (over 25 per cent difference between vote and seats), while both Labour and the Liberal Democrats had a slightly lower number of seats than votes in the majority of councils in the region.

Smaller parties did not fare well here either as the disproportional results went against them. In fact, the Green Party, which won 4 per cent of the vote, only received 0.8 per cent of the seats, while Independent candidates won 4.6 per cent of the vote and 3.1 per cent of the seats.

North East

In this region, 23 councils held elections. The majority of councils were all-out elections (17), while six local authorities held elections by third. Most of the councils were district councils (13), although five were metropolitan boroughs and five were Unitary Authorities (UA).

The Conservatives continued to hold power in Tynedale, the only local authority to be controlled by the party in this region. The Liberal Democrats also remained in control of the same two councils they had held prior to the elections. Seven councils ended up with no party in overall control, while Labour held on to 12 councils losing one to NOC.

Labour retained the majority of the votes (36.2 per cent) and the seats (46.5 per cent), while the Liberal Democrats came second with 23.6 per cent of the vote and 22 per cent of the seats. The Conservatives lost out the most, as the party was only allocated 15.2 per cent of the seats whilst gaining almost the same vote as the Liberal Democrats, 21.4 per cent. The BNP achieved a relatively high vote in this region, with 3.2 per cent, and so did Independent candidates, who gained 9.3 per cent of the vote.

Distribution of vote and seats in the North East

Party	No. of votes	% of votes	No. of seats	% of seats
Con	153,925	21.4	137	15.2
Lab	260,623	36.2	418	46.5
Lib Dem	169,808	23.6	198	22.0
Green	4,915	0.7	1	0.1
BNP	23,390	3.2	0	0.0
UKIP	3,000	0.4	0	0.0
Ind	67,391	9.3	89	9.9
Other	37,734	5.2	56	6.2

The North East was the safest region of those holding elections; less than a quarter of the region was deemed marginal. In fact, the region saw very small changes in political control: Wear Valley was the only council to change administration.

Labour was the main party in this region and therefore saw the most disproportional results in its favour. Labour had, for example, three cases with more than a 30 per cent difference between votes and seats. The Conservative Party, on the other hand, had most cases of disproportional results against it. The Liberal Democrats were under-represented on two councils and over-represented on two other councils. The Independent candidates shared the fate of the Liberal Democrats while smaller parties were hardly represented.

North West

The Conservative Party and the Labour Party were in a close race in the North West as they received a very similar number of votes, but the disproportionality within the FPTP system swung the seat distribution in favour of the Conservatives. The increase in the Conservative vote was partly due to the landslide victories in South Ribble and Blackpool.

There were 43 councils holding elections. A majority of the councils, 33, held elections by third (77 per cent), while only ten were all-out elections. The number of metropolitan boroughs holding elections was relatively high compared to other regions, with 15 councils being metropolitan, 4 being UA and 24 being district councils.

The Conservatives received 32.8 per cent of the vote and 40 per cent of the seats while Labour came very close in votes (32.1 per cent) but lost out in seats (32.8 per cent). The Liberal Democ-

rats won 24 per cent of the votes and 18.3 per cent of seats, while the smaller parties received around 2–3 per cent of the votes.

The Conservatives controlled 13 councils after the elections, gaining three, two from NOC (Chester and South Ribble) and one from Labour (Blackpool). Labour lost three councils, taking it from 11 to 8 controlled councils. The party lost two to NOC and one to the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats gained one council from NOC, ensuring control of five councils in all. The Conservatives controlled 30.2 per cent of the councils, while Labour controlled 18.6 per cent. NOC councils dominated as 39.5 per cent councils had no single-party administration.

Seventeen councils remained NOC, although some councils did change hands. Labour lost Blackburn and Oldham to NOC, while Eden went from being controlled by 'other parties' to become NOC. Three other councils ceased to be NOC, two became Conservative (Chester and South Ribble) and Rochdale passed to Liberal Democrat control.

Distribution of vote and seats in the North West

	Total vote	% of vote	Total seat	% of seat
Con	547,829	32.8	459	40.0
Lab	535,128	32.1	376	32.8
Lib Dem	401,262	24.0	210	18.3
Green	45,383	2.7	13	1.1
BNP	35,949	2.2	1	0.1
UKIP	1,887	0.1	0	0.0
Ind	43,629	2.6	63	5.5
Other	58,198	3.5	26	2.3

Due to the close race, the Conservatives and Labour had a similar number of disproportional

gains. The Conservatives had three cases where the difference between votes and seats was over 20 per cent, Labour had four cases, while the Liberal Democrats had one. Small parties again lost out slightly in the equation between vote and seats. Independent candidates had a relatively low percentage of the vote in this region, although their seat allocation was relatively high, surpassing the Green Party's seat allocation but not its vote.

The close competition led to more proportional results, with the lowest DV score of all regions.

South East

This region had a total of 61 councils where elections were held. There were slightly more all-out elections (36) than elections by third (25). Again, this was a largely non-metropolitan area as 50 councils were district councils.

The South East was a mainly Conservative area, where the party won 47 councils in the May elections which represented a net gain of nine councils. Thus the party controlled 74 per cent of the region. Labour lost one council, but had previously only controlled two councils. The council lost by Labour, Gravesham, passed to the Conservatives. Liberal Democrats remained in control of four councils while the number of NOC councils was reduced from 16 to 8. All of these were lost to Conservatives.

In terms of votes, the Conservatives received the highest vote of any party per region as they polled 48.1 per cent of the vote, giving them 65.9 per cent of the seats. The Liberal Democrats came second with 26.7 per cent of the vote and 21.7 per cent of the seats, while Labour received 12.6 per cent of the vote but only half that amount of seats (7.1

per cent). UKIP received a relatively high vote in this region (1.8 per cent) but no seats.

Distribution of vote and seats in the South East

Party	Total vote	% of vote	Total seat	% of seat
Con	992,358	48.1	1393	65.9
Lab	260,623	12.6	151	7.1
Lib Dem	550,811	26.7	458	21.7
Green	57,911	2.8	14	0.7
BNP	10,201	0.5	0	0.0
UKIP	36,580	1.8	0	0.0
Ind	85,043	4.1	43	2.0
Other	68,529	3.3	55	2.6

The dominance of the Conservative Party in the region affected the disproportionality significantly as 13 councils gave the Conservatives a positive difference between 20 and 24 per cent, seven councils had a difference of 25–29 per cent between votes and seats in favour of Conservatives, while five had a difference of 30–39 per cent.

Labour consistently lost out in the allocation of seats according to votes, while the Liberal Democrats saw some disproportional gains and some losses across the councils of the region. The smaller parties all lost out in the allocation of seats.

South West

Forty-three councils had the electorate going to the polls, most as all-out elections (34), while only nine were elections by third. The majority were district councils (34), while nine were Unitary Authorities.

Conservatives gained the highest number of votes (42.6 per cent) and the most seats (52 per cent) to control the majority of councils in the region (51.2 per cent).

The Liberal Democrats got a very fair result as they gained 29.9 per cent of the vote and 29.4 per cent of the seats. Labour came third with their lowest vote in any region (10.9 per cent) and even fewer seats (5.3 per cent). UKIP again fared comparatively well in votes.

The Conservatives gained seven councils and went from controlling 15 to administering 22. Labour lost the only council they previously controlled (Plymouth), which was taken by the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats lost four councils, reducing those it controlled to two. Councils with no overall control were reduced from 20 to 18. The reduction in NOC was rather small but the change in control was slightly more complicated as five councils passed from single party control to NOC, while six other councils passed from NOC to a single-party administration.

Distribution of vote and seats in the South West

Party	Total vote	% of vote	Total seat	% of seat
Con	615,508	42.6	876	52.0
Lab	157,186	10.9	90	5.3
Lib Dem	431,924	29.9	496	29.4
Green	46,972	3.2	7	0.4
BNP	8,165	0.6	0	0.0
UKIP	27,503	1.9	2	0.1
Ind	138,910	9.6	194	11.5
Other	19,542	1.4	22	1.3

The Conservative Party gained most from the FPTP system in this region as well, being the

largest party. In nine councils the party gained over 20 per cent more seats than votes.

Labour mainly lost out, although the disproportions were quite low, while the Liberal Democrats had one win with more than 20 per cent difference between votes and seats. Smaller parties continued to lose out. UKIP, for example had a quite high vote in this region but only won two seats. In the South West the Independent candidates polled more votes than in any other region.

West Midlands

Elections were held in 33 councils. There was an equal distribution between councils with all-out elections (16) and councils which held elections by third (17). Most of the councils were district councils (23) while seven were metropolitan boroughs and three UAs.

The Conservatives again made quite substantial gains as the party increased its share in council control from 14 to 22. Labour retained control of the two councils they had previously controlled, while the Liberal Democrats continued without controlling any councils in this region. Councils with no overall control were reduced from 17 to 9. It was the Conservative Party which benefited most from this trend as all its gains came from NOC councils. The party controlled two-thirds of all councils in the area.

Despite the high number of Conservative-controlled councils, the Conservative vote was lower than in the South West and South East (37.9 per cent). Labour came second in vote, with 25.7 per cent, while the Liberal Democrats gained 17.1 per cent. Among the smaller parties, the BNP had a substantial vote.

Distribution of vote and seats in the West Midlands

Party	Total vote	% of vote	Total seat	% of seat
Con	518,722	37.9	581	57.1
Lab	352,305	25.7	193	19.0
Lib Dem	233,898	17.1	125	12.3
Green	39,085	2.9	3	0.3
BNP	64,643	4.7	4	0.4
UKIP	11,732	0.9	3	0.3
Ind	84,866	6.2	85	8.3
Other	63,587	4.6	27	2.7

The region contained more marginal areas than safe areas for a particular party.

The Conservative Party had nine cases where the number of seats gained was 20 per cent or more than the percentage of votes they received. Labour had two cases of a high disproportion between votes and seats. One of these cases was Sandwell, one of two councils they still controlled in West Midlands.

The smaller parties again lost out in the allocation of seats versus the vote.

Yorkshire & the Humber

Twenty-one councils held elections, 13 were elections by third and eight all-out elections. Nine councils were metropolitan boroughs, seven were district councils and five were UAs.

Labour gained the highest number of votes (28.7 per cent) although the Conservative Party came a very close second (28.5 per cent). In the allocation of seats, however, the Conserva-

tive Party received a much higher percentage, nearly 40 per cent of the seats compared to Labour's 26 per cent. The BNP positioned themselves as the fourth biggest party, surpassing the Green Party, and gained 7.3 per cent of the vote but only one seat. The vote in this region tended to go to a wider range of parties than in other regions. In fact, the vote for the smaller parties was considerably higher than in any other region.

The Conservatives gained one council now controlling four as it gained East Riding of Yorkshire from NOC. Labour remained in control of four councils, although not the same ones as prior to the election, as they gained North Lincolnshire from the Conservatives while losing Sheffield to NOC. The Liberal Democrats remained in control of one council, losing York to NOC but gaining Kingston from NOC. The majority of councils, 13, remained NOC, with three councils losing their single-party administration to NOC. In total, 61.9 per cent of councils in Yorkshire & the Humber had no party in overall control.

Distribution of vote and seats in Y&H

Party	Total vote	% of vote	Total seat	% of seat
Con	381,937	28.5	253	39.8
Lab	384,101	28.7	165	26.0
Lib Dem	290,502	21.7	133	20.9
Green	59,996	4.5	9	1.4
BNP	97,974	7.3	1	0.2
UKIP	378	0.0	0	0.0
Ind	71,727	5.4	58	9.0
Other	54,038	4.0	16	2.5

Looking at the wide distribution of votes between parties and the close competition, it comes as no surprise that most councils in this region were considered marginals.

Birmingham

In 2003 Labour lost control of this council which it had run for 20 years, partly due to the backlash over the Iraqi war, which saw Muslim voters in particular desert the party. The Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives benefited most as they won several wards from Labour to form a coalition which took control of the council.

The May 2007 elections did not change the political make-up of the council considerably as the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition held on to the authority. The FPTP system did, however, fail to allocate the seats fairly. Labour remained the largest party in terms of votes but lost seats, turning the Conservatives into the largest party in the council. None of the main parties made any real gains at the election as they all experienced a decrease in the vote, while smaller parties made significant gains.

As the second largest city in England, with a very diverse population which is almost 30 per cent BME, it is perhaps not a surprise that the vote was quite fragmented. The three main parties gained a similar proportion of votes, while smaller parties such as Respect, the Green Party or BNP also won a substantial number of votes. The highly competitive election and the close result delivered a quite proportional result with a DV score of 16.

Birmingham confirmed the trend which can be observed particularly in urban areas, where the vote has become increasingly diversified leading to coalitions and minority administrations. The electoral system might be designed to favour a two-party system but that surely does not correspond to voters' wishes.

Percentage of vote and seat allocation in Birmingham in 2007

Party	Con	Lab	LD	Green	BNP	Ind	Other
% of vote	28.0	31.8	21.7	4.8	7.6	0.5	5.5
% of seats	40.0	32.5	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5

The Conservative Party made two very disproportional gains: East Riding and Hambleton. East Riding was a gain from NOC and was achieved through a disproportionate majority. Conservatives gained 70.1 per cent of seats with 40.5 per cent of the vote, while in second place the Liberal Democrats, with 27.6 per cent of the vote, won only 17.9 per cent of the seats.

Labour had one very disproportionate result: Rotherham, where the party gained 45 per cent of the vote and 82 per cent of the seats,

while Conservatives won 28 per cent of the vote but only 14 per cent of the seats.

The same disproportionality was reflected in the Liberal Democrats' unfair losses of seats compared to votes in Sheffield and Hull.

Parties had slightly fewer disproportional gains here than in other regions, but those councils which were won with a disproportional result saw large differences between votes and seats. ■

Scotland

In Scotland local elections were also held on 3 May, but with a difference, the Single Transferable Vote (STV) was being used instead of FPTP.

The STV elections in Scotland was the first time the system was used on the UK mainland for decades. They also provided a good opportunity for comparison with the English local government elections, where FPTP is still being used.

STV uses multi-member wards where voters can rank the candidates standing according to their preferences. It is possible to only express preference for one candidate, a first preference, or to rank all the candidates listed as first preference, second preference, third preference, etc. Candidates do not need a majority of votes to be elected, just a share of the votes that will be determined by the size of the electorate and the number of positions to be filled.

STV therefore not only makes all votes count but also makes it much easier for voters to choose a candidate from any party, regardless of size. FPTP ensures that the largest party gets a majority of seats, while STV allocates seats in proportion to the vote.

The Scottish electorate took advantage of the system and the result was a more diverse political map than prior to the elections.

The trend towards a fragmentation of the vote also seen in the English local elections became more accentuated in Scotland, where the voting system no longer restricted the vote and the chances of seeing smaller parties and Independent candidates increased.

The total number of councils with no party in overall control (NOC) increased as 27 out of 32 local authorities became NOC.

Only in four local authorities did a party win more than 40 per cent of the first preferences. In most cases, voters' choice varied and this was reflected in the number of parties gaining representation and in the number of councils without a single-party administration.

One-party dominance due to over-representation disappeared. It was no longer possible to gain a majority of seats on 28–30 per cent of the vote as had happened in Edinburgh in 2003. To gain majority control, a party needed majority support from voters – a far cry from the English local elections, where many councils were held by one-party administrations on a vote that approximated 30 per cent.

Parties with an evenly spread support of around 25 per cent in all council wards, like the SNP, finally got the representation to match the vote. Under FPTP it is not unusual to find parties regularly polling about 20 per cent of the vote in a council without getting any representation. The cases of unrepresented parties mentioned previously in this report are perfect examples of this. In Cambridge, for example, the Conservatives polled 24 per cent of the vote without winning any seats. A consistent performance in a council will be rewarded under STV, while under FPTP a party which polls extremely well in one or two wards can find itself gaining representation exclusively on this. This is often how BNP manage to gain representation on councils in England, not through widespread support, but through concentrated support among hardliners in a couple of wards.

STV meant that parties had to canvass for support and ensure that people wanted to vote for them to actually obtain representation. Parties with consistent support, such as the SNP, gained seats, while Labour lost out in the cases where the party had been over-represented. In the councils where Labour had a

vast number of keen supporters, it still maintained its share of the vote. In Glasgow, for example, the party remained in majority thanks to the votes received, not the voting system.

The number of candidates standing increased from an average of 3.4 in 2003 to 7.4 in 2007. The variety of choice on offer was taken advantage of by the electorate, who not only chose to vote for a wide range of parties but also used the opportunity to record more than one preference.

The competition for votes and seats was not concentrated in marginal areas, as in the English election. All seats in the Scottish local authorities were up for election as no seats were left uncontested.

The flaws of FPTP, such as wrong winners, over-represented parties, unrepresented parties, uncontested seats or safe councils, were nowhere to be found in the Scottish elections. The DV score was low, almost close to strict proportionality with a median of 10.4 compared to 19 in the English elections across the border.

The Scottish experience is interesting as it confirms the trend of fragmentation of the vote and the tendency of NOC councils to represent the most accurate reflection of the public's opinions. It also strengthens the argument that the current system used in English local elections is restricting voting behaviour. Faced with the chance of unrestricted choice, the Scottish electorate chose to diversify their vote. Judging by the outcome of the English elections in 2007, the English electorate would have taken a similar option, had the voting system allowed it. ■

Conclusions

The findings in this report show us that the electoral system continues to fail us. Few wins were majority wins, most were disproportional, leaving the main party with far more seats than the vote indicated. In other cases, parties failed to gain representation despite a substantial vote, while some voters never got a chance to have their say as wards remained uncontested. The vote for smaller parties increased, but their success was not reflected in seat allocation, as smaller parties kept losing out due to First-Past-The-Post. It cannot be said either that FPTP promotes strong single-party governments as the number of councils not in overall control was the second most common form of government after the elections and most councils saw parties taking control of council on 30–40 per cent of the vote. Across England many voters failed to have an impact as their votes were lost through an unfair distribution of seats. A more proportional system would have guaranteed that all votes counted, instead many voters found that they did not get the representation they had voted for. Once again, England saw an election which failed to give voters what they had asked for and, this year, it was all the more apparent, as it was possible to contrast the results with the local elections in Scotland, where voters did get what they voted for thanks to STV.

Whether we call it a globalised world or a post-modern society, the social, economic and cultural changes that have been experienced over recent decades are undeniable. We now live in a world where the concepts of choice and ever-changing circumstances are central to our ways of living. Consumerism has accustomed us to an endless stream of goods and services, while globalisation has linked us with the rest of the world.

The changes have made us less isolated but also more vulnerable. Our identities have been

altered by the influx of new cultures, new visions and new technologies. The social norms that used to guide people's choices have loosened and traditional forms of identities are disappearing. Most people do not identify themselves in terms of one single identity any more. Depending on the circumstances, people will define themselves on a range of factors such as gender, class, religion, ethnicity, region, marital status or country of birth. Social movements stand as an example of our multiple identities and allegiances. They are a new form of collective action and engagement, tackling varied issues such as global warming, gender, racism, free trade or the war in Iraq.

The politicians are struggling to adapt to these changing circumstances. There has been a generalised move to the centre in recognition of the fact that opinions are not so polarised, multiple factors will influence voters' decisions and many people are indecisive. There is now also a will to engage with minorities, and with the so-called hard-to-reach groups. Localism is re-entering the agenda; the idea of taking local issues to the local communities in order to re-engage them in the decision-making process is seen as a viable way forward.

Although engagement and political participation are central to politics and it is undeniable that the concept of choice is central to modern society, in Britain, where politics is concerned we are left with very little choice. In a society with such a mix of cultures and social groups, a system like FPTP seems strangely antiquated. A monument of the past, it stands out as a reminder of a much less complex society where the political divisions were clearer and people's demands easier to identify. FPTP was designed for a bi-party system, where citizens would clearly identify with one or the other party. This contrasts starkly with the society we

live in today, where citizens' demands and needs are very different and where one solution does not fit all. It is incomprehensible that the notion of choice has not been introduced properly into the voting system, that the most essential part of democracy has been left unreformed. Time is spent by politicians reaching out to the electorate, trying to cater for an increasingly varied range of demands whilst recognising the diversity of our society. Yet nothing has been done about the voting system, the easiest way for citizens to express their choice and engage within socially acceptable forms of participation.

Social change sometimes precedes institutional change and, where the voting system is concerned, it is possible to see just that. Since the late 1990s the British have familiarised themselves with a variety of proportional voting systems through devolution and the European Parliament. Even earlier than this, voters started to express an increasingly varied choice at elections, and it is a long time since we stopped talking about a two-party system, as the Liberal Democrats regularly poll around 20 per cent of the vote in general elections.

On a local level, the fragmentation of the vote is even more apparent. Since the FPTP system does not favour smaller parties, voters might feel it a lost vote to choose them at general elections. At local elections however, voters for smaller parties stand more of a chance of having their vote counted.

The vote for the Green Party, UKIP, Respect or other smaller parties is steadily increasing. These parties are winning more and more seats on councils, which in turn has led them to put up more candidates. A vote for a smaller party does have an impact on a local level, and therefore their vote and their representation across local authorities is increasing. The local

elections show us that voters want to have a wide choice, are expressing a varied choice and, consequently, our local councils now have a variety of representatives.

FPTP is designed to create majority governments, but when competition for votes is strong and the electorate makes a variety of choices, the system can no longer work as it was meant to do. Instead, coalitions and minority governments are increasingly common, particularly in urban areas which have more diverse populations. So when people have a say, the rules of the game are altered and, even though they are restricted by a system which shies away from diversity and multiple choice, voters are making it happen: they are slowly rendering FPTP a thing of the past. Voters are changing the system by making a free and informed choice – when will we see the institutional change that social change has already brought about? ■

Appendix 1: Explaining the data

Calculating the vote share

The vote share of each party has been calculated by adding up the vote of the best placed candidate for each party in a ward. The total vote for each party has then been divided by the total number of votes cast to get each party's share of the vote.

In wards where there is only one candidate per party standing, the total vote for that candidate would be the total vote for the party. In multi member wards, the vote of the best placed candidate for each party is used to calculate the proportion of votes for each party in that particular ward.

Turnout

The votes in all wards have been summed up and divided by the total electorate to calculate the overall turnout in a council.

Boundary changes

The 2003 election saw quite significant boundary changes which made comparisons to the 1999 elections difficult. The 2007 elections saw some boundaries change, but on a much smaller scale. In this report, the 2007 results will often be contrasted with those of 2003; however, the fact that boundary changes may have affected the results in some councils should be taken into account.

Elections by third and all-out elections

The councils which held all-out elections in 2007 last held elections in 2003. The councils which held elections by third last had elections in 2006. However, since elections by third means that one out of three seats was up for election, the seats that were up for election this year were also up for election in 2003.

The categories of votes polled and seats won in elections by third only refer to the current elections. So, as only a fraction of council seats were up for election, the figures in this report are not equivalent to the full council composition.

Council control

This data refer to the full council composition and not only to the election results in the 2007 elections.

DV score

DV (the deviation from proportionality measure) is a method used to measure how voting systems allocate seats in relation to votes cast. The DV scores used in this report have been calculated by subtracting the parties' vote share from their seat share. Ignoring whether the values have been positive or negative, the difference between votes and seats has been added up and then divided by two. An ideal DV score would be around 4–8. While there is no maximum figure using this type of calculation, 50 would be a reasonable maximum to use as a benchmark.

Socio-economic data

The socio-economic data used in this report has been taken from the 2001 Census. So some caution should be used as it is beginning to be a bit dated and boundary changes may have had an effect on the figures from local authorities in 2001.

Appendix 2: Change in council control

Conservative gains from Labour

Blackpool
Gravesham
Lincoln
North West Leicestershire
Plymouth City
South Derbyshire

Conservative gains from Liberal Democrats

Bournemouth
North Devon
South Norfolk
Torbay
Uttlesford
Windsor & Maidenhead, Royal

Conservative gains from NOC

Braintree
Canterbury City
Charnwood
Chester City
Crawley
Dartford
Dover
East Cambridgeshire
East Riding of Yorkshire
Erewash
Forest of Dean
Gedling
Harborough
Herefordshire
High Peak
Malvern Hills

Mid Suffolk
Mid Sussex
Newark & Sherwood
North Dorset
North Kesteven
North Shropshire
North Somerset
North Warwickshire
North Wiltshire
Oswestry
Rugby
Shepway
South Cambridgeshire
South Ribble
South Shropshire
Staffordshire Moorlands
Warwick
Waverley
West Wiltshire
Woking

Labour gain from Conservatives

North Lincolnshire

Labour gains from NOC

Leicester City
Luton

Liberal Democrat gains from Conservatives

Eastbourne
Hinckley & Bosworth

Liberal Democrat gains from NOC

Caradon
Hull
Northampton
Rochdale

Independent loss to NOC

Torridge

Other party loss to NOC

Eden

Other party gain from Conservatives

West Somerset

Conservative losses to NOC

Salisbury
Scarborough
Solihull
Taunton Deane
Thurrock

Labour losses to NOC

Ashfield
Blackburn with Darwen
Oldham
Sheffield
Wear Valley

Liberal Democrat losses to NOC

Carrick
Restormel
St Albans
York

Appendix 3: Results per counties

Avon

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	39.2	50.9
Lab	18.5	12.4
LD	29.7	32.1
Green	6.2	0.5
BNP	1.0	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	4.4	3.7
Other	1.0	0.5

Mean average DV score: 22

Buckinghamshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	48.9	73.2
Lab	12.9	3.7
LD	28.6	20.4
Green	0.9	0.0
BNP	0.2	0.0
UKIP	4.9	0.0
Ind	3.4	1.9
Other	0.3	0.9

Mean average DV score: 23

Bedfordshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	37.3	43.4
Lab	21.2	22.1
LD	29.2	30.1
Green	2.2	0.7
BNP	0.8	0.0
UKIP	0.5	0.0
Ind	3.7	2.9
Other	5.2	0.7

Mean average DV score: 19

Cambridgeshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	45.8	68.2
Lab	14.2	4.0
LD	26.6	23.2
Green	4.4	0.0
BNP	0.2	0.0
UKIP	0.6	0.0
Ind	6.9	3.3
Other	1.3	1.3

Mean average DV score: 19

Berkshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	48.5	67.8
Lab	16.7	8.0
LD	25.1	20.1
Green	2.3	0.0
BNP	0.6	0.0
UKIP	2.5	0.0
Ind	3.1	2.0
Other	1.2	2.0

Mean average DV score: 19

Cheshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	40.6	44.7
Lab	27.7	30.3
LD	24.9	22.3
Green	1.2	0.0
BNP	0.6	0.0
UKIP	0.3	0.0
Ind	3.0	1.6
Other	1.7	1.1

Mean average DV score: 13

Cleveland

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	23.5	17.3
Lab	35.2	45.8
LD	17.3	16.8
Green	0.4	0.0
BNP	1.4	0.0
UKIP	1.5	0.0
Ind	11.6	11.2
Other	9.1	9.0

Mean average DV score: 17

Derby

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	31.9	29.4
Lab	34.2	47.1
LD	28.9	23.5
Green	1.3	0.0
BNP	0.0	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	3.7	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0

Mean average DV score: 13

Cornwall

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	31.9	25.2
Lab	4.3	1.3
LD	31.9	39.4
Green	1.3	0.0
BNP	0.3	0.0
UKIP	1.9	0.4
Ind	22.3	29.7
Other	6.2	4.4

Mean average DV score: 19

Derbyshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	35.9	38.5
Lab	32.2	35.1
LD	20.2	18.9
Green	0.9	0.0
BNP	1.2	0.0
UKIP	0.3	0.0
Ind	8.7	5.0
Other	0.8	2.5

Mean average DV score: 21

Cumbria

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	38.5	37.8
Lab	30.2	34.2
LD	17.1	10.9
Green	0.7	0.0
BNP	2.3	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	10.1	17.1
Other	1.1	0.0

Mean average DV score: 11

Devon

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	41.9	53.9
Lab	9.8	3.0
LD	29.0	26.2
Green	3.0	0.6
BNP	0.6	0.0
UKIP	2.1	0.0
Ind	12.5	15.8
Other	1.1	0.6

Mean average DV score: 17

Dorset

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	48.3	62.8
Lab	6.5	2.3
LD	33.6	28.3
Green	1.6	0.0
BNP	0.5	0.0
UKIP	3.7	0.0
Ind	5.8	6.6
Other	0.1	0.0

Mean average DV score: 16

Gloucestershire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	44.9	62.5
Lab	14.0	8.8
LD	22.2	18.1
Green	6.2	2.5
BNP	0.0	0.0
UKIP	1.2	0.0
Ind	11.3	8.1
Other	0.1	0.0

Mean average DV score: 18

Durham

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	16.6	6.8
Lab	38.1	54.8
LD	21.4	17.3
Green	0.2	0.0
BNP	3.4	0.0
UKIP	0.4	0.0
Ind	12.0	10.4

Mean average DV score: 20

Greater Manchester

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	28.9	20.8
Lab	36.1	50.5
LD	24.4	26.4
Green	3.5	0.0
BNP	2.7	0.0
UKIP	0.2	0.0
Ind	1.2	0.5
Other	3.1	1.9

Mean average DV score: 21

Essex

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	46.2	60.6
Lab	17.1	10.1
LD	19.7	17.5
Green	2.4	0.5
BNP	4.1	0.0
UKIP	0.9	0.0
Ind	4.4	3.4
Other	5.2	8.0

Mean average DV score: 20

Hampshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	48.7	62.1
Lab	11.6	5.5
LD	32.8	30.9
Green	1.8	0.0
BNP	0.5	0.0
UKIP	1.1	0.0
Ind	1.7	1.1
Other	1.8	0.4

Mean average DV score: 19

Herefordshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	38.7	55.2
Lab	2.4	3.4
LD	20.5	17.2
Green	11.5	1.7
BNP	0.9	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	24.5	20.7
Other	1.4	1.7

Mean average DV score: 18

Kent

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	47.7	66.2
Lab	18.5	16.1
LD	18.8	13.2
Green	1.5	0.0
BNP	0.4	0.0
UKIP	0.5	0.0
Ind	6.4	2.2
Other	6.1	2.2

Mean average DV score: 22

Hertfordshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	45.7	64.8
Lab	18.8	13.0
LD	26.0	20.2
Green	4.7	0.4
BNP	1.2	0.0
UKIP	0.2	0.0
Ind	2.8	1.6
Other	0.4	0.0

Mean average DV score: 27

Lancashire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	41.1	55.4
Lab	27.2	20.8
LD	16.9	10.5
Green	2.4	2.7
BNP	2.9	0.2
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	4.5	5.9
Other	4.9	4.3

Mean average DV score: 18

Hull

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	33.9	49.7
Lab	23.9	22.4
LD	28.6	22.4
Green	1.4	0.0
BNP	2.1	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	8.2	4.9
Other	1.9	0.7

Mean average DV score: 22

Leicestershire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	37.4	51.3
Lab	24.7	21.1
LD	23.7	23.4
Green	2.1	0.6
BNP	5.3	1.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	4.0	2.6
Other	2.8	0.0

Mean average DV score: 22

Lincolnshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	40.2	51.6
Lab	10.7	9.1
LD	14.2	6.9
Green	0.9	0.4
BNP	3.1	0.0
UKIP	4.3	0.0
Ind	18.9	18.9
Other	7.6	13.1

Mean average DV score: 22

Norfolk

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	46.4	70.4
Lab	15.0	6.3
LD	25.1	18.3
Green	6.8	1.4
BNP	0.2	0.0
UKIP	1.1	0.0
Ind	4.8	3.5
Other	0.6	0.0

Mean average DV score: 22

Merseyside

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	22.6	13.2
Lab	33.7	46.5
LD	34.4	38.6
Green	3.4	0.9
BNP	1.2	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	0.2	0.0
Other	4.6	0.9

Mean average DV score: 15

North Yorkshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	37.9	49.6
Lab	13.9	11.2
LD	24.8	19.2
Green	6.5	1.4
BNP	3.1	0.0
UKIP	0.2	0.0
Ind	12.1	17.0
Other	1.5	1.4

Mean average DV score: 16

Met

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	33.4	39.6
Lab	32.1	43.3
LD	17.2	15.9
Green	2.9	0.0
BNP	7.5	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	1.3	0.6
Other	5.6	0.6

Mean average DV score: 23

Northamptonshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	46.2	69.1
Lab	25.8	13.2
LD	15.4	12.8
Green	2.1	0.0
BNP	0.6	0.0
UKIP	0.2	0.0
Ind	8.1	4.5
Other	1.6	0.4

Mean average DV score: 26

Northumberland

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	26.3	26.4
Lab	23.2	30.1
LD	34.4	31.8
Green	0.9	0.4
BNP	0.0	0.0
UKIP	0.1	0.0
Ind	11.3	11.3
Other	3.8	0.0

Mean average DV score: 13

Rutland

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	50.0	73.1
Lab	0.0	0.0
LD	15.6	7.7
Green	0.0	0.0
BNP	0.0	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	18.3	19.2
Other	16.1	0.0

Mean average DV score: 24

Nottinghamshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	32.9	36.8
Lab	30.6	27.9
LD	18.2	17.1
Green	2.6	0.6
BNP	1.6	0.3
UKIP	1.1	0.0
Ind	7.6	9.1
Other	5.4	8.2

Mean average DV score: 19

Shropshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	41.4	51.7
Lab	17.8	12.3
LD	15.0	11.3
Green	1.3	0.5
BNP	0.4	0.0
UKIP	1.0	0.0
Ind	19.1	19.7
Other	4.0	4.4

Mean average DV score: 17

Oxfordshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	50.4	73.3
Lab	9.7	2.3
LD	30.4	21.4
Green	3.9	0.0
BNP	0.1	0.0
UKIP	0.9	0.0
Ind	3.5	2.3
Other	1.1	0.8

Mean average DV score: 23

Somerset

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	44.5	46.7
Lab	7.7	5.3
LD	36.9	37.7
Green	1.1	0.0
BNP	0.2	0.0
UKIP	0.9	0.0
Ind	8.6	10.2
Other	0.0	0.0

Mean average DV score: 11

South Yorkshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	18.4	8.7
Lab	37.2	56.5
LD	19.7	21.7
Green	5.2	1.1
BNP	5.7	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	5.0	3.3
Other	8.9	8.7

Mean average DV score: 28

Surrey

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	50.9	66.3
Lab	6.8	1.3
LD	28.0	21.6
Green	0.9	0.0
BNP	0.9	0.0
UKIP	1.9	0.0
Ind	2.8	1.3
Other	7.7	9.5

Mean average DV score: 24

Staffordshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	39.1	62.9
Lab	26.1	17.4
LD	13.8	9.3
Green	0.5	0.0
BNP	3.9	1.2
UKIP	2.8	0.9
Ind	10.4	6.5
Other	3.4	2.5

Mean average DV score: 22

Sussex East

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	40.8	52.1
Lab	12.4	6.0
LD	25.7	30.2
Green	11.4	6.5
BNP	0.0	0.0
UKIP	0.6	0.0
Ind	6.0	3.7
Other	3.1	1.4

Mean average DV score: 21

Suffolk

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	45.0	65.4
Lab	15.6	6.6
LD	24.1	18.1
Green	4.1	1.2
BNP	0.1	0.0
UKIP	2.8	0.0
Ind	7.1	3.7
Other	1.2	4.9

Mean average DV score: 22

Sussex West

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	49.5	69.2
Lab	7.9	2.2
LD	29.4	25.6
Green	2.3	0.0
BNP	1.0	0.0
UKIP	3.6	0.0
Ind	5.7	2.2
Other	0.6	0.9

Mean average DV score: 23

Swindon

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	46.2	71.4
Lab	28.9	23.8
LD	13.4	4.8
Green	6.1	0.0
BNP	1.2	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	0.2	0.0
Other	3.9	0.0

Mean average DV score: 25

West Yorkshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	28.6	29.8
Lab	31.1	40.3
LD	19.0	22.6
Green	4.5	3.2
BNP	11.6	0.8
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	2.1	0.8
Other	3.1	2.4

Mean average DV score: 18

Tyne & Wear

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	21.2	15.5
Lab	40.4	55.2
LD	23.8	25.0
Green	1.0	0.0
BNP	5.3	0.0
UKIP	0.0	0.0
Ind	6.0	3.4
Other	2.4	0.9

Mean average DV score: 20

Wiltshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	47.2	62.2
Lab	7.3	5.6
LD	28.3	24.0
Green	2.0	0.0
BNP	0.5	0.0
UKIP	4.8	0.5
Ind	8.6	3.6
Other	1.2	4.6

Mean average DV score: 23

Warwickshire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	45.0	58.3
Lab	22.0	23.5
LD	24.2	14.8
Green	4.6	0.0
BNP	0.0	0.0
UKIP	0.7	0.0
Ind	3.5	3.5
Other	0.0	0.0

Mean average DV score: 16

Worcestershire

Party	% of vote	% of seats
Con	47.4	70.1
Lab	14.7	7.6
LD	18.3	12.1
Green	3.6	0.6
BNP	1.8	0.0
UKIP	1.4	0.0
Ind	5.4	4.5
Other	7.4	5.1

Mean average DV score: 21

Council control after the 2007 elections

	Con	Lab	LD	NOC	Other	Total
Avon	1	0	0	3	0	4
Bedfordshire	2	1	0	1	0	4
Berkshire	4	1	0	1	0	6
Buckinghamshire	4	0	0	1	0	5
Cambridgeshire	5	0	1	0	0	6
Cheshire	3	2	0	3	0	8
Cleveland	0	2	0	2	0	4
Cornwall	0	0	1	5	0	6
Cumbria	0	1	1	4	0	6
Derby	0	0	0	1	0	1
Derbyshire	5	2	1	0	0	8
Devon	5	0	0	5	0	10
Dorset	7	0	0	1	0	8
Durham	0	5	1	1	1	8
Essex	10	0	0	4	0	14
Gloucestershire	3	0	0	2	0	5
Greater Manchester	1	4	2	3	0	10
Hampshire	7	0	1	3	0	11
Herefordshire	1	0	0	0	0	1
Hertfordshire	6	1	2	1	0	10
Hull	1	1	1	1	0	4
Kent	12	0	0	1	0	13
Lancashire	9	0	1	4	0	14
Leicestershire	5	1	2	0	0	8
Lincolnshire	4	0	1	1	1	7
Merseyside	0	1	1	3	0	5
Met	3	2	0	2	0	7
Norfolk	5	0	1	1	0	7
North Yorkshire	2	0	0	6	0	8
Northamptonshire	5	1	1	0	0	7
Northumberland	1	2	0	3	0	6
Nottinghamshire	4	1	0	2	1	8
Oxfordshire	3	0	1	0	0	4
Rutland	1	0	0	0	0	1
Shropshire	4	0	0	2	0	6
Somerset	2	0	1	1	1	5
South Yorkshire	0	2	0	2	0	4
Staffordshire	6	0	0	3	0	9

	Con	Lab	LD	NOC	Other	Total
Suffolk	5	0	0	2	0	7
Surrey	9	0	0	1	1	11
Sussex East	2	0	2	1	0	5
Sussex West	6	0	0	0	0	6
Swindon	1	0	0	0	0	1
Tyne & Wear	0	3	1	1	0	5
Warwickshire	4	0	0	0	0	4
West Yorkshire	0	1	0	4	0	5
Wiltshire	3	0	0	1	0	4
Worcestershire	4	0	0	2	0	6
	165	34	23	85	5	312

Council control prior to the elections

	Con	Lab	LD	NOC	Other	Total
Avon	0	0	0	4	0	4
Bedfordshire	2	0	0	2	0	4
Berkshire	3	1	1	1	0	6
Buckinghamshire	4	0	0	1	0	5
Cambridgeshire	3	0	1	2	0	6
Cheshire	2	2	0	4	0	8
Cleveland	0	2	0	2	0	4
Cornwall	0	0	2	4	0	6
Cumbria	0	1	1	3	1	6
Derby	0	0	0	1	0	1
Derbyshire	2	3	1	2	0	8
Devon	2	1	2	4	1	10
Dorset	5	0	1	2	0	8
Durham	0	6	1	0	1	8
Essex	9	0	1	4	0	14
Gloucestershire	2	0	0	3	0	5
Greater Manchester	1	5	1	3	0	10
Hampshire	7	0	1	3	0	11
Herefordshire	0	0	0	1	0	1
Hertfordshire	6	1	3	0	0	10
Hull	1	0	0	3	0	4
Kent	7	1	0	5	0	13
Lancashire	7	2	1	4	0	14
Leicestershire	3	1	1	3	0	8
Lincolnshire	2	1	1	3	0	7
Merseyside	0	1	1	3	0	5
Met	4	2	0	1	0	7
Norfolk	4	0	2	1	0	7
North Yorkshire	3	0	1	4	0	8
Northamptonshire	5	1	0	1	0	7
Northumberland	1	2	0	3	0	6
Nottinghamshire	2	2	0	3	1	8
Oxfordshire	3	0	1	0	0	4
Rutland	1	0	0	0	0	1
Shropshire	1	0	0	5	0	6
Somerset	4	0	1	0	0	5
South Yorkshire	0	3	0	1	0	4
Staffordshire	5	0	0	4	0	9

	Con	Lab	LD	NOC	Other	Total
Suffolk	4	0	0	3	0	7
Surrey	7	0	0	3	1	11
Sussex East	3	0	1	1	0	5
Sussex West	4	0	0	2	0	6
Swindon	1	0	0	0	0	1
Tyne & Wear	0	3	1	1	0	5
Warwickshire	1	0	0	3	0	4
West Yorkshire	0	1	0	4	0	5
Wiltshire	1	0	0	3	0	4
Worcestershire	3	0	0	3	0	6
	125	42	27	113	5	312

Local authority elections in England



3 May 2007

Founded in 1884, the Electoral Reform Society is the oldest organisation in the world concerned with electoral systems and procedures.

The Society is campaigning to change the way we choose our politicians. We believe that a fair voting system will improve our democracy, allow politicians to better represent you and help

them to tackle the serious issues facing our society. Fairness, accountability and a real choice for voters should not be compromised.

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