

CCHQ CAMPAIGN BULLETIN

In today's Bulletin, we provide an overview of the local elections results.

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Local Elections 2006 - RESULTS

It has been a great night during which we have built support - winning seats from Labour and the Liberal Democrats - while Labour's support has collapsed and Liberal Democrats flat-line. Today's Cabinet reshuffle is a desperate attempt to cover up this meltdown and rearrange the deckchairs. But what is needed is not a reshuffle but a replacement.

After nine years of Labour Government, many people have recognised the change that has taken place in the Conservatives. They see us as the only alternative to Labour and have put their trust in us - for which we thank them. Now we will show that we deserve that trust. We still have a long way to go if we are to rebuild trust and become the next government: but this is a great start.

Summary

- **Vote share:** Conservatives are confident that we will secure at least 40 per cent of the national equivalent vote - our best result since 1992. Liberal Democrats are flat-lining at 27 per cent and Labour have been beaten into third place with 26 per cent.
- **Significant Conservative gains:** After 173 of 176 councils have declared, we have made a net gain of 11 councils and 278 councillors. We now control 167 councils - more than we have done since 1985. We now have the highest number of councillors since 1990.
- **Labour's worst ever result:** Labour have lost support everywhere - especially in their heartlands and in London. Labour have suffered a net loss of 18 councils. In terms of councillors and councils held, this is Labour's worst ever result - since the prevailing system of modern local government was introduced in 1972. Labour have lost control of councils like Camden, Bury, Redditch, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent, Derby, Crawley, Plymouth, Derby, Warrington, Barrow-in-Furness and Ealing.
- **Liberal Democrats flat-lining:** These elections have shown that they have hit their ceiling. They have only gained a mere net 25 councillors. They have won one council in net terms - but needed to gain 10 more to get back to the number they controlled in 1998. At the start of this evening, they had just 32 councils compared to 55 ten years ago. Conservatives have made net gains of 39 from Liberal Democrats.

What the pundits said

If the Conservatives made over 200 gains: _ · Rallings and Thrasher said this would be 'the basis for a claim that David Cameron really has made a difference to the Party's fortunes' (Local Government Chronicle, 2 March 2006).

- Peter Riddell said: 'David Cameron can claim that the Tories are really on the way back' (The Times, 3 May 2006).

- The Financial Times said: 'David Cameron can claim lift off' (4 May 2006). _
- The Sun said: 'The Tories are back' (4 May 2006).

This is the first time...

... since 1968 that Conservatives have won Hammersmith and Fulham. _... that Conservatives control Mole Valley since the council was created. _... that Conservatives control Bassetlaw since the council was created. _... that Conservatives control Crawley since the council was created. _...since 1978 that Conservatives have won Coventry. _...since 1979 that Conservatives have won Hastings; back in 1996 we had no councillors at all. _...since 1982 that Conservatives have won Chorley and Havering. _...since 1984 that Conservatives have won Waveney. _...since 1986 that Conservatives have won Winchester. _...since 1990 that Conservatives have won Harrow. _...since 1990 that Conservatives have won Croydon.

Conservatives are doing well outside London too

We have gained control of Chorley, Bassetlaw and Coventry; and we have made gains in Bury, Birmingham, Barrow-in Furness, Sunderland, Newcastle-Under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent, Tameside, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Redditch, Bolton, Warrington, Wolverhampton, Rugby and Wigan.

We now control a majority of the metropolitan councils in the West Midlands (Walsall, Dudley, Solihull, and Coventry). We continue to control Trafford in the North West. In Greater Manchester we gained seats in 5 of the 10 metropolitan districts: Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Tameside, Wigan; in a sixth district, Trafford, we continue in control.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS FLAT-LINE

- After 173 of 176 councils have declared, Liberal Democrats have made net gains of just 25 councillors and 1 council. They continue to have fewer councillors and councils under Ming Campbell than they did under Paddy Ashdown.
- Conservatives have won seats from the Liberal Democrats, making 39 net gains in seats from them, on top of gains from Labour.
- Their projected national share of the vote is 27 per cent, compared to Conservatives 40 per cent. They have hit a glass ceiling in their vote share - and they perform worse in general elections.
- Liberal Democrats had very few councils left to lose. They are down to just 33 councils, compared to 55 under the last Conservative Government. They needed to win 10 councils just to get back to their 1998 level.

Liberal Democrats doing badly

- Winchester (CON gain from NOC): Conservatives have taken control of Winchester in savage blow for Liberal Democrat morale. Was a LD minority administration. Council was last Conservative in 1986. Liberal Democrat leader, Sheila Campbell, was one of seven losses for them.
- Hillingdon (CON gain from NOC): Conservatives gained the Liberal Democrat

group leader's seat. _· Islington (LD lose to NOC): Loss of their flagship administration. _· Milton Keynes (LD lose to NOC): LibDem administration lost to NOC; Conservatives gained six seats. _· Solihull (CON hold): Conservatives held this council despite heavy targeting by Liberal Democrats. _· Lambeth (LAB gain from NOC): Rare Labour gain from LD minority administration. _· Sutton (LD hold): The council remains Lib Dem, but Conservatives gained 14 seats. _· Croydon (CON gain): Liberal Democrats wiped off the council. _· Kingston (LD hold): Conservatives gain six seats. _· West Oxfordshire (CON) hold: Conservatives won five seats in David Cameron's constituency from the Liberal Democrats and two from Independents.

· Brentwood (CON hold): Conservatives took a total of six seats from Liberal Democrats, removing their leader and deputy leader.

· Wokingham (CON hold): Leader of Liberal Democrat group lost seat to Conservatives _· Swindon (CON hold): Conservatives gained two seats from Liberal Democrats. _· Bolton (NOC hold): Conservatives gained two seats from Liberal Democrats.

Failing to hold their councils

Liberal Democrats frequently fail to hold on to the councils they do win. In their own words, 'one significant disappointment in recent times has been our record in defending councils where we form the administration. After the elections in 2000 we had 27 majority councils... But of the 27 four years ago, there are just twelve where we still have a majority after these elections' (Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors, cited in *Who's Who in the Liberal Democrats*, 2004 edition, p.35).

What the Liberal Democrats forecast

Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat President, boldly predicted that they 'would win more seats in May's local elections... I believe the Liberal Democrats have huge potential for winning big' (BBC News Online, 27 January 2006).

Ming Campbell pledged, 'under my leadership, the Liberal Democrats won't be content with bronze medals. We're going to go for gold' (Speech to London hustings, 23 February 2006).

What the commentators said

The Sun: 'Below 100 gains - Poor show - Thirds Party get their usual protest vote but fail to shine. No gains - Devastating - Minging result as Lib Dems wonder why they chose him ahead of younger rivals' (The Sun, 4 May 2006).

John Curtis, Professor of Politics at Strathclyde University: 'Mr Cameron needs to break the 40 per cent barrier while Sir Menzies has to pass the 30 per cent mark' (Independent, 4 May 2006).

Peter Riddell, The Times: 'If they make 100 to 200 gains, the Lib Dems have shaken off their January leadership blues and will show that under Sir Menzies Campbell they can

survive a Tory revival' (The Times, 3 May 2006).

David Cowling, BBC: 'the Lib Dems should be on target to gain an impressive tally of seats on 4 May (certainly more than their net gain of 44 seats in 2002 and 98 in 2004); their new leader's problems begin if the party does not achieve such gains... Too many Lib Dem MPs are representing formerly safe Conservative seats for them not to feel seriously threatened by any revival in that party's electoral fortunes (indeed, ten Lib Dem seats would fall on a swing of less than 4 per cent to the Conservatives' (David Cowling, BBC News & Analysis internal handbook, Local elections: A game of two halves, 20 April 2006).

Financial Times: 'Liberal Democrats will want to consolidate their strong second place at the last local elections with at least 30 per cent of the vote... If the Liberal Democrats win 100 council seats: This would draw a line under recent problems for the party' (James Blitz and Jean Eaglesham, Financial Times, 4 May 2006).

Rallings & Thrasher: 'It could just be, though, that the party has reached its high-water mark. They have been in negative territory since the general election' (LGC, 15 December 2005).

BAD NIGHT FOR LABOUR

Conservative gains from Labour

- Hammersmith and Fulham (LAB): Conservatives have taken control of the council for first time since 1968. We have also taken the seat of the Labour leader and defeated the former Labour MP, Iain Coleman, in a formerly Labour ward.
- Bexley (LAB): Conservatives gained control from Labour, taking the council from 32 Labour councillors and 31 Conservatives, to 54 Conservatives and just 9 Labour.
- Croydon (LAB): Conservatives have won Croydon for the first time since 1990.
- Crawley (LAB): Conservatives have gained the council; it has never been Conservative since it was controlled in 1973.
- Ealing (LAB): Conservatives have taken control from Labour against all expectations
- Harrow (NOC): Conservatives have gained control of the council for the first time since 1990.
- Birmingham (NOC): Conservatives have gained Longbridge ward and Erdington ward from Labour.
- Wigan (LAB): Conservatives gained two seats in Wigan - one with a 13 per cent swing against Labour. The district includes the Labour Party Chairman's constituency.
- Barrow-in-Furness (LAB): Conservatives gained five unexpected seats in John Hutton's constituency; Labour lost six seats, and control of the council.
- Tamworth (CON): Labour lost five seats to the Conservatives, who strengthen their hold on the council.
- Bristol (NOC): Conservatives have now gained two seats from Labour.
- Sunderland (LAB): Conservatives have unseated a Labour Cabinet Member in St Peter's ward.
- Newcastle under Lyme (LAB) - Conservatives gained three seats; Labour lost control to NOC.
- Lincoln (LAB) - Labour hold, but Conservatives gained four seats.
- Amber Valley (CON) - Conservatives held the council, winning Kilburn, Denby & Holbrook ward - a former mining town - from

Labour.

· Ipswich: Conservatives gained three seats. NOC hold. _· Swindon (CON): Conservatives gained three seats from Labour. _· Peterborough (CON): Labour is now the fourth party, with just four seats. _· Nuneaton and Bedworth (LAB): Conservatives gain four seats. _· Rugby (NOC): Conservatives gain three seats. _· Redditch (NOC): Conservatives gain one seat. _· Wolverhampton (LAB): Conservatives gain one seat. _· Tameside (LAB): Conservatives gain one seat.

Labour infighting

· Nick Brown attacks Blair. The former Labour minister, Nick Brown - one of the Gordon Brown's closest allies - said urgent action was needed to reverse Labour's 'drift' and raised doubts over whether Mr Blair would be able to deliver it. 'We can't drift on,' he told the BBC. 'It's pretty clear what's gone wrong and we need to address it.' Asked if Mr Blair could do it, the former agriculture minister replied: 'I don't know but he has got to try.'

· Tessa Jowell apologies for her Cabinet colleagues. Tessa Jowell, Labour's London campaign manager, has apologised to local Labour Party activists for the actions of Labour ministers. She told Sky News: 'I don't think we are going to do very well. I think that's a great pity...The headlines of the last two weeks have created a great problem for us...I am very sorry if local activists feel that they have been let down.'

· Labour MP calls for Blair to go. Martin Salter MP has called for 'clarity' on the timing of the handover of the Labour leadership, and told the BBC that Mr Blair's successor should be given 'plenty of time' to prepare for a general election due in 2009 or 2010.

· Margaret Hodge attacked for giving BNP publicity. Margaret Hodge has been criticised by her own party for giving the BNP 'the oxygen of publicity'. The attack was made by a leading Labour councillor in Barking and Dagenham, Liam Smith. Another Labour councillor, Val Rush, said: 'I will now be asking ruling party members whether we should look at some form of disciplinary action against Mrs Hodge. We cannot have our local MP stepping out of line. The MP is there to represent us and a lot of people are very unhappy about what she has said.'

· Labour leader loses seat and quits Labour Party. A Labour council leader who lost his seat in the local elections has announced he is to leave the Labour Party in disgust with his Party. The former leader of Stoke-on-Trent council, Mick Salih, told BBC Radio Stoke he had tried to listen to people and had done his best, but he had had 'enough of the Labour Party...I shall not be renewing my membership and that is a fact.' He had been a councillor for 13 years. Labour lost overall control of the council, where it lost two seats and the BNP saw its strength rise from two to five councillors (Press Association, 4 May 2006).

LONDON SUCCESS

Expert verdict

As Professor Tony Travers of the London School of Economics has said, 'Tories bask in biggest wins since Falklands factor boost... Overall, the Conservatives were the big

winners. When all councils have declared, it seems likely that the party's final vote in the capital will be close to 40 per cent. This is the highest figure since 1982, when in their post-Falklands glow Mrs Thatcher's Tories managed 43 per cent. Labour on the other hands will be close to their all-time low of 28 per cent of the vote, achieved in their most catastrophic view of 1968. The Liberal Democrats once again bumped up against the glass ceiling that appears to stop them making serious progress across the capital' (Evening Standard, 5 May 2006).

Overview

- Conservatives have gained seven councils (six net): Hammersmith & Fulham, Bexley, Croydon, Harrow, Ealing, Hillingdon, and Havering. The win in Ealing is worth noting. As Tony Travers noted, 'Ealing is London's bellwether Borough - the majority party after Ealing elections has always, except 1986, been the same party that formed the next national government' (Tony Travers/London Communications Agency, Predicting London's local elections, March 2006).
- Labour have lost control of nine councils (so far): Camden (for the first time in 35 years), Croydon, Bexley, Hammersmith & Fulham, Ealing, Lewisham, Brent, Hounslow and Merton.
- Liberal Democrats have lost control of their flagship Islington and their minority administration in Lambeth.

Other notable results include:

- Tower Hamlets (not yet declared): The Conservatives won seven seats. Before a by-election win last year, we had never had any councillors in Tower Hamlets.
- Camden (LAB to NOC): Conservatives take Labour leaders' seat.
- Hounslow (LAB to NOC): Conservatives took the seat of the Labour leader of Hounslow, more than doubling our share of the vote.

And finally...

In Portsmouth, Labour councillor T. Blair lost his seat to the Conservatives by a massive swing in Hilsea ward.

In Westminster, Prime Minister T. Blair reshuffled his Cabinet in a move that Labour MP, Frank Dobson, labelled 'rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic'.

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