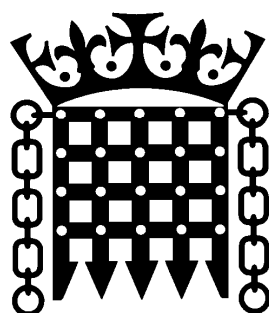


The local elections of 2 May 1996

Research Paper 96/59

7 May 1996



This paper provides a brief summary of the local elections which took place in many parts of England on 2 May 1996. There were no elections in Scotland or Wales, or in Greater London. In the interest of producing the paper quickly, it is based largely on press reports. More detailed information, including the votes cast, will be published later in the year.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	5
Table 1 Councillors elected in May 1996 local elections	6
Table 2 Net gains and losses by each party	7
Table 3 Changes in council control	8

Introduction

On 2 May 1996 there were elections for just over 3,000 seats on 150 councils in England. Elections took place for

- one third of the council in each of the 36 metropolitan districts;
- one third of the council in 100 non-metropolitan districts;
- the whole council in 13 new unitary authorities. These assume full powers in April 1997;
- one third of the council in one unitary authority (Hartlepool) which had its first elections in 1995.

This paper is intended as a brief and immediate summary of the elections and is based on press reports supplemented by information from individual councils. The final compilation of the results, including votes cast, takes some time, and the full results will not be available centrally until later in the year¹. Meanwhile, any requests for further information should be directed to the Social & General Statistics Section (extension 4310).

Estimates based on these elections have been made of the projected national (Great Britain) share of the vote of the major parties. These are not the parties' shares of the votes cast in the elections themselves but a projection of what the national vote would have been if voting had taken place nationwide. Two sets of estimates are available, using somewhat different methodologies. Estimates for ITN and the Sunday Times, made by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher of the University of Plymouth, put Labour's share at 44% (compared with 47% in 1995), the Conservatives at 28% (25% in 1995) and the Liberal Democrats at 23% (also 23% in 1995). Figures produced for the Guardian and the BBC by John Curtice of the University of Strathclyde put Labour on 43% (46% in 1995), the Conservatives on 27% (25% in 1995) and the Liberal Democrats on 26% (24% in 1995)².

¹ In Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher **Local elections handbook 1996** (Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth).

² Guardian 4 May 1996; Sunday Times 5 May 1996; Research Paper 95/59.

Research Paper 96/59

Table 1 shows the numbers of councillors elected on 2 May. The totals include some elected as a result of casual vacancies. Table 2 gives details of each party's net gains or losses of seats on 2 May compared with the position immediately before the elections. Table 3 lists changes in local authority control as a result of the elections.

Table 1
Councillors elected in May 1996 local elections

	Conserv -ative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Other	Total
Metropolitan districts	73	615	133	15	836
Shire districts					
North	70	183	62	8	323
Midlands	76	229	63	35	403
South	202	306	252	50	810
<i>Total</i>	<i>348</i>	<i>718</i>	<i>377</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>1,536</i>
Unitary authorities	97	411	131	19	658
Total elected	518	1,744	641	127	3,030

North: 19 districts in North, North West and Yorkshire & Humberside regions.

Midlands: 27 districts in West Midlands, East Midlands and East Anglia regions.

South: 54 districts in South West and South East regions.

Table 2
Net gains and losses by each party

	Conserv -ative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Other
Metropolitan districts	-183	+157	+30	-4
Shire districts				
North	-67	+57	+14	-4
Midlands	-80	+85	+6	-11
South	-208	+134	+94	-20
<i>Total</i>	-355	+276	+114	-35
Unitary authorities	-39	+33	+6	-
Total	-577	+466	+150	-39

Note: the figures for unitary authorities compare the 1996 election results with the position immediately before the elections in the (identical) district councils³. They do not include Milton Keynes, where there were new boundaries for this year's elections. Three additional councillors in Poole, where three wards have each been increased from two to three members, are not included.

North: 19 districts in North, North West and Yorkshire & Humberside regions.

Midlands: 27 districts in West Midlands, East Midlands and East Anglia regions.

South: 54 districts in South West and South East regions.

³ The new authorities are 'continuing' authorities which assume full unitary powers, taking over county functions, in April 1997.

Table 3
Changes in control as a result of the 1996 elections

Formerly Conservative, now no overall control (1)

Runnymede⁴

Formerly no overall control, now Labour (11)

Basildon
Cambridge
Cherwell
Hertsmere
Milton Keynes
North Hertfordshire
Oldham
Peterborough
Rochdale
Trafford
Wyre Forest

Formerly no overall control, now Liberal Democrat (5)

Hastings
Tunbridge Wells
West Lindsey
Woking
Wokingham

⁴ The Conservative Party has exactly half the seats on the council and will control it using the mayor's casting vote.

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