

Research Briefing

22 May 2023

By Elise Uberoi

# Local elections 2023: Results and analysis



## Summary

- 1 Local elections in England
- 2 Results in England by party
- 3 Post-election council control and councillors
- 4 England: Mayoral elections
- 5 National share of the vote (Great Britain)
- 6 Local elections in Northern Ireland
- 7 About the data

### Image Credits

Attribution: Showing ID - Electoral Commission, photographs for media use

### Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

### Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact [hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk](mailto:hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk) or visit [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources) for more information.

### Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk). If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
England	4
Northern Ireland	6
<b>1 Local elections in England</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Electoral cycles	7
1.2 First use of voter ID	8
<b>2 Results in England by party</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Conservative	9
2.2 Labour	10
2.3 Liberal Democrat	11
2.4 Green and Other	12
<b>3 Post-election council control and councillors</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 England: Labour becomes the largest party in local government	13
3.2 Councillors by party in Great Britain	17
3.3 Vote share in English regions	18
<b>4 England: Mayoral elections</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5 National share of the vote (Great Britain)</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6 Local elections in Northern Ireland</b>	<b>23</b>
6.1 The 2023 local elections	24
<b>7 About the data</b>	<b>26</b>
7.1 How are local election results analysed?	26

# Summary

## England

Labour became the largest party in local government following the 4 May 2023 local elections, which were held in 230 councils in England. For the first time in recent history, councils are more likely to have ‘no overall control’ than be controlled by a political party.

The Conservatives lost 1,063 seats, while Labour gained 537 and the Liberal Democrats 407. If the voting patterns witnessed in these elections were duplicated in a general election, writing in the Sunday Times, [politics professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher predict that Labour would become the biggest party](#) in Parliament with 298 seats.

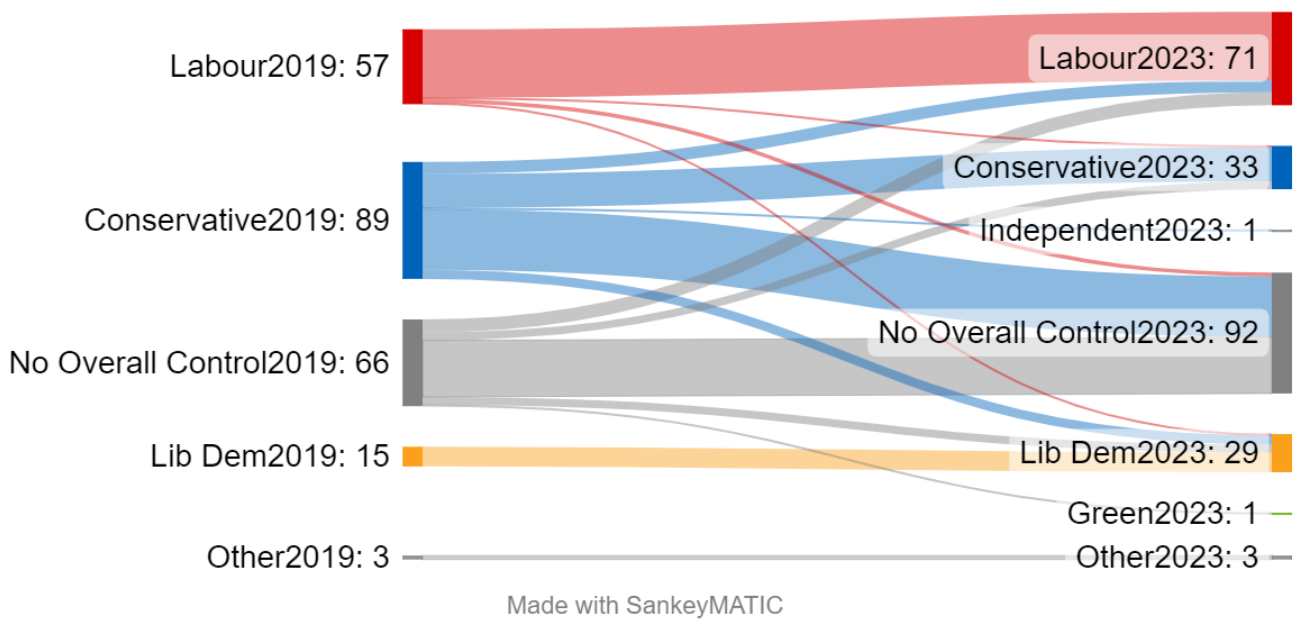
Data used in this briefing is taken mostly from the BBC and from Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher.

## Number of seats up for election

Local councillors are elected for four-year terms using the first past the post system. Across England elections were held for 8,025 seats (8,519 including by-elections). With some exceptions, these seats were last up for election in 2019, when both Labour and the Conservatives lost seats to smaller parties and independents. After the 2023 elections there were 24 seats left vacant for various reasons. There were also elections for four local mayors.

## Local election results in England

The diagram below shows changes in council control in England between 2019 and 2023. In 2019, there were 57 councils controlled by a Labour majority, which increased to 71 in May 2023. The Conservatives controlled 89 councils in 2019 and now have 33.



Source: BBC, [local election results 2023](#)

The results of the elections in England were:

### Labour won 33% of all seats

Labour won or retained control of 71 of the councils with elections. This is 14 more than it controlled after these seats were last up for election in 2019. Compared with 2019, Labour gained control of 19 councils and lost control of five. The party won 33% of all seats up for election, up from 24% in 2019.

### Conservatives lost control of 63 councils

The Conservatives won or retained control of 33 councils in England. This is 56 fewer than in 2019. They gained control of seven councils and lost control of 63. The Conservatives won 29% of seats, the party's lowest proportion of seats up for election in this cycle in the last 20 years.

### Liberal democrats won 20% of seats

The Liberal Democrats won or retained control of 29 councils, 14 more than in 2019. The party won 20% of seats up for election, four percentage points up on 2019.

### Green Party gains control of first council

The Green Party gained control of a council for the first time, in Mid Suffolk, and won 6% of seats up for election, the highest proportion in 20 years.

## No control and independents

There were 92 councils with no overall control, 26 more than after the last elections in these seats in 2019.

The Ashfield Independents retained control of Ashfield Council, and residents' associations retained control in Epsom and Ewell, and Uttlesford.

## Northern Ireland

Local elections for all seats on all 11 councils in Northern Ireland were held on 18 May 2023. Votes were counted using the Single Transferable Vote system which takes account of second (and third etc.) preferences.

Sinn Fein became the largest party in local government for the first time in recent history, winning 30.9% of first preference votes and 144 seats (39 more than in 2019). The party gained control of one council. The Democratic Unionist Party retained the same number of seats compared with 2019 (122 seats, winning 23.3% of first preference votes). The Alliance Party came third with 13.3% of first preference votes and 67 seats (14 more than in 2019).

# 1 Local elections in England

All areas of England are covered either by a unitary council, a metropolitan borough council, a London borough council or a county council. Unitary, metropolitan and London borough councils are all ‘single-tier’ councils.

In most cases county councils and district councils have a ‘two-tier’ system, with upper-tier county councils covering multiple lower-tier district councils.

On 4 May 2023, 230 councils in England were scheduled to hold elections in almost 5,000 wards: 152 district councils, 32 metropolitan district councils, and 46 unitary authorities. Seven in ten English voters were eligible to vote.<sup>1</sup>

Not all these elections went ahead as planned. For example, [The Guardian](#) reported that the Coxford ward election for Southampton City council was cancelled after a candidate died on polling day. The [BBC](#) reported that the count for the Hilton ward election in Derbyshire was also abandoned after a candidate died on election day. Elections in seven other councils were ‘countermanded’ after candidates died between nomination and polling day. This means a new election must be called. Candidates already nominated in the abandoned poll remain on the ballot paper, but new candidates can be nominated.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Electoral cycles

Local council members are elected for four-year terms using the first past the post system.

There are a variety of electoral cycles, with elections held in different years, so not all councillors are elected at the same time. In some authorities (including London boroughs and all county councils) elections for all councillors are held every four years. Others elect a proportion of members each year.

There are three methods of holding elections to local councils: whole council; thirds; and halves.

---

<sup>1</sup> Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, ‘[Local elections 2023: what’s at stake](#)’, UK in a changing Europe, 3 May 2023

<sup>2</sup> Electoral Commission, Guidance for Returning Officers administering Local Government Elections in England, ‘[Death of a candidate](#)’, accessed 17 May 2023

- Whole: All councillors are elected once every four years, in whole council elections. Councils also elect all councillors after local authority boundary changes.
- Thirds: At each election a third of councillors are elected for four-year terms. Elections are held every year except in years when there are county council elections in the rest of England.
- Halves: At each election half the councillors are elected. Elections are held every two years.

For more information on future elections see the Library briefing [UK Elections in 2022 and beyond](#). A timetable of elections can be found in [chapter 8](#), detailing elections due to take place in the UK up to 2026.

## 1.2 First use of voter ID

The 2023 local elections were the first elections in Great Britain requiring voters to bring a photo ID to the polling station. People without an approved form of photo ID before the elections could apply for a Voter Authority Certificate from their local council.

By the deadline of 25 April, [there had been 85,700 online applications for a certificate](#).<sup>3</sup> This represents roughly 4.3% of the two million people estimated to not have suitable ID, but this figure does not include paper applications and it does include rejected online applications.<sup>4</sup>

Critics have suggested that the introduction of voter ID could lead to lower turnout overall, especially among marginalised groups who are less likely to have access to suitable forms of ID. Advocates say it will reduce electoral fraud. Following the elections, there were reports of some voters expressing ‘anger’ with the requirement for voter ID, but its effects remain unclear at the time of writing.<sup>5</sup> The Electoral Commission is expected to publish an initial evaluation of the effect of voter ID on the 2023 local elections before the summer.

For more information, see the Library briefing on [Voter ID](#).

---

<sup>3</sup> GOV.UK, [Voter Authority Certificate dashboard](#), applications breakdown, accessed 8 May 2023

<sup>4</sup> BBC News, ‘[Local elections 2023: 4% of voters without voter ID apply through scheme](#)’, 25 April 2023, accessed 15 May 2023

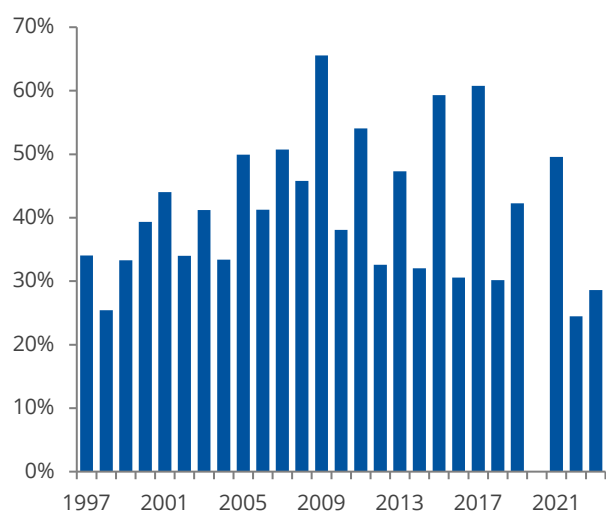
<sup>5</sup> BBC News, ‘[Local elections 2023: Voters express anger at ID rule changes](#)’, 5 May 2023, accessed 10 May 2023



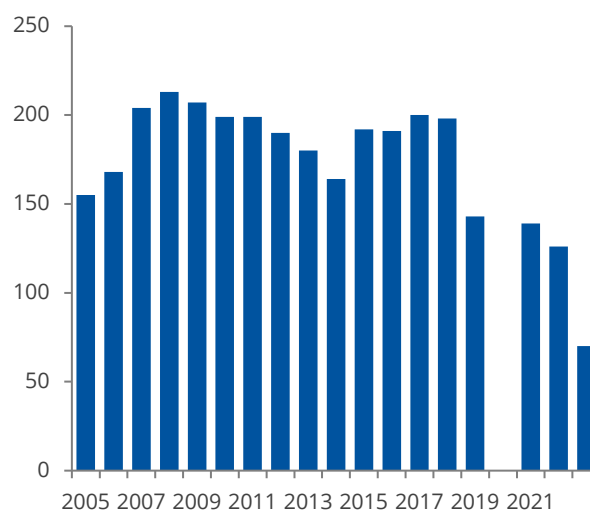
# Conservative

The Conservatives won 29% of the seats up for election on 4 May 2023, down from 42% in 2019 when these seats were last up for election. The party controlled 48 fewer councils compared with immediately before the election. At 70, the total number of councils controlled is the lowest in more than 15 years, this is partly due to local authority restructures meaning that there are fewer councils overall.

## Percent of seats up for election won<sup>a</sup>



## Councils controlled<sup>b</sup>



## Summary of Conservative local election results

Election year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
<b>Seats won</b>	<b>1,117</b>	<b>1,366</b>	<b>5,540</b>	<b>851</b>	<b>1,440</b>	<b>1,332</b>	<b>3,559</b>	<b>2,345</b>	<b>1,075</b>	<b>2,296</b>
Unitary Councils	183	115	941	138	231	108	698	648	184	497
Metropolitan		128	162	114	7	175	119	226	158	150
London Boroughs		612				511			401	
District Councils		511	4437	599		538	2742	534	332	1649
County Councils	934				1202			937		
% of seats up for election won <sup>a</sup>	47%	32%	59%	31%	61%	30%	42%	50%	24%	29%
<b>Councils controlled<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>180</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>70</b>
Unitary Councils	20	18	19	21	22	23	16	22	19	12
Metropolitan	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	3
London Boroughs	11	9	9	9	9	7	7	7	5	5
District Councils	131	119	146	143	143	143	95	86	79	31
County Councils	16	16	16	16	24	24	23	21	20	19
Net change in council control <sup>c</sup>	-10	-13	28	-1	9	-2	-49	13	-13	-48

## Notes and sources

a. All figures England only. Shows seats won by stated party as a percentage of total seats up for election. Note not all parties field candidates in all seats.

b. Council control immediately following elections of stated year.

c. Net change compared to control immediately prior to election; figures not comparable with year-on-year changes to total number of councils controlled by party.

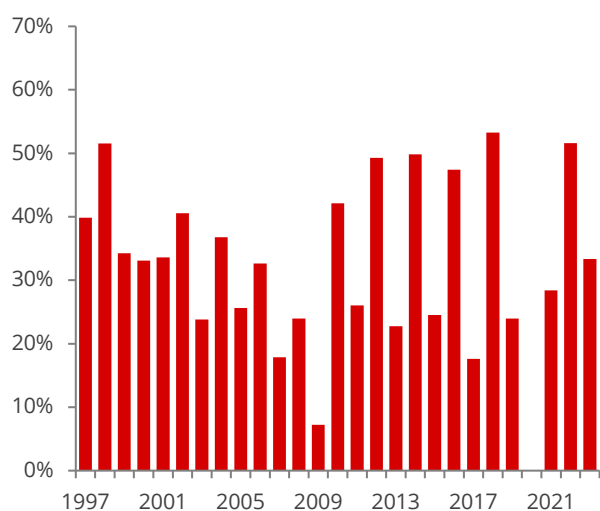
d. Figures for councils controlled and net change in councils controlled refer to those controlled by an absolute majority; minority controlled councils are excluded.

Sources: 1997 - 2017 data from Rallings & Thrasher Local Elections Handbooks; 2018 and 2019 data collated by House of Commons Library; Rallings and Thrasher, "Voters turned their backs on the main two parties", Local Government Chronicle, 7 May 2019, and "Brexit is changing voting patterns", Local Government Chronicle, 14 May 2021; BBC

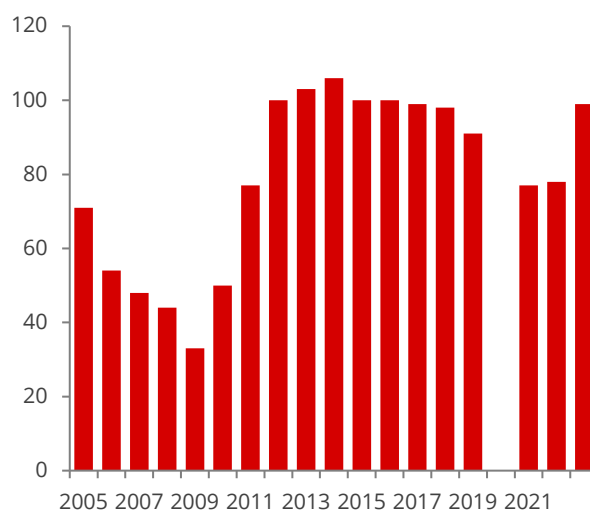
# Labour

Labour won 33% of the seats up for election on 4 May 2023, up by 9 percentage points on the proportion it won in 2019, when these seats were last up for election. The overall number of councils controlled by Labour increased by 22 compared with immediately before the election; the Party now controls 99 councils, the highest number since 2017.

## Percent of seats up for election won<sup>a</sup>



## Councils controlled<sup>b</sup>



## Summary of Labour local election results

Election year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
<b>Seats won</b>	<b>538</b>	<b>2,124</b>	<b>2,292</b>	<b>1,319</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>2,355</b>	<b>2,020</b>	<b>1,345</b>	<b>2,265</b>	<b>2,675</b>
Unitary Councils	158	191	673	233	115	187	589	333	235	786
Metropolitan		565	634	664	43	723	472	571	594	724
London Boroughs		1060				1125			1153	
District Councils		308	985	422		320	959	269	283	1165
County Councils	380				259			172		
% of seats up for election won <sup>a</sup>	23%	50%	25%	47%	18%	53%	24%	28%	52%	33%
<b>Councils controlled<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>103</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>99</b>
Unitary Councils	23	21	18	19	20	20	15	11	10	20
Metropolitan	29	30	30	29	29	30	30	28	29	29
London Boroughs	17	20	20	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
District Councils	32	33	30	30	29	27	25	17	18	29
County Councils	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Net change in council control <sup>c</sup>	2	4	-6	0	-1	0	-6	-8	1	22

## Notes and sources

a. All figures England only. Shows seats won by stated party as a percentage of total seats up for election. Note not all parties field candidates in all seats.

b. Council control immediately following elections of stated year.

c. Net change compared to control immediately prior to election; figures not comparable with year-on-year changes to total number of councils controlled by party.

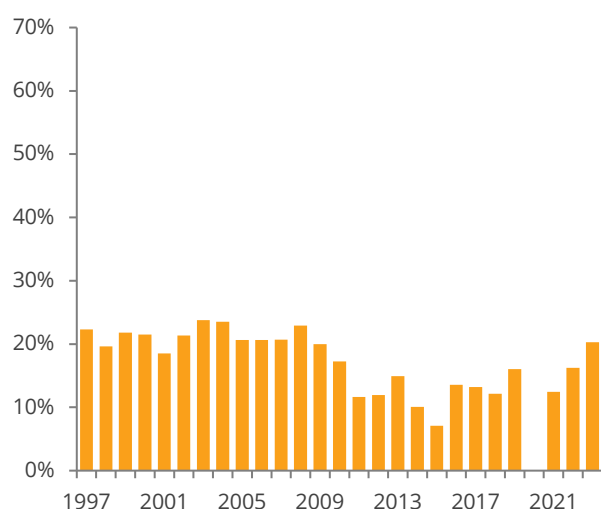
d. Figures for councils controlled and net change in councils controlled refer to those controlled by an absolute majority; minority controlled councils are excluded.

Sources: 1997 - 2017 data from Rallings & Thrasher Local Elections Handbooks; 2018 and 2019 data collated by House of Commons Library; Rallings and Thrasher, "Voters turned their backs on the main two parties", Local Government Chronicle, 7 May 2019, and "Brexit is changing voting patterns", Local Government Chronicle, 14 May 2021; BBC

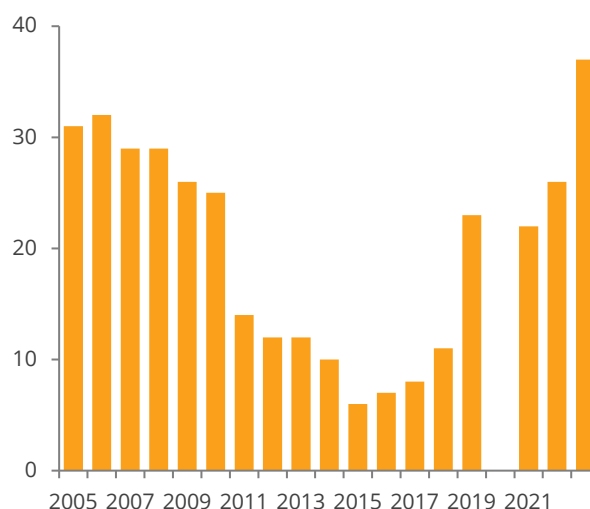
# Liberal Democrat

The Liberal Democrats won 20% of all seats up for election, four percentage points higher than the proportion won in 2019, when these seats were last up for election. Their total of councils controlled was 37, 14 more than in 2019. This is the most councils the Liberal Democrats have controlled in more than 15 years and continues the growth seen since a decade low of six councils controlled in 2015.

## Percent of seats up for election won<sup>a</sup>



## Councils controlled<sup>b</sup>



## Summary of Liberal Democrat local election results

Election year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
<b>Seats won</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>1,351</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>1,628</b>
Unitary Councils	101	45	123	54	88	48	287	146	158	355
Metropolitan		66	40	88	0	83	80	70	86	132
London Boroughs		116				152			177	
District Councils		202	498	235		254	984	177	291	1141
County Councils	251				225			195		
% of seats up for election won <sup>a</sup>	15%	10%	7%	14%	13%	12%	16%	12%	16%	20%
<b>Councils controlled<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>37</b>
Unitary Councils	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	6
Metropolitan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
London Boroughs	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	3
District Councils	9	9	5	6	7	8	19	18	20	28
County Councils	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Net change in council control <sup>c</sup>	0	-2	-4	1	0	4	12	1	4	12

### Notes and sources

a. All figures England only. Shows seats won by stated party as a percentage of total seats up for election. Note not all parties field candidates in all seats.

b. Council control immediately following elections of stated year.

c. Net change compared to control immediately prior to election; figures not comparable with year-on-year changes to total number of councils controlled by party.

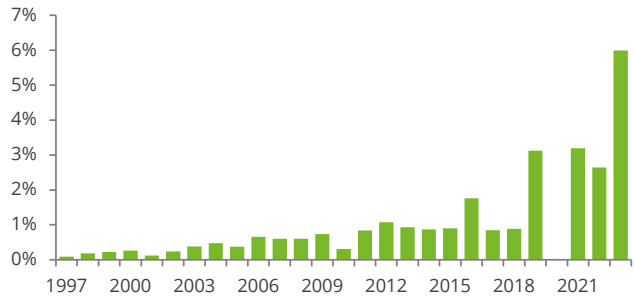
d. Figures for councils controlled and net change in councils controlled refer to those controlled by an absolute majority; minority controlled councils are excluded.

Sources: 1997 - 2017 data from Rallings & Thrasher Local Elections Handbooks; 2018 and 2019 data collated by House of Commons Library; Rallings and Thrasher, "Voters turned their backs on the main two parties", Local Government Chronicle, 7 May 2019, and "Brexit is changing voting patterns", Local Government Chronicle, 14 May 2021; BBC

# Green

The Green Party won 481 seats at the local elections on 4 May 2023, around 6% of all seats up for election. This is the highest proportion of seats the Green Party has won in more than twenty years. The Green Party also gained control of its first council this year.

Percent of seats up for election won<sup>a</sup>

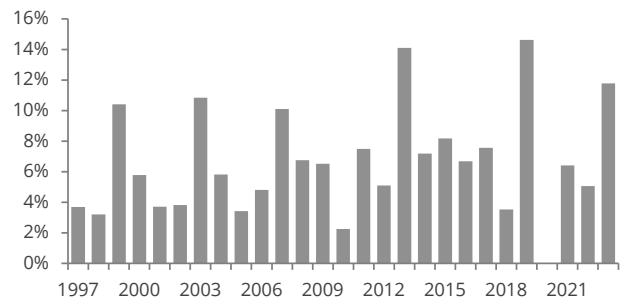


Election year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
<b>Seats won</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>481</b>
Unitary Councils	3	5	30	15	2	2	51	42	22	59
Metropolitan		12	7	12	0	18	24	27	36	49
London Boroughs		4				11			18	0
District Councils		16	47	22		8	188	39	40	373
County Councils	19				18			43		
% of seats up for election won <sup>a</sup>	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	3%	3%	3%	6%

# Other parties and independents

Other parties and independent candidates won 945 seats in the local elections on 4 May 2023, around 12% of the seats up for election. The highest proportion of seats won by other parties and independents was 15% in 2019. The Ashfield Independents and residents' associations in Uttlesford and Epsom and Ewell retained the councils they controlled.

Percent of seats up for election won<sup>a</sup>



Election year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
<b>Seats won</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>1,232</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>945</b>
Unitary Councils	106	48	145	28	91	14	259	115	34	208
Metropolitan		54	17	43	5	25	39	28	40	54
London Boroughs		59				34			59	0
District Councils		145	601	115		77	934	78	89	683
County Councils	227				83			82		
% of seats up for election won <sup>a</sup>	14%	7%	8%	7%	8%	4%	15%	6%	5%	12%

## Notes and sources

a. All figures England only. Shows seats won by stated party as a percentage of total seats up for election. Note not all parties field candidates in all seats.

Sources: 1997 - 2017 data from Rallings & Thrasher Local Elections Handbooks; 2018 and 2019 data collated by House of Commons Library; Rallings and Thrasher, "Voters turned their backs on the main two parties", Local Government Chronicle, 7 May 2019, and "Brexit is changing voting patterns", Local Government Chronicle, 14 May 2021; BBC

---

## 3 Post-election council control and councillors

### 3.1 England: Labour becomes the largest party in local government

The table below summarises council composition and control for all local authorities in England immediately following the local elections held on 4 May 2023. This includes those where elections were not held.

The Labour Party holds the greatest share of seats and councils in England (45% of seats and 32% of councils). Of political parties, the Conservatives are second with 33% of the seats and control 22% of councils. However, this is fewer than the number of councils where no party has an overall majority (defined as no overall control (NOC), making up 103 councils or 33%).

The Liberal Democrats have 18% of seats and control 12% of councils in England. 'Other parties' or independents account for 10% of seats and control 1% of councils. The Green Party has 5% of seats and gained control of its first council this year, in Mid Suffolk.

English post-election council composition: May 2023						
Councillors	CON	LAB	LD	GRN	Other	NOC
<b>Number of seats</b>						
London boroughs	399	1,149	180	18	71	-
Counties	920	175	200	44	85	-
Metropolitan boroughs	396	1,535	241	98	121	-
Shire districts	2,346	1,597	1,533	449	893	-
Unitary authorities	1,302	1,237	680	123	389	-
<b>England</b>	<b>5,363</b>	<b>5,693</b>	<b>2,834</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>1,559</b>	-
<b>Percent</b>						
London boroughs	22%	63%	10%	1%	4%	-
Counties	65%	12%	14%	3%	6%	-
Metropolitan boroughs	17%	64%	10%	4%	5%	-
Shire districts	34%	23%	22%	7%	13%	-
Unitary authorities	35%	33%	18%	3%	10%	-
<b>England</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>10%</b>	-
Councils controlled	CON	LAB	LD	GRN	Other	NOC
<b>Number</b>						
London boroughs	5	21	3	0	1	2
Counties	19	0	0	0	0	2
Metropolitan boroughs	3	29	0	0	0	4
Shire districts	31	29	28	1	3	71
Unitary authorities	12	20	6	0	0	24
<b>England</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Percent</b>						
London boroughs	16%	66%	9%	0%	3%	6%
Counties	90%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%
Metropolitan boroughs	8%	81%	0%	0%	0%	11%
Shire districts	19%	18%	17%	1%	2%	44%
Unitary authorities	19%	32%	10%	0%	0%	39%
<b>England</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>33%</b>

Source: Colin Rallings & Michael Thrasher, 'Opposition tactics delivered heavy Tory losses', [Local Government Chronicle](#), 12 May 2023

Note: 'NOC' stands for 'No overall control' this means no single party has enough seats to hold a

The following table looks at council composition and control for all local authorities in England immediately following elections by year (generally held on the first Thursday of May). As above, this includes those where elections were not held.

English council control immediately after local elections										
	Number					Percent				
	CON	LAB	LD	OTH	NOC	CON	LAB	LD	OTH	NOC
2005	155	71	31	7	122	40%	18%	8%	2%	32%
2006	168	54	32	5	127	44%	14%	8%	1%	33%
2007	204	48	29	5	100	53%	12%	8%	1%	26%
2008	213	44	29	5	95	55%	11%	8%	1%	25%
2009	207	33	26	4	81	59%	9%	7%	1%	23%
2010	199	50	25	4	73	57%	14%	7%	1%	21%
2011	199	77	14	1	60	57%	22%	4%	0%	17%
2012	190	100	12	1	48	54%	28%	3%	0%	14%
2013	180	103	12	1	55	51%	29%	3%	0%	16%
2014	164	106	10	1	70	47%	30%	3%	0%	20%
2015	192	100	6	2	51	55%	28%	2%	1%	15%
2016	191	100	7	1	52	54%	28%	2%	0%	15%
2017	200	99	8	2	42	57%	28%	2%	1%	12%
2018	198	98	11	1	43	56%	28%	3%	0%	12%
2019	143	91	23	5	79	42%	27%	7%	1%	23%
2020	(no local elections in this year because of the Covid-19 pandemic)									
2021	139	77	22	5	88	41%	23%	7%	2%	27%
2022	126	78	26	6	95	38%	24%	8%	2%	29%
2023	70	99	37	4	103	22%	32%	12%	1%	33%

Source: Rallings and Thrasher, Local Elections Handbooks 2005-2016 and Local Government Chronicle articles; House of Commons Library

Note: Results for 2022 include the new councils in North Yorkshire and Somerset but do not include the new unitary authorities of Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness

The Conservatives control 56 fewer councils compared with 2022 and Labour gained 21. The Liberal Democrats control 37 councils, up by 11 on 2022. This is their highest return since 2005.

In the recent past, the Conservatives typically controlled approximately twice as many councils as Labour (for example, 56% compared with 28% in 2018). Since 2019 this pattern has changed, with Labour controlling 24% of councils and the Conservatives controlling 38% in 2022, and Labour now overtaking the Conservatives with 32% of councils compared with 22%.

For the first time in recent history, there were more councils where no party had an overall majority ('no overall control') than were controlled by a single party. 103 councils had 'no overall control' following the May elections, making up 33% of all councils. As the table below will show, however, 'no overall control' is a more common outcome in some types of councils (shire districts and unitary authorities) than others (London and metropolitan boroughs, and county councils).

A breakdown of council control in England by party and type of local authority is presented below.

English council control immediately after local elections																	
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
<b>London boroughs</b>																	
<b>CON</b>	14	14	14	14	11	11	11	11	9	9	9	9	7	7	7	5	5
<b>LAB</b>	7	7	7	7	17	17	17	17	20	20	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
<b>LD</b>	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	3
<b>OTH</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>NOC</b>	8	8	8	8	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
<b>Counties</b>																	
<b>CON</b>	23	23	23	26	26	26	26	16	16	16	16	24	24	23	21	20	19
<b>LAB</b>	6	6	5	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>LD</b>	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>OTH</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>NOC</b>	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	9	9	9	10	3	3	3	3	3	2
<b>Metropolitan boroughs</b>																	
<b>CON</b>	5	4	6	6	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	3
<b>LAB</b>	15	13	12	12	16	24	29	29	30	30	29	29	30	30	28	29	29
<b>LD</b>	3	4	4	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>OTH</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>NOC</b>	13	15	14	13	15	9	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	4
<b>Shire districts</b>																	
<b>CON</b>	114	145	151	137	135	136	131	131	119	146	143	143	143	95	86	79	31
<b>LAB</b>	18	13	12	5	7	19	31	32	33	30	30	29	27	25	17	12	29
<b>LD</b>	19	18	18	15	18	11	9	9	9	5	6	7	8	19	18	23	28
<b>OTH</b>	5	5	5	4	4	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	5	5	6	4
<b>NOC</b>	82	57	52	40	37	34	29	28	39	18	21	20	22	48	55	61	71
<b>Unitary authorities</b>																	
<b>CON</b>	12	18	19	24	24	23	20	20	18	19	21	22	23	16	22	22	12
<b>LAB</b>	8	9	8	9	10	17	23	23	21	18	19	20	20	15	11	9	20
<b>LD</b>	4	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	6
<b>OTH</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>NOC</b>	22	18	18	19	18	14	11	11	16	18	15	13	12	23	24	27	24

Source: Rallings and Thrasher, Local Elections Handbooks 2005-2016 and Local Government Chronicle articles

This table shows that since 2006, Labour has performed strongly in London and Metropolitan councils, while the Conservatives dominated in county councils.

The Conservatives had also controlled most shire district councils but its position weakened from 2019 onwards and 'no overall control' is now the most likely outcome in shire district councils (43.6%).



In unitary authorities, the Conservatives' lead weakened from 2011 onwards, with Labour and the Conservatives alternating as the biggest party since then. The Conservatives controlled more unitary councils in 2022, but Labour controls more in 2023. However, since 2019 both parties have controlled fewer unitary councils than have been under no overall control.

Academics Rallings and Thrasher note that Labour regained control of Stoke on Trent and Middlesbrough, councils that were seen as key indicators of electoral recovery in 'red wall' seats. Labour also won Medway and Dover, which had both been Conservative-held for a long time.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the Conservatives won Torbay and Wyre Forest councils and won a lot of seats in Slough.

Significant gains for the Liberal Democrats included Stratford-upon-Avon, Dacorum, and South Hams where the party gained control for the first time. The Greens took control of Mid Suffolk, the first council it has ever controlled.<sup>7</sup>

## 3.2 Councillors by party in Great Britain

The chart below shows the number of councillors by party in Great Britain from 1973 to 2023.

Following the elections in May 2023, Labour has more councillors in Great Britain (6,495) than the Conservatives (5,685) for the first time since 2002. The Liberal Democrats now have 2,983 councillors across Great Britain, the Greens 776, and Plaid Cymru and the SNP combined have 650. There are a further 2,052 councillors who are affiliated with other parties or were elected as Independents. In total, there are 18,641 councillors in Great Britain.<sup>8</sup>

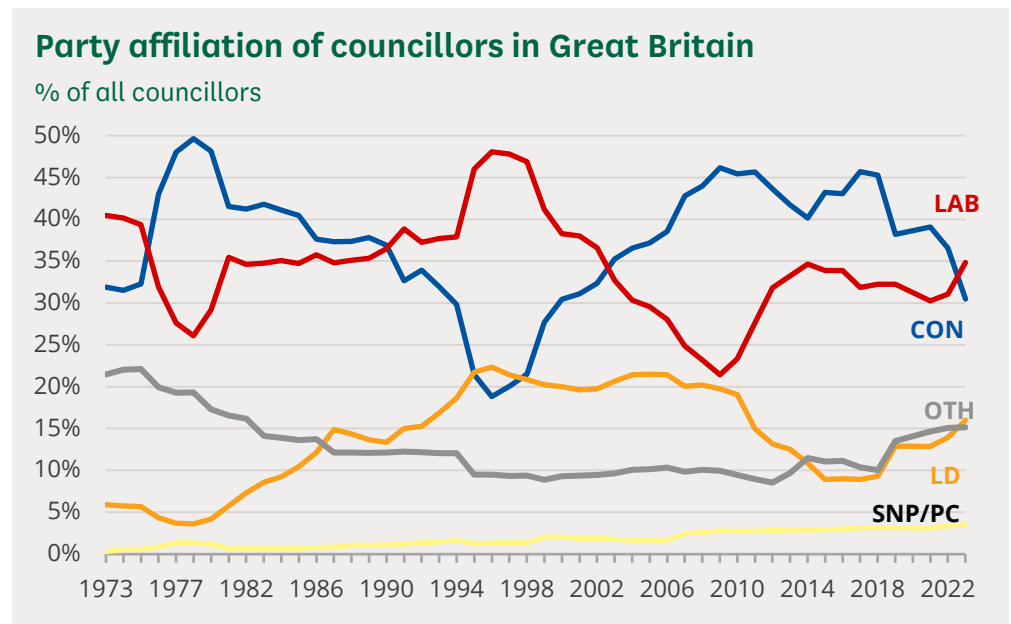
Compared with 2022, the Conservatives lost 1,396 councillors and Labour gained 479. The Liberal Democrats gained 287 councillors compared with 2022, while other parties lost 94.

---

<sup>6</sup> Colin Rallings & Michael Thrasher, 'Opposition tactics delivered heavy Tory losses', [Local Government Chronicle](#), 12 May 2023

<sup>7</sup> Colin Rallings & Michael Thrasher, 'Opposition tactics delivered heavy Tory losses', [Local Government Chronicle](#), 12 May 2023

<sup>8</sup> Colin Rallings & Michael Thrasher, 'Opposition tactics delivered heavy Tory losses', [Local Government Chronicle](#), 12 May 2023



Source: Rallings and Thrasher, Local Elections Handbooks 2005-2016 and Local Government Chronicle articles

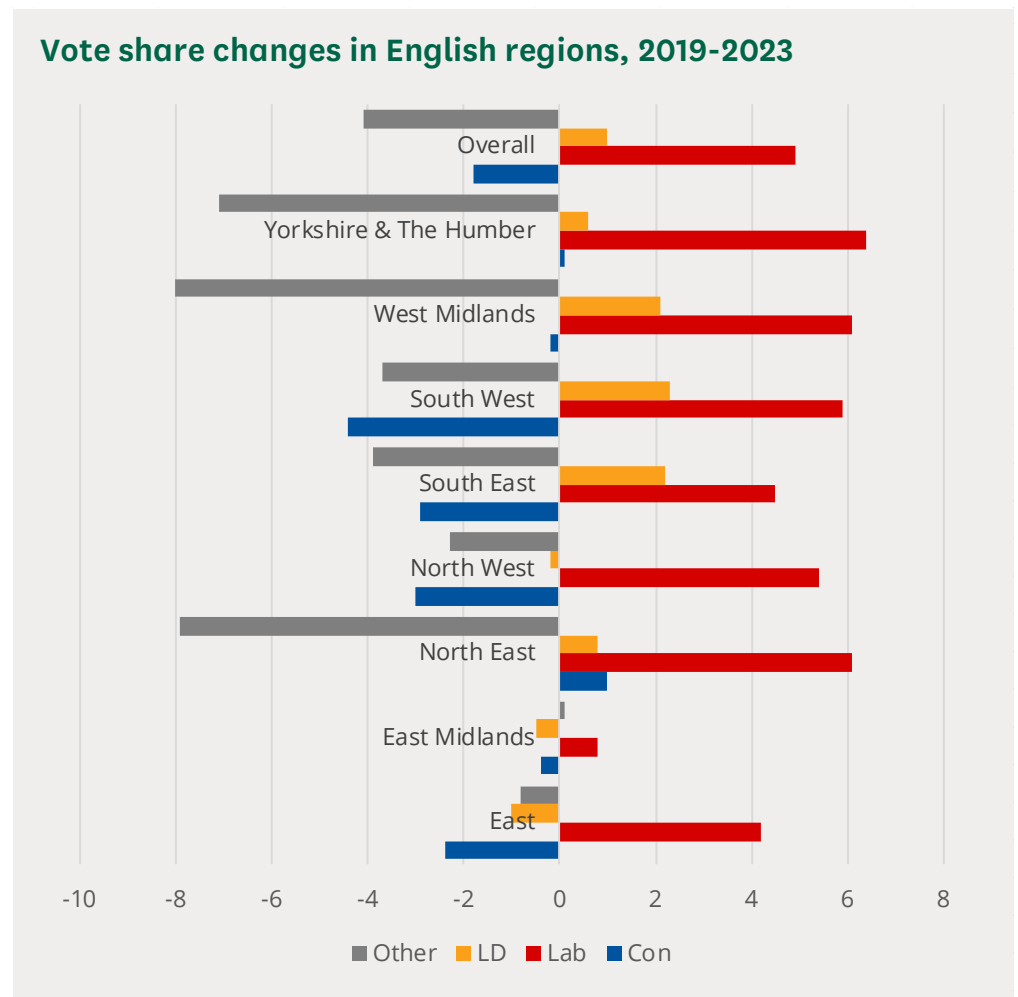
### 3.3 Vote share in English regions

Academics Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher analysed six million votes cast in the May 2023 elections in almost 3,000 wards to identify regional differences in vote share. The chart below shows their analysis of changes in vote share between 2019 and 2023.<sup>9</sup>

Conservative vote share fell most in the South West but increased somewhat in the North East. Labour gained the most vote share in Yorkshire and The Humber and the least in the East Midlands.

The Liberal Democrats did best in the South West but lost some vote share in the East Midlands and the East. Some of Labour's and the Liberal Democrat's gains came from vote share decreases for 'other' parties and independents, who had performed especially well in the 2019 local elections, benefitting from the unpopularity of the bigger parties nationally.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Rallings & Michael Thrasher, 'Opposition tactics delivered heavy Tory losses', [Local Government Chronicle](#), 12 May 2023



Source: Colin Rallings & Michael Thrasher, 'Opposition tactics delivered heavy Tory losses', [Local Government Chronicle](#), 12 May 2023

## 4

## England: Mayoral elections

Four local authorities held mayoral elections for their councils on 4 May 2023. These were the first mayoral elections to be held using first-past-the-post voting system: in previous years, mayoral elections had been held using the supplementary vote (SV) system.

Sitting Labour mayors Sir Peter Soulsby and Andy Abrahams were re-elected with comfortable majorities in Leicester and Mansfield. In Bedford, Conservative candidate Tom Wootton beat the sitting Liberal Democrat candidate Dave Hodgson who had been in office since 2009. In Middlesbrough, Labour candidate Chris Cooke defeated sitting independent mayor Andy Preston, who had been in office since 2019. The Bedford and Middlesbrough contests were won with a relatively small majority: arguably, the result of these contests could have been different under SV, after the redistribution of secondary preferences.<sup>10</sup>

There were two female candidates in Leicester and two in Mansfield but no female candidates in Bedford and in Middlesbrough, where voters chose between two Jo(h)ns.

Council mayoral election results									
			Number	%				Number	%
<b>Bedford</b>			<b>CON gain</b>		<b>Mansfield</b>			<b>LAB hold</b>	
<b>Tom Wootton</b>	<b>CON</b>	<b>15,747</b>	<b>33.1%</b>	<b>Andy Abrahams</b>	<b>LAB</b>	<b>9,987</b>	<b>45.1%</b>		
Dave Hodgson	LD	15,602	32.8%	Andre Camilleri	CON	5,832	26.3%		
Saqhib Ali	LAB	11,568	24.3%	Mick Barton	OTH	4,992	22.5%		
Adrien Spurrell	GRN	3,795	8.0%	Julie Tasker	IND	936	4.2%		
Alberto Thomas	OTH	887	1.9%	Karen Seymour	OTH	420	1.9%		
<b>Electorate</b>		137,042		<b>Electorate</b>		80,809			
<b>Turnout</b>		34.7%		<b>Turnout</b>		27.4%			
<b>Leicester</b>			<b>LAB hold</b>		<b>Middlesbrough</b>			<b>LAB gain</b>	
<b>Sir Peter Soulsby</b>	<b>LAB</b>	<b>35,002</b>	<b>39.3%</b>	<b>Chris Cooke</b>	<b>LAB</b>	<b>10,956</b>	<b>40.2%</b>		
Sanjay Modhwadia	CON	26,422	29.7%	Andy Preston	IND	10,196	37.4%		
Parmjit Singh Gill	LD	9,674	10.9%	Jon Rathmell	IND	3,102	11.4%		
Rita Patel	IND	7,966	8.9%	John Cooper	CON	2,997	11.0%		
Mags Lewis	GRN	7,808	8.8%						
Steve Score	OTH	2,173	2.4%						
<b>Electorate</b>		244,198		<b>Electorate</b>		99,034			
<b>Turnout</b>		36.5%		<b>Turnout</b>		27.5%			

Source: BBC, [England local election results 2023](#), accessed 8 May 2023

<sup>10</sup> Michael Thrasher, Local Government Association, forthcoming

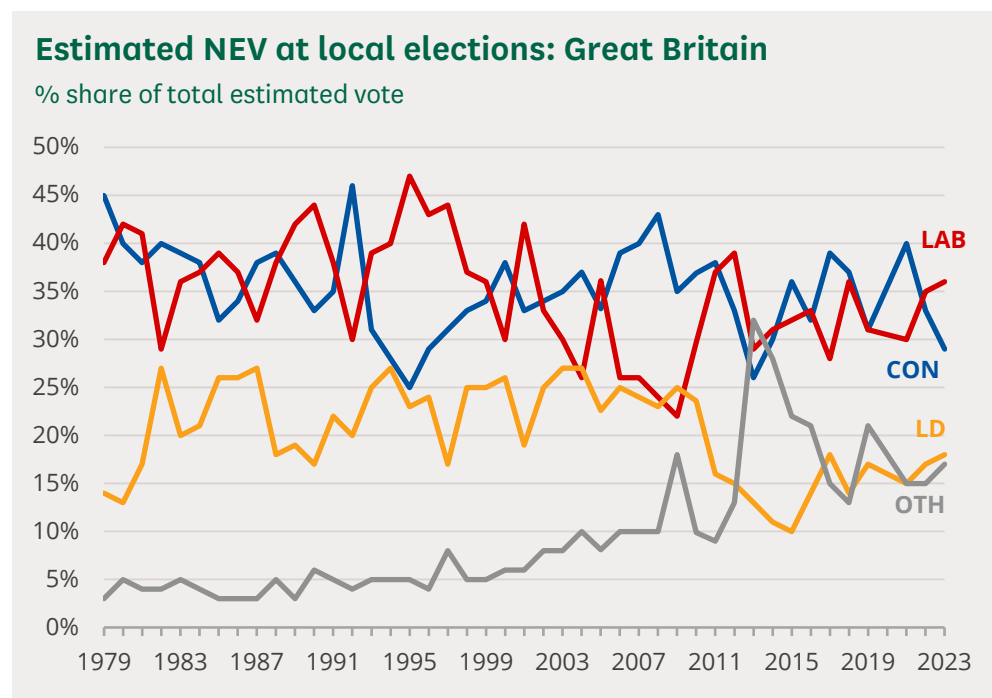
## 5

## National share of the vote (Great Britain)

Because local elections are not held in all local authorities at the same time, it's difficult to get an overview of how much support political parties attract across Great Britain in the years between general elections.

Academics Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher overcome this by using the results of local elections to estimate how the major parties would have fared had the elections of that year taken place throughout Great Britain. Rallings and Thrasher's national equivalent share of the vote (NEV) is a widely used estimate of where the parties stand nationally based on voting in local elections.

The chart below shows how the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats and other parties would have performed if local elections had taken place across Great Britain.



Source: Rallings and Thrasher, *Local Elections Handbook*, various years; Rallings and Thrasher, "[City victories are cold comfort for Labour](#)", *The Sunday Times*, 9 May 2021; Rallings and Thrasher "[Hung Parliament Looms in a general election as major parties flounder](#)" 8 May 2022; Rallings and Thrasher, "[Hung parliament looms but all's not lost for Rishi](#)", *The Sunday Times*, 7 May 2023

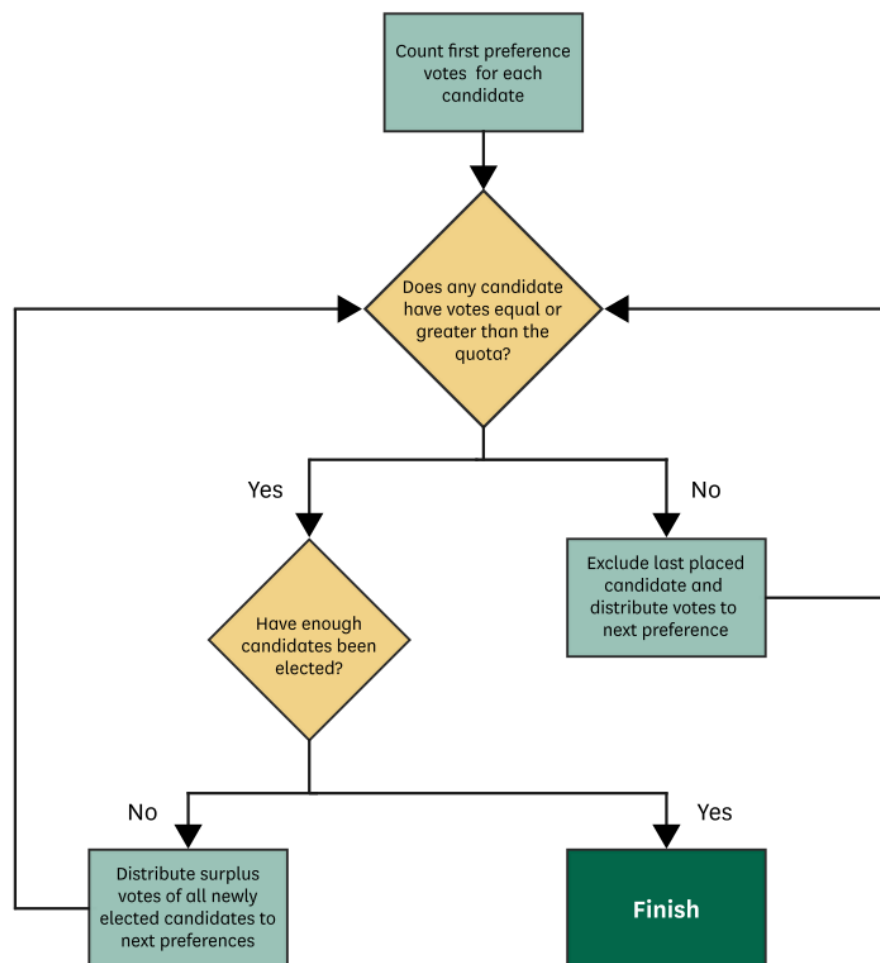
In 2023, the Conservatives had an estimated 29% of the national vote share. This was a drop of four percentage points from 2022 and continued a decline from the decade high of 40% in 2021.

Labour's national share increased to 36%, up one percentage point on 2022 when Labour overtook the Conservatives for the first time since 2016. The Liberal Democrats also increased their vote share by one percentage point to 18%.

The 'others' category stayed at 15%; 'others' achieved a similar proportion in 2017 (15%) and 2018 (13%), and their standing had been higher before then, peaking at 32% in 2013. This peak was largely due the rise in popularity of UKIP.

## 6 Local elections in Northern Ireland

Elections for all council seats take place once every four years in Northern Ireland. Councillors are elected to multi-member wards using the Single Transferable Vote system. Voting under this system is illustrated in the diagram below. The quota refers to the ‘Droop quota’, which is calculated as the number of valid votes divided by the total number of seats plus one, plus one.



Source: adapted from [Single Transferable Vote](#), New Zealand Government; Institute for Government, [Electoral Systems across the UK](#), 27 February 2020

Voters in Northern Ireland have been required to produce photographic ID to vote since 2003.

By tradition, the main Great Britain parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat) do not stand candidates in Northern Ireland elections.

## 6.1

# The 2023 local elections

The 2023 local elections in Northern Ireland took place in the context of the stalemate in the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) over the Northern Ireland Protocol, covering post-Brexit trading arrangements. Following the [NIA elections in May 2022](#), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) refused to form a government with the biggest party, Sinn Féin (SF). No Executive has been formed since then and new elections are expected to be held before January 2024.

Since the 2022 NIA elections, the UK Government has agreed changes to the Northern Ireland Protocol with the EU under [the Windsor Framework](#).

## Results

SF became the biggest party in local government in Northern Ireland. [Overall turnout](#) was 54.7%. The table below shows the results of the 2023 elections compared with the results of the 2019 elections.

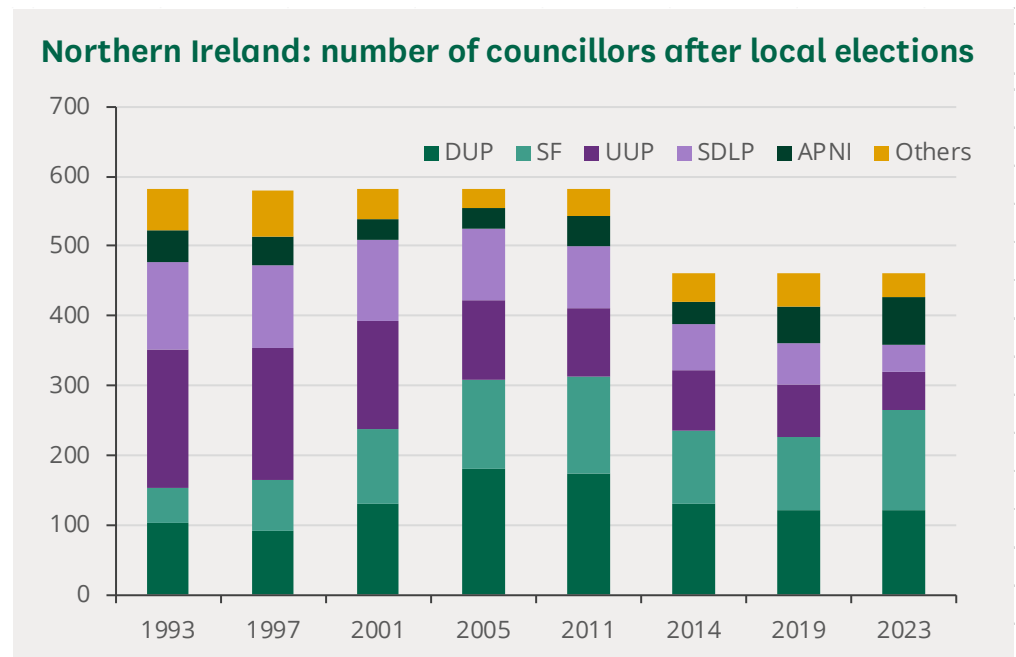
Local elections 2023: results				
First preference vote share and number of councillors by party				
Party	Vote share	Change since 2019	Councillors	Change since 2019
Sinn Féin	30.9%	7.7%	144	39
Democratic Unionist Party	23.3%	-0.8%	122	0
Alliance Party	13.3%	1.8%	67	14
Ulster Unionist Party	10.9%	-3.2%	54	-21
Social Democratic & Labour Party	8.7%	-3.3%	39	-20
Others	12.8%	6.0%	36	-12

Source: BBC, [Northern Ireland local election results 2023](#)

The Ulster Unionist Party lost the most seats while the Social Democratic and Labour Party lost the most vote share.

The chart below shows the number of councillors each party had following local elections since 1993. Note that the total number of councillors decreased following a local government reorganisation taking effect in 2014.





Source: BBC, [Northern Ireland local election results 2023](#); [ARK Elections](#) [accessed 17 May 2023]; [CAIN, Northern Ireland election results](#) [accessed 17 May 2023]

The Ulster Unionist Party had the most councillors between 1993 and 2005. The DUP had the most councillors between 2005 and 2023. Following the 2023 local elections, SF had the most councillors (31.2% of all councillors, compared with 26.4% for the DUP and 14.5% for the Alliance Party).

SF won control of one council, Fermanagh and Omagh, following the elections. In Northern Ireland, local councils typically have No Overall Control (NOC), with no one party holding a majority of seats. This was the case for all councils in 2014 and 2019. The last time any councils were controlled by a single party was in 2005, when the DUP controlled Ballymena and Castlereagh councils.

## 7

# About the data

There is no official body collecting and publishing local election results.

Academics Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher have compiled [Local Elections Handbooks](#) each year since 1985 (together with the House of Commons Library since 2021). Historical data quoted in this briefing is mostly derived from these handbooks. More recent data on council control and councillor numbers comes from Rallings and Thrasher's May articles in *The Sunday Times* and the *Local Government Chronicle*.

Data on the 2023 local election results comes from the BBC, cross-checked with local authorities where necessary.

Findings presented in this paper may in some cases differ from analysis available elsewhere because of different definitions or reference points used.

## 7.1

# How are local election results analysed?

Local election results are commonly analysed in two ways:

- The total number of councils controlled and councillors a party has at a given time, usually immediately following elections
- The number of councils or seats won and lost at any given round of elections. This measures net change, comparing the number of councils or seats won and lost at an election to the situation immediately before that election

The net change figures will not necessarily match the annual totals because parties' total number of councillors and councils controlled are subject to change over the course of the year (for example because of by-elections or councillors changing party affiliation).

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk).

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe) or scan the code below:



 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)