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The local elections of 6 May 1999

This paper provides a brief summary of the local elections which took place in most parts of Great Britain on 6 May 1999. 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.

Results of elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly are covered in research papers 99/50 and 99/51 respectively.

Richard Cracknell & Bryn Morgan

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I Introduction

On 6 May 1999 elections took place in all of Great Britain except for Greater London and a few unitary and shire authorities. Around 36 million people were eligible to vote. Elections took place for:

- one third of the council in each of the 36 metropolitan districts
- all of the council in 169 shire districts in England
- one third of the council in 68 shire districts in England
- all of the council in 18 unitary authorities in England
- one third of the council in 17 unitary authorities in England
- all of the council in the 22 unitary authorities in Wales
- all of the council in the 36 unitary authorities in Scotland.

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 where possible. The final compilation of the results, including details of votes cast, takes some time. These will be published later this year.¹ In the meantime, any requests for further information should be directed to the Social and General Statistics Section (extension 3851).

In some areas there were major boundary changes and changes in the number of seats. Furthermore, certain of these would normally have had elections by thirds, but, because of the changes to boundaries, this year elected the whole council. They will return to electing by thirds in future years. In the case of authorities with significant boundary revisions, gains and losses simply show changes in representation on an authority before and after the elections. Because of changes in the number of seats, this means that the gains and losses do not necessarily sum to zero.

Estimates based on these elections have been made of the projected national (Great Britain) share of the vote for major parties. This is not the share of the vote in these elections but a projection of what the national vote would have been if voting had taken place everywhere. Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher of the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth have estimated the national equivalent shares at Labour 36%, Conservative 34% and Liberal Democrat 24%.² They put estimated turnout at 30%.

¹ In Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher **Local Elections Handbook 1999** (Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth)

² Sunday Times 9/5/99

Table 1 shows the number of councillors elected on 6 May in these elections. These will additionally include some elected as a result of casual vacancies. Of the total elected, 36% were Labour, 28% Conservative and 20% Liberal Democrat.

Table 1

Councillors elected in 1999 local elections

	Number of authorities	Councillors elected						Total
		Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	PC/SNP	Other	Vacant	
Metropolitan boroughs	36	116	533	171		14		834
Shire districts								
<i>North</i>	44	463	711	320		259		1,753
<i>Midlands</i>	78	979	1,043	434		339	4	2,799
<i>South</i>	115	1,702	775	1,140		465	9	4,091
Total	237	3,144	2,529	1,894		1,063	13	8,643
Unitary authorities	35	310	626	291		50		1,277
England	308	3,570	3,688	2,356		1,127	13	10,754
Welsh unitary authorities	22	74	565	95	203	332	1	1,270
Scottish unitary authorities	32	107	549	156	206	201		1,219
Great Britain	362	3,751	4,802	2,607	409	1,660	14	13,243

North: Northern region, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside

Midlands: West Midlands, East Midlands, East Anglia

South: Greater London, South East, South West

Table 2 gives details of each party's net gains or losses of seats on 6 May compared to the position immediately before the elections. The Conservatives gained around 1,300 councillors, while Labour lost around 1,200 and the Liberal Democrats some 75. The Liberal Democrat overall loss is the net effect of gains in metropolitan boroughs and northern shire districts being more than offset by losses in the South.

Some changes in the number of seats may be due to the boundary changes rather than changes in voting patterns. Rallings and Thrasher have made estimates of gains and losses taking these boundary changes into account. These show higher Conservative gains and Labour and Liberal Democrat losses than are given in Table 2.³

³ Local Government Chronicle 14/5/99

Table 2

Net gains or losses by party

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	PC/ SNP	Other
Metropolitan boroughs	+64	-117	+65		-11
Shire districts					
<i>North</i>	+132	-186	+58		+10
<i>Midlands</i>	+395	-334	-2		-57
<i>South</i>	+604	-222	-252		-136
Total	+1,131	-742	-196		-183
Unitary authorities ^(a)	+98	-108	+12	-1	+3
England	+1,293	-967	-119	-1	-191
Welsh unitary authorities	+29	-143	+20	+80	+11
Scottish unitary authorities	+22	-51	+24	+16	-35
Great Britain	+1,344	-1,161	-75	+95	-215

(a) A Scottish National Party councillor lost his seat in Brighton and Hove

The following two pages list the councils that changed control following the 1999 local elections. Compared with the position before the election, the Conservatives gained control of 48 authorities.

Changes in control as a result of the 1999 elections:**Now Conservative - formerly:**

Labour	Lib Dem	Independent	No overall control	SNP/PC
Bromsgrove	East Dorset	South Holland	Blaby	N Somerset
Carlisle	E Hampshire		Breckland	Purbeck
E Northamptonshire	Horsham		Broadland	Rother
Gedling	New Forest		Chichester	Rushcliffe
Hertsmere	Waverley		Chiltern	Sedgemoor
Lichfield	Worthing		Christchurch	Sevenoaks
N Hertfordshire			Craven	Shepway
Welwyn Hatfield			Dacorum	South Bucks
Wyre			Daventry	South Hams
			Derbyshire Dales	S Northamptonshire
			E Hertfordshire	St Edmundsbury
			Fenland	Suffolk Coastal
			Forest Heath	Test Valley
			Maldon	W Somerset
			Mid Bedfordshire	Wychavon
			Mid Sussex	Wycombe

Now Labour - formerly:

Labour	Lib Dem	Independent	No overall control	SNP/PC
			Wellingborough	
			Walsall	
			Renfrewshire	

Now Liberal Democrat - formerly:

Labour	Lib Dem	Independent	No overall control	SNP/PC
Sheffield		E Cambs	Berwick-u-Tweed	
			Carrick	Stockport
			Three Rivers	S Gloucestershire

Now Independent - formerly:

Labour	Lib Dem	Independent	No overall control	SNP/PC
			Oswestry	
			Torridge	

Now No overall Control - formerly:

Labour	Lib Dem	Independent	No overall control	SNP/PC
Barrow-in-Furness	Adur	Cotswold		Moray
Charnwood	Aylesbury Vale	Richmondshire		Perth & Kinross
Dover	Chelmsford	Ceredigion		
Hyndburn	Cheltenham			
Kettering	Eastbourne			
King's Lynn & W Norfolk	North Dorset			
Lancaster	North Wiltshire			
Newark & Sherwood	Pendle			
Preston	Poole			
Selby	Restormel			
Stafford	St Albans			
Tendring	Taunton Deane			
Wyre Forest				
Kirklees				
Merthyr Tydfil				
Monmouthshire				
Vale of Glamorgan				
Wrexham				
Clackmannanshire				
Dundee City				
East Dunbartonshire				
Falkirk				
Stirling				

Now PC/SNP - formerly:

Labour	Lib Dem	Independent	No overall control	SNP/PC
Caerphilly				
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff				

Table 3 shows the number of councils controlled by each party following the elections of 6 May, including those areas where no elections took place. Despite the net loss of 32 authorities, Labour still controls more authorities than any other party, with 38%. Because of their gains at these elections, the Conservatives now control the second highest number of councils, overtaking the Liberal Democrats.

Table 3

Control of local authorities by party and class

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	PC/ SNP	No overall control	Other	Total
London boroughs	4	17	2		9		32
Metropolitan boroughs		29	3		4		36
Shire districts							
<i>North</i>	5	17	3		17	2	44
<i>Midlands</i>	19	28	3		24	5	79
<i>South</i>	35	15	10		52	3	115
Total	59	60	16		93	10	238
Unitary authorities	3	29	5		9		46
Shire counties	9	8	2		15		34
Other authorities						2	2
England	75	143	28		130	10	386
Welsh unitary authorities		8		3	8	3	22
Scottish unitary authorities		15		1	11	5	32
Great Britain	75	166	28	4	149	18	440

Finally, **Table 4** presents estimates of the number of councillors from each party following the elections. Around 9,120 councillors are Labour, 41% of the total. This compares with around 6,140 for the Conservatives and 4,500 for the Liberal Democrats.

Table 4

Estimated number of councillors: Great Britain: 7 May 1999

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	PC/ SNP	Other	Total
London boroughs	540	1,050	300		30	1,920
Metropolitan boroughs	300	1,660	470		50	2,480
Shire districts						
<i>North</i>	530	850	380		270	2,040
<i>Midlands</i>	1,120	1,380	530		390	3,430
<i>South</i>	2,050	1,100	1,510		580	5,250
Total	3,700	3,320	2,430		1,240	10,720
Unitary authorities	540	1,230	550		110	2,440
Shire counties	890	740	500		80	2,200
Other authorities						
England	5,960	8,010	4,250		1,520	19,760
Welsh unitary authorities	70	570	100	200	330	1,270
Scottish unitary authorities	110	550	160	210	200	1,220
Great Britain	6,140	9,120	4,500	410	2,050	22,240

* rounded to the nearest ten. Total includes vacant seats