



Councillors and Council Control: 1979-2009

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Social and General Statistics

The following note looks at the number of councillors by party in Great Britain since 1979.

In 2009 there were around 4,700 fewer councillors in Great Britain than in 1979. This is as a result of numerous changes to the structure of local authorities, particularly the introduction of unitary authorities in Wales and Scotland in 1995, when the number of councillors fell by 1,605.

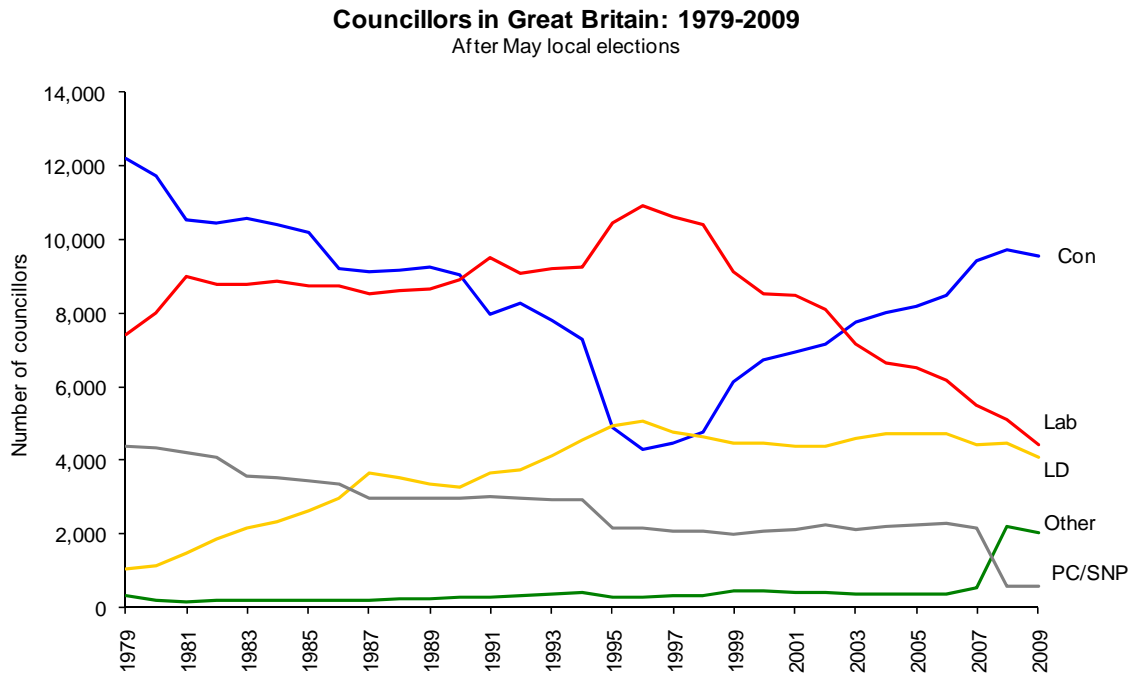
In 2009 the Conservatives had 9,533 councillors, an increase of 5,270 councillors compared with 1996 when they had 4,276 councillors. The Conservatives have also seen a gradual increase in the number of councils it controlled in England since 1998 when they had 24 compared to 207 in 2009. Labour had 4,436 councillors in 2009, less than half the number of councillors compared with 1996 (11,000). Labour on the other hand in England had seen a steady decrease since 1998 when they controlled 140 councils to the current level of 33 councils in 2009. The Liberal democrats had 4,083 councillors in 2009, a decrease of a thousand councillors compared with 1996 when they had 5,078 councillors and controls 26 councils.

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A. Councillors in Great Britain 1979-2009

Table 1 and the chart below show the total number of councillors by party for the selected (years).



The proportion of Conservative councillors in Great Britain fell during the 1980s and early 1990s, from 48% in 1979 to a record low of 19% in 1996, since when the percentage has increased, to 46% in 2009. The number of Labour councillors rose during the 1980s, peaking in 1996 when 48% of councillors were Labour, but since then the number of Labour councillors has fallen consistently year-on-year, (21% of councillors were Labour in 2009). Since 1990 the gap between Conservative and Labour has grown. In 2003, the Conservatives overtook Labour and have since had the most councillors. The proportion of Labour councillors fell to its lowest level in 2009.

Councillors in Great Britain at May

Table 1: Councillors in Great Britain at May^(a)

	1979	1982	1986	1990	1994	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Great Britain																			
Conservative	12,222	10,447	9,216	9,020	7,286	4,276	4,449	4,772	6,144	6,750	6,940	7,177	7,776	8,033	8,193	8,495	9,431	9,721	9,553
Labour	7,410	8,774	8,759	8,920	9,257	10,929	10,608	10,411	9,134	8,540	8,490	8,117	7,175	6,652	6,518	6,176	5,483	5,122	4,436
LD	1,059	1,850	2,971	3,265	4,551	5,078	4,754	4,629	4,485	4,470	4,380	4,379	4,581	4,708	4,743	4,723	4,420	4,467	4,083
PC/SNP	301	177	191	264	392	298	301	304	444	440	420	412	383	361	357	364	537	2,220	2,048
Other	4,388	4,099	3,364	2,968	2,941	2,157	2,076	2,083	1,973	2,080	2,130	2,245	2,101	2,201	2,233	2,273	2,173	574	582
Total	25,380	25,347	24,501	24,437	24,427	22,738	22,188	22,199	22,180	22,280	22,360	22,330	22,016	21,955	22,044	22,031	22,044	22,104	20,702
Percentages																			
Conservative	48%	40%	37%	36%	30%	19%	20%	21%	28%	30%	31%	32%	35%	37%	37%	39%	43%	44%	46%
Labour	29%	34%	35%	37%	38%	48%	47%	47%	41%	38%	38%	36%	33%	30%	30%	28%	25%	23%	21%
LD	4%	8%	13%	12%	19%	22%	22%	21%	20%	20%	20%	20%	21%	21%	22%	21%	20%	20%	20%
PC/SNP	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	10%	10%
Other	18%	17%	15%	13%	12%	10%	10%	10%	9%	9%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	3%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(a) Following May elections (June in 2001). 'Other' includes vacant seats. All figures are approximate. City of London and Scilly Isles (both non-political) are excluded.

Sources: HoC Library electronic holdings, Rallings & Thrasher's Local elections handbooks (University of Plymouth)

Note: the figures for 1995, 1996 and 1997 include both shadow authorities and existing councils (for example, the 1995 totals include councillors of Welsh counties, districts and unitary authorities) when they retain separate identities. In cases of continuing authorities (eg Bristol, Hull, Leicester, Blackburn etc) only the new authority, which takes over from the former council, is included.

Councillors in Great Britain at May by class of Authority

Table 2: Councillors in Great Britain at May by class of authority

	1979	1982	1986	1990	1994	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
London boroughs																			
Conservative	960	980	690	730	520	520	520	530	540	540	540	650	650	650	650	790	780	784	783
Labour	880	780	960	930	1,050	1,050	1,030	1,050	1,050	1,050	1,050	880	870	860	850	680	680	683	681
LD	30	120	250	220	320	320	320	300	300	300	300	300	310	320	320	320	320	322	323
Other	40	30	20	30	30	30	50	30	30	30	30	30	40	40	40	70	70	72	74
Met districts																			
Conservative	970	750	550	500	520	190	200	230	300	410	410	430	470	550	550	550	550	621	623
Labour	1,330	1,460	1,650	1,730	1,580	1,880	1,880	1,820	1,680	1,500	1,500	1,480	1,380	1,180	1,180	1,110	1,180	1,093	1,091
LD	110	220	240	230	330	360	360	380	450	500	500	490	530	590	590	550	580	585	587
Other	90	50	50	30	50	50	50	50	60	60	60	60	70	120	120	140	140	146	144
Shire counties																			
Conservative	2,350	1,480	1,320	1,420	930	850	960	880	880	890	1,020	1,020	1,020	1,020	1,150	1,140	1,150	1,164	1,260
Labour	440	1,080	960	1,030	1,120	980	900	740	720	720	710	710	700	700	580	570	570	567	146
LD	60	330	620	440	840	770	570	490	510	510	410	410	410	410	470	480	470	505	346
Other	280	200	110	120	100	100	90	80	80	80	120	80	80	80	80	80	80	96	102
Shire districts																			
Conservative	6,700	6,270	6,010	5,890	4,960	2,420	2,320	2,550	3,700	4,000	4,050	4,150	4,730	4,830	4,840	4,960	5,680	5,786	5,165
Labour	3,190	3,320	3,460	3,620	3,880	4,850	4,300	4,140	3,320	3,100	3,060	2,920	2,270	2,120	2,120	2,000	1,520	1,429	1,062
LD	720	1,150	1,740	1,890	2,830	3,140	2,960	2,700	2,440	2,390	2,390	2,350	2,400	2,400	2,380	2,390	2,230	2,219	1,821
Other	2,850	2,720	2,240	2,060	1,780	1,440	1,420	1,370	1,270	1,270	1,260	1,240	1,210	1,220	1,250	1,220	1,140	1,139	866
Unitary authorities																			
Conservative	-	-	-	-	-	190	420	440	540	720	730	740	710	760	780	800	1,010	1,049	1,405
Labour	-	-	-	-	-	870	1,380	1,340	1,230	1,060	1,080	1,030	890	810	810	770	700	656	763
LD	-	-	-	-	-	320	550	540	550	530	520	570	650	670	660	650	510	504	682
Other	-	-	-	-	-	50	80	100	110	120	120	130	150	170	160	170	190	198	292

Sources: HoC Library electronic holdings, Rallings & Thrasher's Local elections handbooks (University of Plymouth)

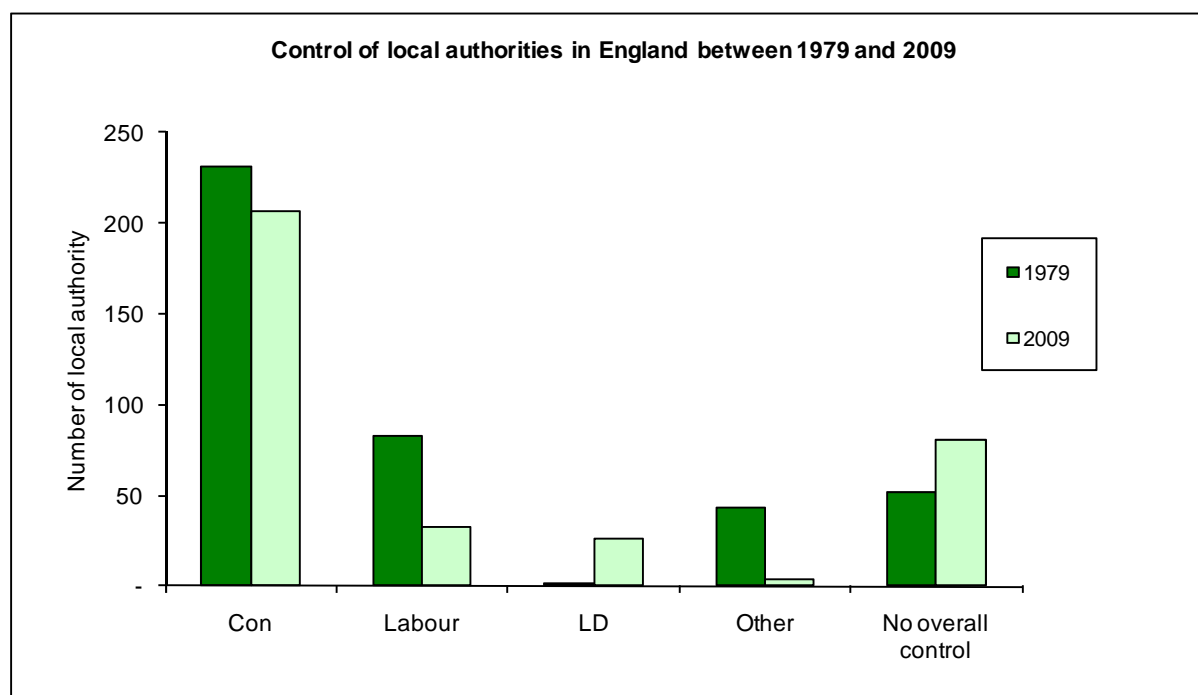
Table 3: Councillors in Great Britain at May by class of authority

	1979	1982	1986	1990	1994	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total England																			
Conservative	11,400	9,650	8,550	8,540	6,930	4,170	4,420	4,630	5,960	6,570	6,760	6,990	7,580	7,800	7,960	8,250	9,180	9,404	9,236
Labour	6,070	7,110	7,030	7,290	7,620	9,630	9,490	9,090	8,010	7,430	7,390	7,020	6,110	5,670	5,540	5,130	4,660	4,428	3,743
LD	950	1,880	2,840	2,790	4,330	4,910	4,750	4,420	4,250	4,230	4,130	4,120	4,300	4,390	4,420	4,390	4,110	4,135	3,759
Other	3,280	3,000	2,420	2,240	1,960	1,670	1,690	1,630	1,530	1,560	1,590	1,710	1,540	1,620	1,650	1,680	1,620	1,651	1,478
Total	21,700	21,640	20,840	20,860	20,840	20,380	20,350	19,770	19,750	19,790	19,870	19,840	19,530	19,480	19,570	19,450	19,570	19,618	18,216
Total Scotland																			
Conservative	420	310	250	210	230	80	80	80	110	110	110	110	120	120	130	130	140	143	143
Labour	480	680	760	780	690	620	620	610	550	550	540	540	510	510	500	500	350	348	348
LD	40	70	130	130	150	130	130	130	150	150	160	160	180	180	180	180	170	166	166
SNP	180	80	100	160	220	180	180	180	200	200	210	210	180	180	180	190	360	363	363
Other	520	500	440	400	400	240	230	240	220	220	210	200	240	230	230	230	200	202	202
Total	1,640	1,640	1,680	1,680	1,690	1,250	1,240	1,240	1,230	1,230	1,230	1,220	1,230	1,220	1,220	1,230	1,220	1,222	1,222
Total Wales																			
Conservative	330	260	230	190	140	40	40	40	70	70	80	80	80	110	110	110	110	174	174
Labour	800	890	920	910	920	730	730	730	560	560	560	560	560	480	480	480	480	346	345
LD	50	80	120	110	120	80	80	80	100	100	100	100	110	150	150	150	150	166	158
PC	100	80	100	110	160	110	110	120	240	240	210	200	200	180	170	170	170	206	207
Other	830	770	700	660	640	310	310	310	300	300	330	330	320	350	350	350	350	372	380
Total	2,110	2,080	2,070	1,980	1,980	1,270	1,270	1,280	1,270	1,270	1,280	1,270	1,270	1,270	1,260	1,260	1,260	1,264	1,264
Great Britain																			
Conservative	12,140	10,220	9,030	8,940	7,310	4,300	4,550	4,760	6,140	6,750	6,940	7,180	7,780	8,030	8,190	8,480	9,430	9,721	9,553
Labour	7,350	8,680	8,710	8,980	9,230	10,980	10,840	10,430	9,120	8,540	8,490	8,120	7,180	6,650	6,520	6,110	5,480	5,122	4,436
LD	1,030	2,030	3,090	3,030	4,600	5,110	4,960	4,630	4,500	4,470	4,380	4,380	4,580	4,710	4,740	4,710	4,420	4,467	4,083
PC/SNP	280	160	200	260	380	300	300	300	440	440	420	410	380	360	360	360	540	2,220	2,048
Other	4,620	4,280	3,570	3,300	3,000	2,220	2,230	2,180	2,050	2,080	2,130	2,250	2,100	2,200	2,230	2,260	2,170	574	582
Total	25,430	25,360	24,590	24,520	24,510	22,910	22,880	22,290	22,250	22,280	22,360	22,330	22,020	21,960	22,040	21,930	22,040	22,104	20,702
Percentages																			
Conservative	47.7%	40.3%	36.7%	36.5%	29.8%	18.8%	19.9%	21.4%	27.6%	30.3%	31.0%	32.2%	35.3%	36.6%	37.2%	38.7%	42.8%	44%	46%
Labour	28.9%	34.2%	35.4%	36.6%	37.7%	47.9%	47.4%	46.8%	41.0%	38.3%	38.0%	36.4%	32.6%	30.3%	29.6%	27.9%	24.9%	23%	21%
LD	4.1%	8.0%	12.6%	12.4%	18.8%	22.3%	21.7%	20.8%	20.2%	20.1%	19.6%	19.6%	20.8%	21.4%	21.5%	21.5%	20.1%	20%	20%
PC/SNP	1.1%	0.6%	0.8%	1.1%	1.6%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	2.0%	2.0%	1.9%	1.8%	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	2.5%	10%	10%
Other	18.2%	16.9%	14.5%	13.5%	12.2%	9.7%	9.7%	9.8%	9.2%	9.3%	9.5%	10.1%	9.5%	10.0%	10.1%	10.3%	9.8%	3%	3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100%

Sources: HoC Library electronic holdings, Rallings & Thrasher's Local elections handbooks (University of Plymouth)

B. Local authority control

The chart and table below compare the control of local authorities in England between 1979 and 2009. Figures for selected years are given in Table 4. Labour lost control of a large number of local authorities during the mid-1990s. In 2009 Labour controlled 46 authorities, compared with 83 in 1979, 140 in 1998, and 126 in 2001. Labour lost seats all over the country although the biggest losses occurred in the shire districts and London boroughs. The Conservatives lost control of authorities from 231 in 1979 compared with 207 in 2009. In 1998, they controlled 24 councils, but since then the number they have controlled has risen. Over time, the Liberal Democrats have increased the number of councils they control, rising to 26 local authorities by 2009. Interestingly the number of authorities that are under No Overall Control remains much higher in 2009 (81) compared with 1979 (52). From 1979 while the number controlled by other parties fell, there was a rise in control for the Liberal Democrats. The most likely explanation to the increased is the influence of the Liberal Democrats as a third party.



Control of local authorities in Great Britain

Table 4: Control of local authorities in Great Britain

	1979	1994	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Shire counties														
Conservative	36	1	9	8	9	16	17	17	17	23	23	23	23	26
Labour	1	9	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	5	0
Liberal Democrat	-	4	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	3	3	3	3	0
Other	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
No overall control	1	25	15	16	15	11	10	10	10	2	2	2	3	1
Shire districts														
Conservative	162	72	12	59	71	75	76	103	111	109	114	145	151	137
Labour	48	77	83	60	52	52	47	27	22	22	18	13	12	5
Liberal Democrat	1	31	30	16	17	17	19	21	19	17	19	18	18	15
Other	42	23	12	10	10	10	12	8	7	7	5	5	5	4
No overall control	43	93	101	93	88	84	84	79	79	83	82	57	52	40
London boroughs														
Conservative	17	4	3	4	4	4	8	8	8	8	14	14	14	14
Labour	14	17	18	17	18	19	15	15	15	15	7	7	7	7
Liberal Democrat	-	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
No overall control	1	8	9	9	7	6	6	6	6	6	8	8	8	8
Metropolitan districts														
Conservative	11	1	-	-	2	2	1	1	4	4	5	4	6	6
Labour	18	24	31	29	25	26	25	21	16	16	15	13	12	12
Liberal Democrat	-	-	1	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
No overall control	7	11	4	4	6	5	8	12	13	13	13	15	14	13
Unitary authorities														
Conservative	-	-	-	-	5	5	7	8	10	11	12	18	19	24
Labour	-	-	-	-	23	22	20	13	13	12	8	9	8	9
Liberal Democrat	-	-	-	-	2	2	3	5	5	5	4	1	1	3
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
No overall control	-	-	-	-	16	17	16	20	18	18	22	18	18	19
England														
Conservative	231	78	24	74	91	102	109	137	150	155	168	204	213	207
Labour	83	127	169	144	126	126	114	83	73	71	54	48	44	33
Liberal Democrat	1	38	42	28	27	25	27	31	30	31	32	29	29	26
Other	43	23	13	10	10	10	12	8	7	7	5	5	5	4
No overall control	52	137	138	130	132	123	124	127	126	122	127	100	95	81
Total	410	403	386	386	386	386	386	386	386	386	386	386	386	351
Wales														
Conservative	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	2	2
Labour	17	21	14	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	2	2
Liberal Democrat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Other/Nat	17	14	5	6	6	6	6	7	4	4	4	4	5	5
No overall control	7	9	3	8	8	8	8	7	9	9	9	9	13	13
Total	44	44	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Scotland														
Conservative	10	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Labour	9	23	20	15	14	14	13	13	13	13	13	2	2	2
Liberal Democrat	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	0	0
Other/Nat	29	18	9	6	7	7	8	7	7	7	7	3	3	3
No overall control	16	18	3	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	27	27	27
Total	65	65	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
GB														
Conservative	244	82	24	74	91	102	109	137	151	156	169	205	215	209
Labour	109	171	203	167	148	148	135	104	94	92	75	58	48	37
Liberal Democrat	2	40	42	28	27	25	27	32	31	32	33	29	29	26
Other/Nat	89	55	27	22	23	23	26	22	18	18	16	12	13	12
No overall control	75	164	144	149	151	142	143	145	146	142	147	136	135	121
Total	519	512	440	440	440	440	440	440	440	440	440	440	440	405

Sources: HoC Library electronic holdings, Rallings & Thrasher's Local elections handbooks (University of Plymouth)