

Local elections end in deadlock

By [Niamh Carroll](#)

Friday 11 May 2018



The local elections last week seem to signal an era of political deadlock between Labour and the Conservatives. While Labour gained 77 seats, this was not a decisive indication that electoral support has turned in their favour and they failed to take several target councils from the Conservatives. Despite losing seats, Theresa May's Conservative party managed to hold off the sort of expression of mass discontent at the local ballot box that the ruling party often fears.

A Labour takeover in London had been talked of before the local elections, but it failed to materialise. While Jeremy Corbyn's party managed to gain Tower Hamlets and councils outside of London such as Sheffield, it failed to snatch the capital's "Tory Crown Jewels" such as Wandsworth. There are signs that the row over anti-Semitism in the party has taken an electoral toll as the Conservatives took target seat Barnet, where there is a large Jewish community. If Labour had hoped to make gains upon their performance in the 2017 General Election, then they failed to achieve this. Jeremy Corbyn deemed the

result “solid”; muted language from a Labour leader who declared his party had “changed the face of British politics” following the result in the 2017 General Election.

Meanwhile, it seems that UKIP’s demise was to the Conservatives’ advantage, as they gained control over Basildon and Peterborough following the collapse of UKIP’s vote. Local elections are normally a time when voters feel freer to express discontent at the ballot box by casting their vote for smaller parties; UKIP have in the past (especially prior to the referendum) done very well in local elections. Despite their loss of 123 seats, general secretary Paul Oakley, declared all was not lost for the Eurosceptic party, saying: “think of the Black Death in the Middle Ages,” Mr Oakley said. “It comes along and it causes disruption and then it goes dormant, and that’s exactly what we are going to do.” However, last week’s results do not bode well at all for UKIP, once seen as the new third party in British politics, as they seem to have lost momentum even at a protest level in a UK set on course for Brexit.

The Liberal Democrats celebrated success after gaining four councils and 76 seats. Leader Vince Cable declared: “we are very much on our way back.” Brexit continues to have electoral impact and the party’s ultra-Remain stance seems to have done them a favour, with the party gaining the pro-EU areas of Kingston, Richmond and South Cambridgeshire. However, after faltering support in recent years, the barometer to measure success is set low. These gains are small given the propensity for small parties to do well in local elections, whereas in General Elections voters feel cornered into making a choice between the two main parties as they feel anything else is a wasted vote. The Green Party made a net gain of seven seats, including co-leader Jonathan Bartley. After the results, the Greens declared themselves as “England’s fourth party”, and given UKIP’s dismal result it seems hard to dispute this.

The BBC estimates that the turnout was an underwhelming 36 per cent, and in some ways the results are rather underwhelming too. Parties’ leadership don’t see local elections in terms of the issues of bin collection and green belts; instead they see them as a litmus test for how their party is faring among the electorate. The picture seems to be much unchanged from the General Election; with the two main parties neck and neck in support. Whether this will change in a political landscape deadlocked by Brexit remains to be seen.



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