English local elections 2018

A cautious stalemate?

On Thursday 3 May 2018, nearly 1 year on from Theresa May's snap general election, local elections took place across London and in 118 other local councils across parts of England — the first real electoral test since the general election. Local election results offer a partial picture of party support in England only and are a notoriously unreliable forecast of the parties' fortunes in a general election. In 2017, Labour polled 27% in local elections just weeks before achieving 40% in the general election. Local issues such as bin collections may be more on voters' minds than the high politics of Brexit. Nevertheless, they offer a glimpse of where the main parties and party leaders stand 1 year after the general election and how Brexit continues to shape the national and local picture

Peak Corbyn?

After the shock surge in support for Labour in last June's general election the party was expected to do well, but it failed to win overall control of any new councils. Labour missed its target of winning the Conservative flagship, low-tax London councils of Westminster and Wandsworth. As in 2017, Labour did well with young, urban Remain voters in London, but failed to take target councils in pro-Leave Basildon, Nuneaton and Derby.

Claims that Corbynism has reached its peak may be premature, but as Brexit negotiations develop and Labour is forced to either support or oppose the government's vision of Brexit, the party may need to end its careful balancing act of appealing to both Leave and Remain supporters.

Resilient May?

A year on from May's snap election disaster, when many tipped the prime minister to resign within the year, the Conservatives lost 4% of the vote but continued to benefit from UKIP's collapse in support, doing particularly well in areas that voted Leave in 2016.

These elections were never likely to be decisive in terms of the prime minister's own job security, with fractious debates in cabinet over post-Brexit customs arrangements, the danger of cabinet resignations and defeats in Parliament on the EU Withdrawal Bill representing more serious risks to her survival.

A two-party stalemate?

With the collapse of UKIP and no signs of a convincing Liberal Democrat revival, Labour and the Conservatives shared 70% of the vote and were tied on 35%. George Eaton of the *New Statesman* concluded that 'Labour is not making the gains an opposition needs to be confident of winning power, but nor are the Conservatives close to recovering their squandered majority'. Forecasts pointed to another hung parliament in a general election.

As the clock runs down on the UK's negotiations with the EU, both parties will need to resolve internal difficulties and declare final positions on Brexit — this may just break 2 years of political stalemate.

The end of UKIP?

UKIP lost almost all of the 163 seats it was defending, from the huge gains it made in the 2014 local elections. UKIP's fortunes mirrored its collapse in support at the 2017 general election and confirmed its struggle to remain relevant after winning the Brexit referendum, exacerbated by party in-fighting and four changes in leadership since Nigel Farage's resignation in 2016.

Lib Dem recovery?

The Liberal Democrats gained control of four councils from the Conservatives and gained 75 seats, suggesting signs of a slow recovery, particularly in areas that voted Conservative in 2017 but Remain in 2016, such as Richmond and South Cambridgeshire.

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