



Political Studies Association

The London Elections

Media Briefing Pack

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1. Background

The 2012 London elections will be the fourth contest for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly. The size of the capital (8 million) and the scale of its electorate make it a major prize for the leading political parties on each occasion it is fought. The Mayor has a massive personal mandate which has been shown to extend beyond the services for which the Greater London Authority is formally responsible. Ken Livingstone (who had been leader of the predecessor Greater London Council from 1981 to 1986) has fought all four elections, in 2000 as an Independent and in 2004, 2008 and 2012 for Labour. Steven Norris represented the Conservatives in 2000 and 2004, with Boris Johnson being candidate in 2008 and this year. Brian Paddick represented the Liberal Democrats in both 2008 and 2012.

The London Mayor and Assembly elections were intended to produce more plural (some would say representative) results. But, as in Scotland, where the Scottish National Party has won a Parliamentary majority in a system with proportional representation, experiments with new voting systems can produce unexpected outcomes. GLA elections have increasingly led to more traditional two-party results than might have been expected. The Boris vs Ken contest has created a binary choice which has evidently spilled over into the Assembly, leaving little room for smaller parties.

Opinion polls conducted thus far about the 2012 election have suggested a close race between Johnson and Livingstone. Results of London-wide elections since the first Greater London Council contest in 1964 have proved a good predictor of the outcome of the following general election. Only in 1981 was the London election (where Labour won) not followed by a similar outcome at the 1983 national contest (where Mrs Thatcher triumphed). The outcome of the 2012 mayoral race may also tell us something about the current state and likely future path of British politics.

2. London within British politics

It is sometimes argued London is a 'Labour city'. Recent elections, for Parliament and locally, have seen Labour do somewhat better than had been expected. Table 1 below shows the vote share for the three major parties in London and the UK in each general election since 1979. The party's 'London lead' (ie the difference between its London and national vote shares) is shown in the right-hand column.

Table 1 Vote share (%) for each major party, 1979-2010 general elections

	Conservatives		
	London	UK	London 'lead'
1979	46.0	43.9	2.1
1983	43.9	42.4	1.5
1987	46.5	42.2	4.3
1992	45.3	41.9	3.4
1997	31.2	30.7	0.5
2001	30.5	31.7	-1.5
2005	31.9	32.3	-0.4
2010	34.5	36.1	-1.6

Labour			
	London	UK	London 'lead'
1979	39.6	36.9	2.7
1983	29.9	27.6	2.3
1987	31.5	30.8	0.7
1992	37.1	34.4	2.7
1997	49.5	43.2	6.3
2001	47.3	40.7	6.6
2005	38.9	35.2	3.6
2010	36.6	29.0	7.6

Liberal Democrats			
	London	UK	London 'lead'
1979	11.9	13.8	-1.7
1983	24.7	25.4	-0.7
1987	21.3	22.6	-1.3
1992	15.9	17.8	-1.7
1997	14.6	16.8	-2.2
2001	17.5	18.3	-0.8
2005	21.9	22.1	-0.2
2010	22.1	23.0	-0.9

Thus, it does appear that since 1997 Labour has been doing significantly better in London than across the whole of the country. Even in 2005, when the party was suffering from an anti-Iraq war backlash (which was particularly strong in parts of the capital), Labour still had a lead in London. The Conservatives, by contrast, who until 1992 had a 'London lead' now appear to do slightly less well in the capital than elsewhere. It is possible the coming of 'New Labour' was beneficial to Labour in London. However, London remains politically plural – more so than most other UK regions. It may have tipped slightly towards Labour in recent years, but it remains a major potential prize for both Labour and the Conservatives.

3. London mayoral elections

The Mayor of London is elected using the 'supplementary vote' system: voters can vote twice, expressing a first and second preference. Table 2 below summarises the first preference votes in the 2000, 2004 and 2008 mayoral elections. Ken Livingstone's vote share held up remarkably well in 2008, though he was overtaken by a huge jump in the Conservative/Boris Johnson share.

Table 2 First preference votes, Mayor of London election, 2000, 2004 and 2008

	2000	2004	2008
Livingstone (Ind/Lab)	39	37	37
Norris/Johnson (Con)	27	29	43
Kramer/Hughes/Paddick (LD)	12	15	10
Greens	2.2	3.1	3.2
UKIP	1.0	6.2	0.9
BNP	2.0	3.1	2.9

ComRes and YouGov have been polling in advance of the mayoral election, with the latest research from ComRes published on 10th April. Table 3 shows Livingstone has been polling close to the first preference figures he achieved in 2000, 2004 and 2008, while Johnson had been under-performing his 2008 result until the most recent poll. Johnson is now significantly out-performing the Conservative Party, while Livingstone is underperforming Labour. Paddick is stuck at five or six per cent, rather below his 2008 showing. Although Jenny Jones, the Green candidate achieved four per cent in the 10th April ComRes poll, there is no sign of a radical increase in her (or other smaller party) voting.

Table 3 Recent polling

	ComRes 19-21 Jan	YouGov* 12-15 March	ComRes 2-5 April
Livingstone (Lab)	39	37	36
Johnson (Con)	38	36	42
Paddick (LD)	5	5	6

NB: YouGov asked “who would you vote for”, not “who would be your 1st preference”

In 2008, with first and second preference votes taken together, Johnson beat Livingstone by 53% to 47%, a slightly narrower win than Livingstone’s 55% to 45% defeat of Steve Norris in 2004.

4. London Assembly elections

The Assembly is elected using the ‘additional member’ system – a form of PR. There are 25 members in total, 14 elected for a constituency and 11 on a ‘city-wide’ basis. Voters can choose a constituency member and separately vote for a list of candidates who are then distributed between parties so that the overall result is broadly proportional. Table 4 shows the seats won by each party in each year, while Table 5 shows the ‘list’ vote share. There has been a national vote swing of about 15 per cent from the Conservatives to Labour since 2008 (comparing the national equivalent vote share for 2008 with recent polling) ,so only one constituency seat is likely to be marginal. Barnet and Camden would fall to Labour with a swing of about six per cent. Recent opinion polls imply Labour may pick up two or three Assembly seats, while the Conservatives are likely to lose at least two. Smaller parties may collectively lose one or two.

Table 4 London Assembly seats won, 2000, 2004 and 2008

	2000	2004	2008
Conservative	9	9	11
Labour	9	7	8
Liberal Democrats	4	5	3
Greens	3	2	2
UKIP	0	2	0
BNP	0	0	1

Although the Assembly is elected using a form of PR, the Conservatives and Labour look set to win 20 or 21 seats in 2012 with only 65 per cent or so of the total vote. The more fragmented the votes of the smaller parties, the less likely they are to get elected. A combination of the relatively small number of Assembly members, the form of PR used and the binary squeeze created by the mayoral election has made it relatively hard for minor parties to get elected to the Assembly.

Table 5 London Assembly 'list' vote share (%), 2000, 2004 and 2008

	2000	2004	2008
Conservative	29	29	35
Labour	30	25	28
Liberal Democrat	15	17	11
Greens	11	8.6	8.4
UKIP	2.1	8.4	1.9
BNP	2.9	4.8	5.4
Others	10	7	10

NB: Figures may not add due to rounding

5. Conclusions

The personality-driven nature of the 2012 London mayoral election seems likely to ensure it will be a high-profile contest, though the fact that the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats are all running the same candidates as in 2008 may push turnout below the 45 per cent level achieved in 2008. Liverpool and Salford will also vote in mayoral elections on May 3, while there will be referendums about whether or not to introduce mayors in Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Newcastle, Sheffield and a number of other major cities. A further round of mayoral and police commissioner elections will then take place on 15 November this year.

Mayoral government is, according to polling, relatively popular in London. This success appears likely to be a leading indicator of reform elsewhere. Elections for powerful city mayors are now likely to become a major feature of English politics. City mayors may turn out to be 'English devolution'.

Background Brief for the London Elections 2012

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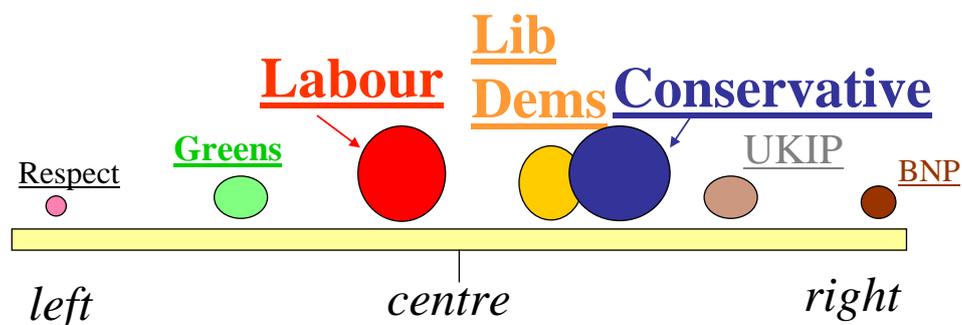
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Multi-party politics

1. All of England (as well as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) is a multi-party system, but MPs and major party leaders immured in a highly unrepresentative House of Commons often lose sight of this fact. In London the twin elections for Mayor and the Greater London Assembly every four years provide a more accurate picture of the underlying patterns of voters' alignments, and always show greater votes for parties outside the England big three of Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats.

2. Figure 1 below shows the current set-up of the UK party system, with the Liberal Democrats having moved sharply to the right after entering the coalition government with the Conservatives. The Conservatives and Labour have always tended to dominate London voting in general elections, but get less support in London Assembly elections usually. The Liberal Democrats always poll relatively poorly in London, and are set to do badly this year - with some opinion polls giving them only a half to a third of their 2010 general election support, and because of the strong mayoral race between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingston.

Figure 1: The English and London multi-party system, in 2012



There are two left of Labour parties, the Greens who have a London Assembly seat already tend to do well in London, and Respect, recent winner of a Bradford by-election, but not otherwise faring well in London. There are two far-right parties, the main one being UKIP (UK Independence Party), which has two London Assembly seats, and campaigns for the UK to leave the EU. The British National Party (BNP) has one existing Assembly seat but is in internal disarray, with their candidate numbers declining sharply in 2012 and other rightwing groupuscles standing against or instead of them.

Voting systems

3. A specific support for greater multi-party politics in London comes from the two voting systems, for Mayor and Assembly – both designed in 1998 by Dr Helen Margetts and myself, and implemented by the first Blair government. This is the fourth time the systems have been used, and they are well understood by voters (unfortunately not by journalists, however!) and work very effectively. Voters have four votes, two for Mayor, and two for the Assembly.

The London Mayoral election system is called the Supplementary Vote. Voters have two votes, a first preference and a second preference, which they mark by putting an X in their first preference column against their best candidate, and an X in their second preference column. The system allows people to eg vote Green, but then back Ken Livingston; or vote UKIP, but then back Boris Johnson.

We count first preference votes. If anyone gets over 50% support here they are elected immediately. This never happens in London, and looks very unlikely this time. IN this case, the top two candidates stay in the race – at present they look certain to be Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone. All other candidates are eliminated at once, and their second preference votes are looked at – any for Boris or Ken are added to their vote piles, and the winner is whoever of the top two now had most first and second preference votes combined. In past elections, the winner has usually got a very convincing majority of 58 to 60 per cent of eligible votes, meaning that the London Mayor has huge electoral legitimacy.

The London mayoral voting system, the Supplementary Vote, is also used in all other 10 English mayoral elections, and could spread to other large cities if their voters approve a Mayoral system this May.

The Greater London Assembly system is called Additional Member System and is a form of proportional representation. There are 25 Assembly members, of which 14 are locally elected in constituencies. Here first-past-the-post voting is used and whoever gets the largest vote becomes the member for that constituency.

But people also have a second vote for 11 London-wide Assembly members, who are elected in a ‘top-up’ manner. Candidates are put forward on London-wide lists by each party. We look at how many local seats a party has in the capital, and at what share of the London-wide votes it has: if it does not have enough members already we elect more people from its London list to bring it up to parity of Assembly members and vote shares. There’s a formula for doing this that works very proportionately to match party seats to their vote shares.

A complication in the Greater London Assembly is that to win *any* seats at all a party must get a minimum 5 per cent of London-wide votes. The BNP and Respect are unlikely to make this level, and so will not win a seat. For UKIP and the Greens this will be a challenge to get past this level.

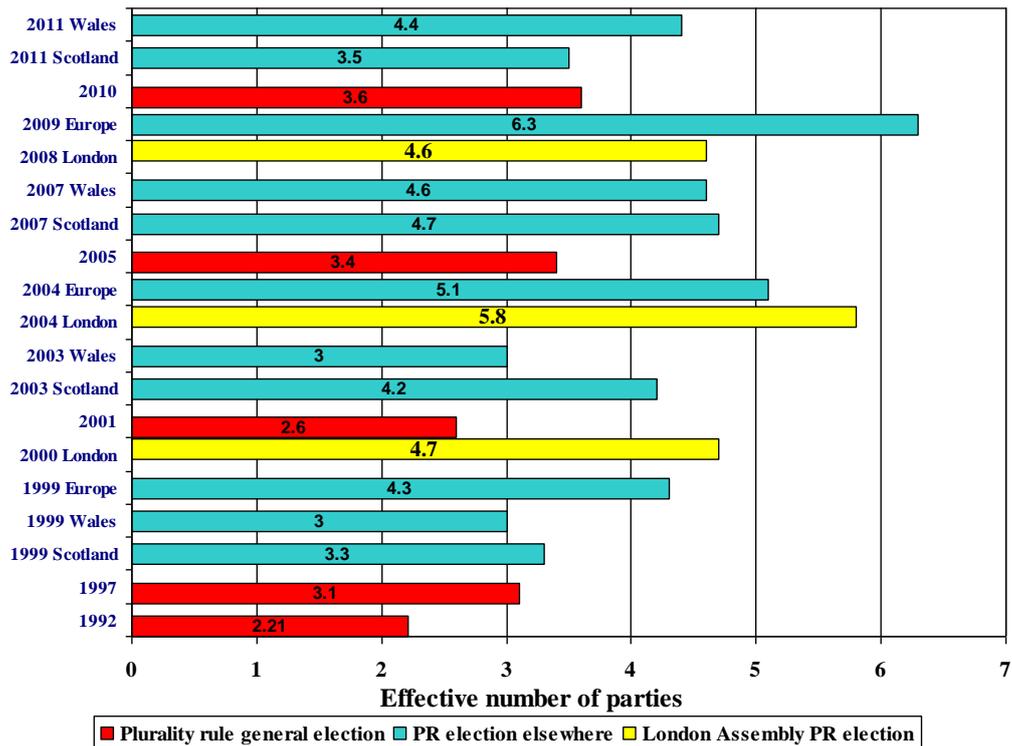
Consequences of the voting system and London’s political make-up

4. The main consequence of these two voting systems is that a wider range of parties have in the past won votes in the Mayoral election and in the Assembly voting than at general elections, shown in Figure 2. On the normal political science way of counting parties, London voters have split their votes across nearly 5 or 6 ‘effective’ parties.

In 2012 the results may well show a decline in the number of 'effective' parties because of several factors:

- the Liberal Democrats are doing badly in national polls and will slip back;
- the BNP is in disarray and its campaign is weak;
- the Boris vs Ken race for Mayor focuses attention on the top two parties, as it did in 2008.

Figure 2: How PR elections in London compare with PR elections elsewhere in Great Britain and with general elections in Great Britain, 1992-2012



Note: General election data exclude Northern Ireland.