

# Local Elections in Britain: The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) leads race to the gutter

Monday 26 May 2014, by [MAC UAID Liam](#) (Date first published: 26 May 2014).

From the coverage of the English local election results and the relentless Farage mania you would think that the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) had romped to first place with the Tories a close second writes Liam Mac Uaid. You'd also be forgiven for thinking that Labour had received a hammering and the Liberal Democrats don't exist. The main story in most of the press, from the BBC to *The Daily Telegraph*, is that Labour is in crisis as a result of the election.

Yet what actually happened was that it was the two parties of the coalition that have been hammered. Labour's result reflects the party's polling figures over the last few months. It would have made them the largest party in Parliament if repeated in a general election, though just short on an overall majority. A big swathe of the press has been standing the results on their heads solely to pretend that the Tory position is much stronger than the numbers show. Some Lib Dems have begun an online petition to ditch party leader Nick Clegg, yet while Miliband is the target of an unrelenting hostile barrage of personal abuse, there is no press comment on how Cameron has presided over significant Tory losses and Labour is ahead of them.

Overall Labour made some modest gains, increasing its number of councillors by 338 and the number of councils under its control by six. The Tories lost 231 councillors and control of 11 councils. The Lib Dems lost a staggering 307 of their 427 councillors. UKIP now have 163 councillors, though they won none in London.

The number of votes won was not the new factor in UKIP's performance. They did well last year too. Their achievement is to have repeated it a year later and they are showing all the signs of continuing their surge until the general election next year. This means the election will be a four cornered fight.

This is potentially bad news for the Tories. While it is true that UKIP is having as impact in the Labour heartlands as well, it is on a different scale to the potential effects in the Tory areas. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, some Tories are saying that even if UKIP's vote in the general election dips to 6 or 7% it would scupper their chances of winning a majority. The paper also comments that UKIP smashed the Tories in their Essex strongholds.

UKIP has established itself as a new party of the hard right with a significant electoral base. Its largely improvised programme has much in common with the main demands that neo-fascist groups like the British National Party (BNP) advanced when they were trying to develop an electoral strategy. Farage, the UKIP leader, has achieved something akin to Marine Le Pen's marginal detoxification of the Front National. However it was hardly necessary. The people who voted for him knew that they were voting for an anti-immigration package and every outrageous homophobic, misogynistic, racist remark from Farage or his newly assembled ragbag of candidates didn't really matter.

The exception to this was London where it made much more limited inroads. London is the most

multicultural part of the country; Farage said that it is because it has a younger voter base. It is not only a youth problem for UKIP; it is essentially a white party seeping votes from BNP supporters and Labour supporters who see no future in this country for working people.

### **So much for conventional wisdom**

The conventional wisdom has been that Tory governments are bad news for the far right since they borrow a modified form of the BNP or National Front's (NF) rhetoric. UKIP has succeeded in forcing the Tories and Labour to steal its language. While the votes were still being counted Ed Balls was on the BBC driving home just how much like UKIP Labour was willing to be:

*"people want tougher controls on immigration... we have been making those arguments ... people feel we don't have the right kind of immigration controls and border controls."*

It is hard to imagine a more utter capitulation to UKIP's racism. Labour has lost some votes to UKIP. Rotherham, where Farage's outfit won ten seats and is now the official opposition, was a traditional Labour stronghold. Basildon, a Labour target area returned eleven UKIP councillors.

Labour should have done better in the circumstances, but they are hampered not just by lacklustre presentation, they are compromised on the key policy issues, from the cuts to racism

The Tory attitude to UKIP is changing with an embarrassing rapidity. They are no longer describing UKIP as "clowns and fruitcakes". George Osborne, the person most likely to replace Cameron, has spoken of his "respect" for Farage and some MPs are floating the idea of an electoral pact. Partly this is because they don't disagree with a lot of what UKIP says, and partly it's because they want to hold onto their seats next year.

The left is not doing well. Left Unity stood a dozen candidates as a first election outing scored its best result in Wigan with 8.8%.

The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) fielded several hundred candidates in areas where they had no base and no political profile. This was reward by votes typically in the region of 1% and the re-election of a former Labour councillor under the TUSC banner. The Greens had another 17 councillors elected and are now the official opposition in Liverpool and Solihull, Islington and Lewisham in London, and they remain the official opposition in Norwich. The Green Party now have 162 councillors on 56 councils.

Four years of aggressive class warfare by the Con Dem government has left tens of millions of people in England poorer and feeling more financially insecure than ever before. The poor and the unemployed are held up as objects of scorn and abuse by the entire political class. And who is the principal beneficiary of this situation? The first really successful far right party the country has produced. If Labour continue to use the same language as UKIP on immigration and benefits there will only be one winner in that race to the gutter.

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\* From Socialist Resistance. May 24, 2014:

<http://socialistresistance.org/6279/ukip-leads-race-to-the-gutter>