

ELECTORAL LANDSCAPE PAPER FOR MAY 2016 ELECTIONS

Draft October 2015

Introduction

1. The purpose of this draft paper is to set out the broad electoral context for elections in May 2016.
2. This draft is to inform the Editorial Standards Board of the BBC Executive and the Editorial Standards Committee of the BBC Trust, prior to the public consultation on the draft Election Guidelines for 2016. Following the consultation, a revised paper will assist the ESC prior to approval of the guidelines and in determining any appeals, regarding either allocation of PEBs or relevant editorial coverage; it will also assist the Executive in determining the allocation of Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) based on the PEB allocation criteria.
 - **Blue highlight** denotes text which may need to be amended according to events (NI).
3. This paper sets out details of past relevant electoral support and provides a framework for assessing current electoral support and other relevant factors. The intention of the paper is to set out the material evidence necessary for making these judgements – not to make recommendations about the judgements themselves.
4. The BBC will remain open to any new relevant evidence of current electoral support (in relation to the allocation of PEBs, until the day after the close of nominations).

Political Landscape: Background

5. The BBC takes the position that to ensure due impartiality, the electorate and licence-fee payers are best served by giving those parties or candidates demonstrating clear evidence of substantial electoral support more coverage in an election period than those which do not.
6. For editorial coverage, this is set out in the Editorial Guidelines, which say:

News judgements at election time are made within a framework of democratic debate which ensures that due weight is given to hearing the views and examining and challenging the policies of all parties. Significant smaller parties should also receive some network coverage during the campaign.

7. In making these judgements, electoral support in the previous equivalent election is the starting point – eg. for the Scottish Parliamentary election, the level of electoral support demonstrated at the same election in 2011. In order to have

regard to changes in levels of support since that time, some weight is also given to evidence of electoral support at different, subsequent elections, including local and European elections, the General Election and relevant by-elections. Another consideration is evidence of robust and consistent trends in opinion polls.

8. Other relevant factors are the broad political context, which could include the formation of new parties, splits in parties, and new alliances between parties.
9. Weight will also be applied appropriately taking account of the number of candidates a party is fielding and the electoral system being used.

2016 Elections

10. Elections will take place around the UK on Thursday 5th May 2016 for:

- The Scottish Parliament
- The National Assembly for Wales
- The Northern Ireland Assembly
- The Greater London Authority
- Local government in parts of England
- Police and Crime Commissioners (England – outside London – and Wales)

11. Each election has its own political backdrop, but the broader UK political landscape which will potentially impact on voters to a greater or lesser extent includes:

- The return to majority government and other ramifications of the general election result;
- The debate over the UK's future relationship with the European Union;
- The issues arising from migration and asylum- seekers;
- The health of the UK economy.
- The impact of the constitutional issues following the result of the referendum in Scotland.

Past Electoral Support

Devolved Elections 2011

12. Scotland: The 2011 Scottish Parliamentary election saw the SNP winning a majority for the first time, with 69 seats (up from 47) out of 129 and a mid-40% share of the vote in both the constituency and list sections of the poll. Labour

slipped from 46 to 37 seats, with just over 30% in the constituency section and over 26% in the top-up lists. The biggest losers were the Liberal Democrats, reduced from 16 to 5 seats and a vote share down to 7.9% and 5.2% respectively. The latter figure, in the list section, was less than 1% ahead of the Scottish Green party, who again won two seats, though its 4.4% represented only a slight increase on 2007, despite having regularly registered more in opinion polls during the run-up to the election. UKIP took less than 1% of the regional vote. One list seat, in Lothian, was won again by Margo MacDonald, as an independent; it has remained vacant since her death in 2014. Three MSPs elected for the SNP in 2011 now sit as independents; the SNP also lost one constituency by-election, in 2013, to Labour. This means that the SNP now holds 64 seats (excluding the Presiding Officer), technically a majority of one.

13. Wales: The Welsh Assembly election in 2011 saw Labour improve its position from 2007, increasing from 26 seats to 30, with a share of over 40% in the constituencies vote, allowing the party to form an administration in the 60 seat Assembly without their former coalition partners, Plaid, who slipped from 15 to 11 seats and to below 20% in terms of share. The Conservatives improved marginally, winning 14 seats, an increase of two; the Lib Dems dropped from 6 seats to 5 and lost more than 4% share in the constituencies, 3% in the list section – down to 8%. No other party won a seat – UKIP and the Greens received four and a half and three and a half per cent share respectively in the regional vote. There has been no change in the composition of the Assembly since 2011.
14. Northern Ireland: The Assembly elections in 2011 followed a similar pattern to the 2010 General Election in Northern Ireland – further establishing the DUP and Sinn Fein as the two dominant parties, but there was little change in the share of first preference votes between the larger parties compared to the previous Assembly election in 2007. The DUP topped the poll with 30%, gaining two more seats for a total of 38 out of 108. Sinn Fein, with almost 27%, took 29 seats, up one. The Ulster Unionist Party, with 13% of the vote, took 16 seats, down two; the SDLP, with 14%, won 14 seats, also down two. The Alliance Party increased their share of the vote by two and a half percentage points, to more than seven and a half per cent, winning eight seats, an increase of one. The TUV and the Greens won a seat each, with two and a half and one per cent share respectively. The remaining seat was won by David McClarty, an independent unionist who died in 2014 – his parliamentary assistant, Claire Sugden, was subsequently co-opted and is now an incumbent independent MLA. Since 2011, three of the MLAs elected for the UUP have changed to represent the NI21, UKIP and a second independent seat.

15. In August 2015, the UUP announced it was resigning from the Executive and going into “opposition” (though there is no such formal designation).

Greater London Authority 2012.

16. London Mayor: bucking the trend of the rest of the UK, the contest for London Mayor was largely polarised between the candidates representing the two largest

parties – the incumbent Conservative, Boris Johnson, and the former Mayor, Labour’s Ken Livingstone, both of whom gained more than 40% of first preference votes. The Conservative candidate won on the second round of transferred votes. The other five candidates were all below 5%. The Green party candidate came third, with 4.5%, narrowly ahead of the Liberal Democrat, whose share of the vote more than halved since 2008, only narrowly ahead of the independent candidate Siobhan Benita, who was fifth, with just under 4% of first preference votes. UKIP and the BNP received 2% and just over 1% respectively.

17. London Assembly: The fourteen London constituencies were won only by Labour (8) and Conservative (6) candidates. Labour also secured more than 40% of the vote in the top-up list - an increase of more than 13 percentage points - to become the largest party, with 12 of the total 25 seats. The Conservatives dropped from 11 to 9 seats, down to 32% in share of the vote (more than 10 percentage points below Boris Johnson’s share, re-elected Mayor the same day). The Green share of the vote was stable at over 8%, with two top-up seats retained, but overtaking the Lib Dems, whose vote slipped below 7%, losing a seat, also with two Assembly Members. No other party, including UKIP, won a seat or secured 5% of the vote. The composition of the Assembly remains unchanged since 2012.

English Local Elections:

18. It is important to bear in mind that local elections in England only ever present a partial picture of the view of the total electorate in England. That needs to be taken into account when analysing figures for the share of the vote the last time most of these elections were contested, in 2012. Altogether that year, there were elections in more than 120 authorities, with a strong showing for Labour, increasing its number of councillors by more than five hundred. The Conservatives lost more than three hundred and the Liberal Democrats nearly two hundred councillors. This was a year before UKIP made big gains in local government – the party returned seven councillors.. The Greens’ 26 councillors was an increase of five. In terms of national share of the vote – a notional figure for the UK as a whole – Labour’s 38% was up three points, with the Tories down four on 31%.; the Liberal Democrats were unchanged on 16%.
19. The main change in subsequent local elections in England – albeit not in the same set of seats – was the advance of UKIP from 2013 to 2015. The party’s net gain over that period was approaching 500 seats, now a long way past the Greens as the fourth party in English local government. On general election day in 2015, the local government results in England saw the Conservatives gaining more than 500 seats, Labour losing just over 200 and the Liberal Democrats losing more than 400.

Police and Crime Commissioners (England –outside London – and Wales)

20. Following the replacement of police authorities by PCCs, the first ever elections – using the Supplementary Vote system - were held on 15th November 2012 (the

original intention was for them to be held in May, the same day as local authority elections, but the legislation was delayed). The turn-out was a record low for a national election – averaging less than 15% across the 41 police areas.

21. The elections were not generally contested with national party campaigns, but on a more local basis. Although the Conservatives and Labour contested all 41 elections, other parties did not: the Lib Dems and UKIP each stood candidates in 24 areas, the Greens contested only one – and Plaid Cymru none at all. More than a quarter of the candidates were independents – and they were strikingly successful. Twelve independents were elected (winning two of the four elections in Wales), compared to 16 Conservatives and 13 Labour PCCs. No other party won.
22. Share of the vote by party, therefore, has to be seen in the context of the varying strategies adopted by the parties nationally. Altogether, Labour won just over 32% of first preference votes, ahead of the Conservatives, at under 28% - though the latter returned more PCCs than Labour. Independent candidates achieved around 23% of first preference votes – far exceeding their combined performance in any other national election in the UK in recent times. The Liberal Democrats and UKIP, contesting fewer than 60% of the elections, each secured around a 7% share of first preference votes. The English Democrats, with five candidates, won just over 1% of overall share, but averaged more than 8% in the areas where they stood, coming second in South Yorkshire, with 16%. The Green's only candidate, in Cleveland, came last with 14%.
23. One feature of the PCC elections is that the deposit is particularly high – at £5000, ten times more than for a Parliamentary election. This restricted the number of candidates in most areas: apart from Devon and Cornwall, with ten, and three areas with seven, all the other contests had six or fewer candidates; in three areas, electors had to choose from only two candidates. As a result, hardly any candidates failed to secure 5% or more of the vote and there were as a consequence very few lost deposits.
24. There have been two by-elections, both in 2014: one caused by the death of the PCC in the West Midlands, the other by the resignation of the South Yorkshire PCC – both were retained by Labour
25. With the 2016 PCC elections being held on the more normal polling day in May, turnout in some areas may be expected to be higher than in 2012 – approximately half of those able to vote will also have a local authority election at the same time.

European Elections 2014

26. UKIP's victory in the European elections was the first time a party other than Labour or Conservative had topped the poll in a UK-wide election since the Liberals more than a century before. From second in 2009, they increased their share of the vote by nearly eleven percentage points, to more than 27%, winning 24 of the 73 seats, an increase of eleven. Labour, from a low base in

2009, also added nearly 10 percentage points, to win 20 seats, an increase of seven, with just over a quarter of the vote. The Conservatives, down seven to 19, were narrowly behind Labour. The Liberal Democrats' share of the vote was exactly halved, down to less than 7%, losing all but one of their eleven seats. For the first time in a UK-wide election, they slipped to fifth, 1% behind the Greens, who gained a seat for a total of three, despite their own share of the vote marginally decreasing. The BNP, who had won national representation for the first time in the 2009 European election, with more than 6% of the vote, lost both their seats and dropped to just over 1% of the vote.

27. In Scotland, the SNP topped the poll with 29%, keeping its two MEPs; Labour's improvement, by 5 percentage points, to 26%, also meant retention of its two seats. The Conservatives retained their one seat, marginally up in share to 17%. The only change in seats was UKIP –with more than 10% of the vote - returning its first MEP in Scotland, , at the expense of the Lib Dems; their 7% meant they slipped to sixth just behind the Scottish Greens, whose share was marginally up at 8%.
28. None of the four seats in Wales changed hands, where Labour, despite increasing its share of the vote by nearly 8 percentage points, only just topped the poll ahead of UKIP, whose share increased by nearly twice as much. The Conservatives and Plaid - though both found their vote-share was down 3-4% - each held on to their single Welsh MEP. Again, it was the Lib Dems who suffered most, securing less than 4% of the vote, in sixth place, narrowly behind the Greens, whose share was also marginally down.
29. Northern Ireland uses a different voting system in European elections to the rest of the UK, electing three members via Single Transferable Vote. Sinn Fein topped the poll, with more than 25% of first preference votes; the DUP were next with 21%. The Ulster Unionist Party, with 13%, took the third seat, but only very narrowly ahead of the SDLP and then the TUV, who gained 12% of the vote. The Alliance Party took 7% and UKIP 4% of first preference votes.

General Election 2015

30. After five years of coalition government with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, 2015 marked a return – albeit unexpected by media and politicians alike – to majority government. There was much talk of the growth of “other” parties and the decline of the larger UK parties: it is worth noting, therefore, that, unusually, both Conservative and Labour actually increased their share of the vote in 2015 – that decline was accounted for by the Liberal Democrats' losses.
31. Although the Conservatives' share of the UK vote went up by less than one percentage point, to nearly 37%, the net increase in seats of 24 gave them 331 of the 650 seats in the Commons. Labour's vote share actually went up

by more – an extra one and a half points, to go above 30% - but its net loss of 26 seats reduced it to a total of 232 MPs. The Liberal Democrats lost nearly two thirds of their share of the vote from 2010, dropping to below 8% and losing nearly fifty MPs for a total of just 8.

32. The most substantial changes, however, were in Scotland, where turnout was over 71%, well above the rest of the UK. In 2010, there had been neither gains nor losses of seats between the parties; in 2015, the SNP went from six seats to fifty-six seats (all but three of the constituencies in Scotland), took exactly half the share of the total vote and, by some distance, became the third largest party in the Commons. Labour collapsed from 41 seats to a solitary MP, with its share of the vote declining from around 40% in 2010 to less than 25% in 2015. The Lib Dems, who lost all but one of their eleven seats in Scotland, were reduced to a 7.5% share of the vote – in 2005, they had had more votes than the SNP. The Conservative share slipped slightly to just below 15%, but the party retained its single MP.
33. The party which came third across the UK – in terms of votes – was UKIP. Having captured two seats at by-elections late in the previous parliament, the party won the support of one in eight voters – approaching four million people; in England, UKIP achieved more than 14% share. Yet, such is the effect of First Past the Post, that translated into just one Member of Parliament. The Greens, with a third as many voters as UKIP, also had their best ever performance in a general election: their share in England was over 4%, winning more than four times as many votes as in 2010, (they stood in 238 more seats than in 2010, an increase of more than 70%), but they did not add to their single seat.
34. In Wales, by contrast with Scotland, Labour's net loss was only one seat, to hold 25, with almost 37% share of the vote. The Conservatives gained three, up to 11, with a small increase in share. The Lib Dems lost two seats in Wales, retaining only one; their 6.5% share of the vote – placing them a distant fifth - was even lower than in England and Scotland. Plaid Cymru was little changed, retaining its three seats, despite the increased exposure from the TV debates; it held on to around 12% share of the vote in Wales. But by that measure, Plaid was beaten into fourth place by UKIP, who, with 13 and a half per cent, performed almost as strongly in Wales as they did in England, though without winning a seat.
35. Northern Ireland, still largely with its separate party political structure, did not experience the same substantial swings in support seen elsewhere in the UK. At 58%, turnout was significantly lower in Northern Ireland – a full 13 percentage points lower than in Scotland. The DUP won a seat and lost one, to stay at 8 MPs: but with its share of the vote marginally up, to just over a quarter, it returned to being the party with most votes. In 2010 (as well as in the 2014 European election), Sinn Fein had topped the poll; this time, it was marginally down in share to just under 25%, losing a constituency and leaving it with four seats (which its MPs continue not to occupy at Westminster). The Ulster Unionist Party – without an MP in the 2010 parliament – while

only marginally increasing its share of the vote to 16%, gained two seats. In four seats, the UUP and the DUP agreed not to stand candidates against each other. The SDLP slipped two and a half percentage points to less than 14%, but retained its three seats; the Alliance Party increased its share of the vote to more than eight and a half per cent – but lost its only seat. The single independent – Lady Sylvia Hermon – retained her seat, but with a reduced majority. Other parties were well behind the five largest, all below 3% share and winning no seats. UKIP, standing candidates for the first time, took just over two and a half per cent across ten constituencies, saving deposits in four of them; the TUV, which won nearly 4% in 2010, slipped back to less than two and a half per cent, also saving the deposit in four seats. The Northern Ireland Green Party took 1%, slightly up on 2010, but behind the Northern Ireland Conservatives.

36. Across Britain, only two other parties managed to secure more than 10,000 votes altogether – sufficient to register a percentage share of 0.1 or more. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition won more than 36,000 votes, standing more than 130 candidates, all of whom lost their deposits. The National Health Action Party, fielding only a dozen candidates, attracted 20,000 votes, with two deposits saved.
37. The BNP – who had a higher share of the vote than the Greens in 2010 – virtually disappeared; more than twice as many people voted for the Monster Raving Loony Party. Respect – who had returned an MP at a by-election in 2012 – lost the seat and fell below 0.1% of the vote. The English Democrats, with more than 30 candidates, secured fewer votes than Yorkshire First, who contested less than half as many constituencies.

Current Electoral Support

Opinion Polls

38. Questions remain for the polling industry, following the 2015 general election result, when the strength of the Conservatives relative to Labour was, to say the least, underestimated. It's worth remembering, however, that over a long time period, the polls did give indications regarding other parties which turned out to be more reliable: the strength of UKIP in England and Wales; the surge in support for the SNP after the referendum in Scotland; the long-term decline of the Liberal Democrats across Britain; and the relatively modest improvement of the Greens in England.
39. In assessing relative levels of electoral support, running up to May 2016, there is a substantial amount of evidence from real votes in real elections and, for the time being at least, comparatively little useful additional information from the limited number of voting intention polls.

October 2015.

Scottish Parliament 2011

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/election2011/overview/html/scotland.stm>

Welsh Assembly 2011

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/election2011/overview/html/wales.stm>

NI Assembly 2011

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/election2011/constituency/html/northern_ireland.stm

GLA (London Mayor and Assembly) May- 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/vote2012/mayor/> and
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/vote2012/assembly/>

Police and Crime Commissioner – Nov 2012

<http://web.archive.org/web/20121213151924/http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19970734>

European Election – 2014

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/vote2014/eu-uk-results>

General Election – 2015

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>