



# London Local Elections Pack

## A guide to the 2022 elections

From the Opinium political team

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May 2022



What people think,  
feel and do



Local elections in the capital always attract huge interest. In the context of sweeping electoral changes over the last 4 years and some remarkable political events of the last 4 months, all eyes will be on the fates of the surviving Conservative councils in London.

The political team at Opinium have taken an in-depth look at the borough council elections. We hope that our research will illuminate the vote on the 5th May and provide election-watchers with a helpful guide as to what to look out for as the results come in.

**James Crouch**  
Head of Policy & Public Affairs



# Contents

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- 01 Understanding these local elections**  
The four categories of ward in London that helps explain how the election might play out
- 02 State of play**  
How London voted at the last local elections and what the battleground for 2022 looks like
- 03 Battleground boroughs**  
A focus on the key battleground boroughs and what to look out for on election night
- 04 Past elections in London**  
What recent elections in the capital can tell us about the direction voters are heading
- 05 Our polling**  
What matters the most to Londoners in these elections and how will it impact how residents will vote
- 06 About us**  
Find out a little more about Opinium's political and social team and what we do



# Understanding these local elections

Welcome to our guide to the 2022 local elections in London

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# The four categories of ward in London

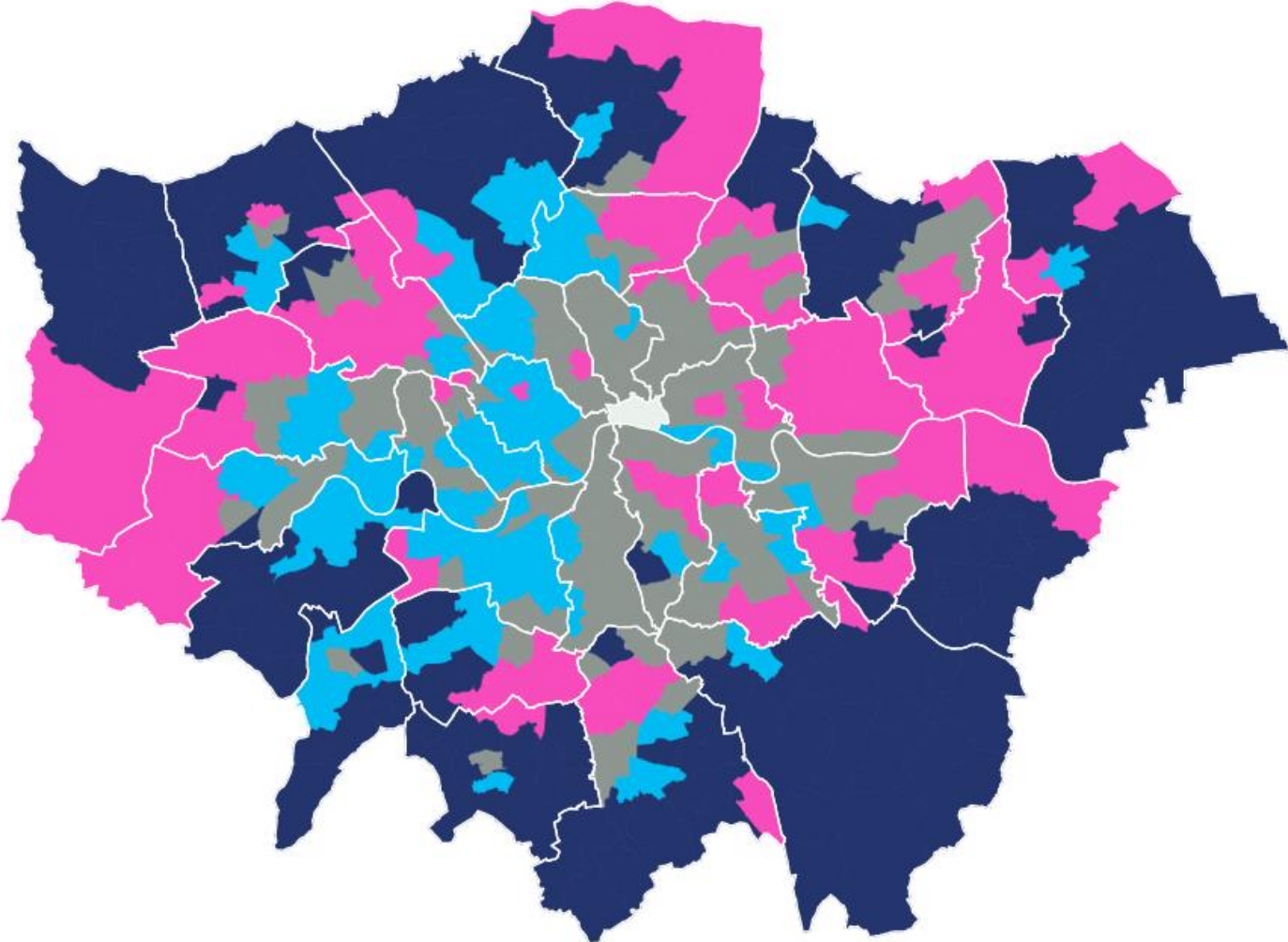
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Older homeowning suburbs

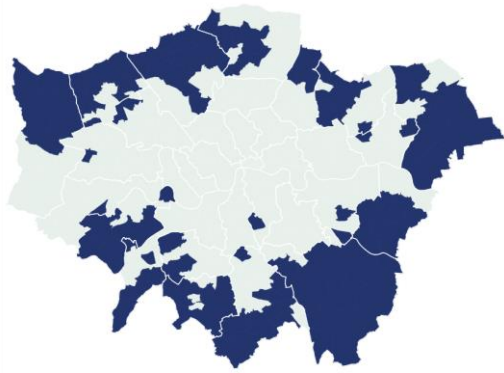
Professional graduate neighbourhoods

Young and urban districts

Working-class estates

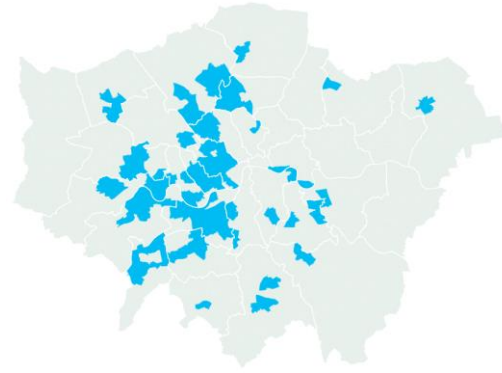


# The four categories of ward in London



## Older homeowning suburbs

The oldest areas of the capital, with a significant number of over 50s, most of whom are homeowners with many owning 2 or more cars. These suburbs are mainly – but not exclusively – white and can often be from a variety of class backgrounds, as far from all are professional or managerial.



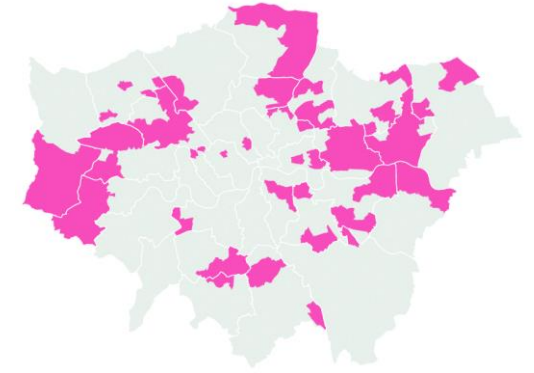
## Professional graduate neighbourhoods

These areas have the highest number of graduates who are generally successful and higher-income younger professionals. The housing mixture is a combination of privately rented flats and homeowners. They are generally white, although not necessarily white British.



## Young and urban districts

The most common type of ward in inner London, it's also the youngest, with the lowest rates of home and car ownership. Although everyone living there has that in common, it tends to be a complex mix of privately renting graduates (usually) and minorities (usually) in social housing.



## Working-class estates

Neighbourhoods with the highest number of blue collar workers and the lowest number of graduates. Although housing tenure is mixed, social housing (current or former) is likely to be prominent. These are most of the majority-minority areas in London, often with only a small proportion of white Brits.

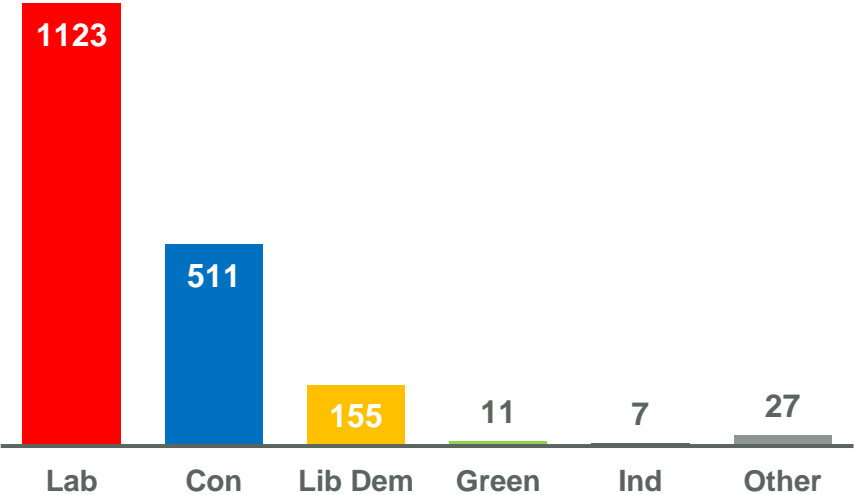
# State of play

How London voted at the last local elections and what the battleground for 2022 looks like

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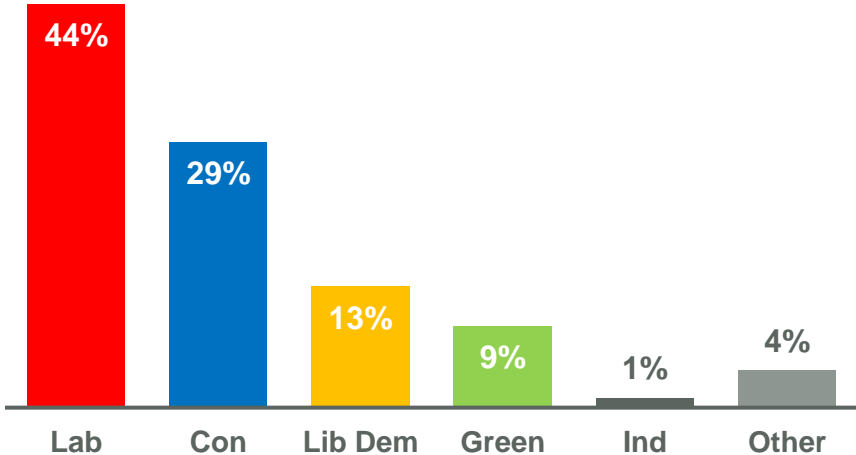
# Results of the 2018 local elections

Councillors



Labour won more than twice as many councillors as the Conservatives in 2018. After 1982 the only time the Conservatives have had a plurality of councillors in London was 2006.

Vote share



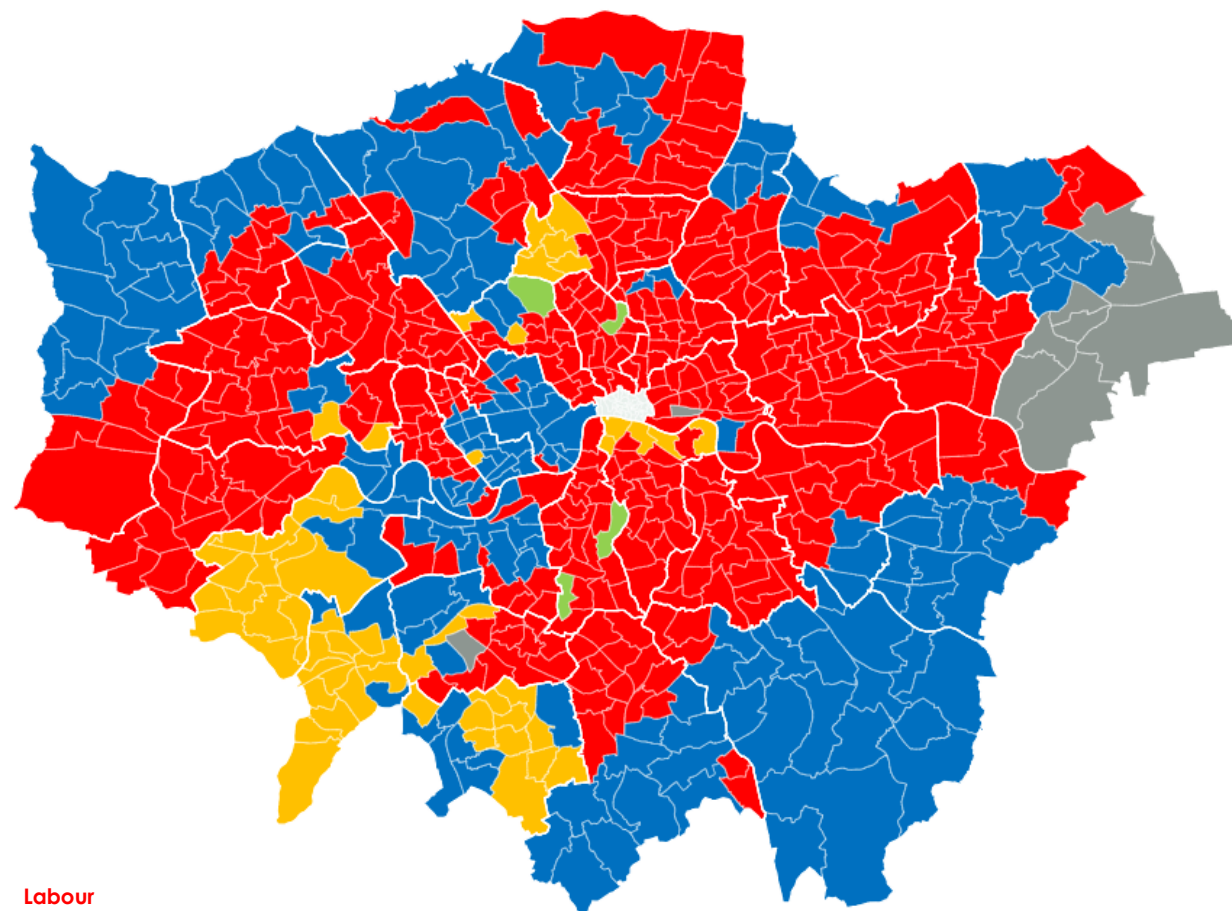
Labour won 44% of the vote, a 15-point lead over the Conservatives on 29%. In terms of vote share. This is the best local election performance ever for Labour in London, including their success in 1994 during John Mayor's troubled premiership.

London is often seen as being a combination of Conservative-leaning suburbs surrounding a Labour-voting urban centre. The real picture is more complex.

Outer London still has a large number of estates, while the Conservatives have struggled with demographic change in many of their old heartlands. The Liberal Democrats have also had a major presence in south west London since the 1990s.

Conversely central London, containing many of the most affluent parts of the country, has several Conservative redoubts. The gentrification of many traditional working class areas in inner London also saw limited Conservative success under David Cameron, even if this is less obvious now.

## Largest party in 2018 local elections by ward



Labour  
Conservative  
Lib Dem  
Green  
Other

These wards are coloured according to the party of the candidate with most votes. If an Independent received the most votes it is coloured according to the party of the candidate with second most votes, as most wards elect three councillors.

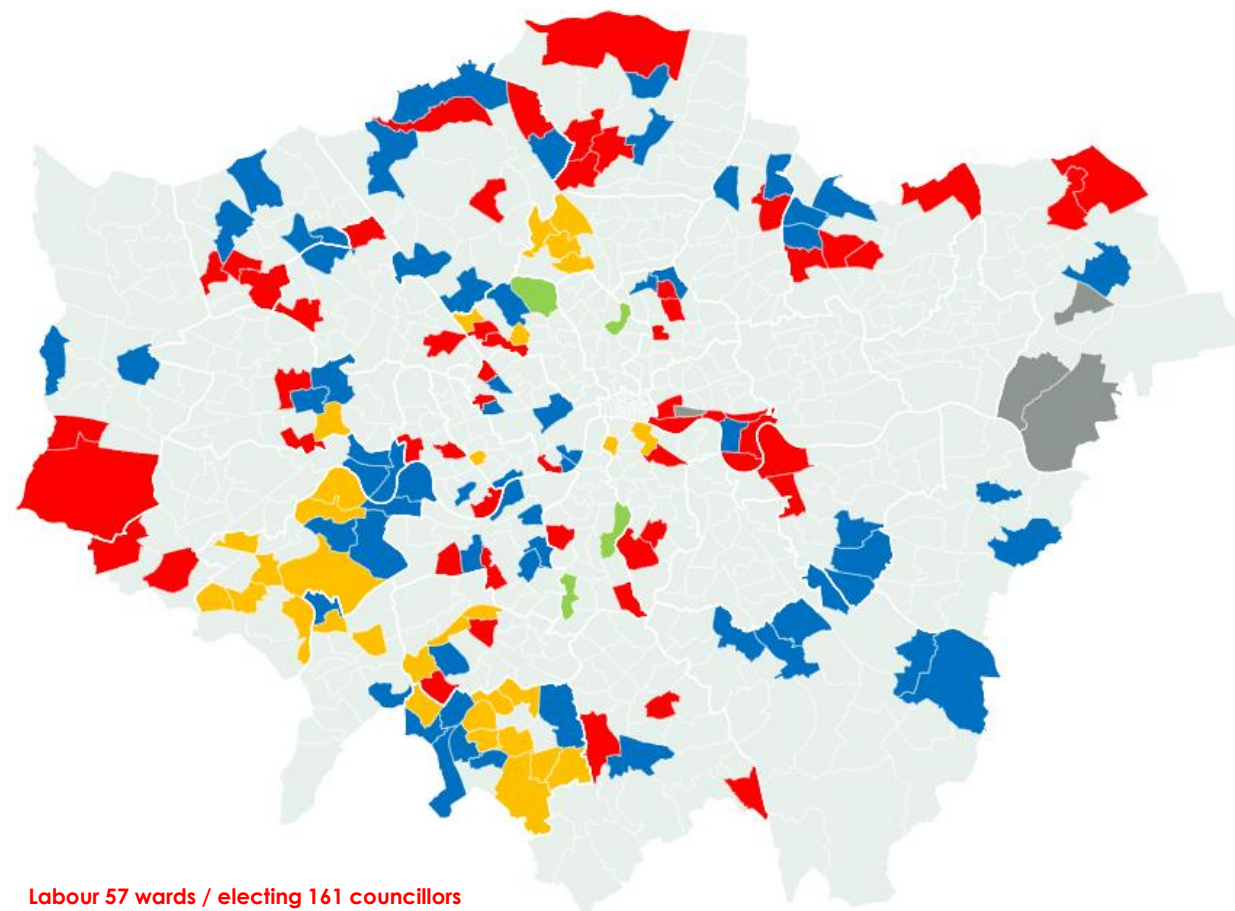
Last time around, Labour came top in 57 wards by less than 15%, and these wards elected a total of 161 councillors.

This was actually fewer than the Conservatives, who held onto 66 wards that would now be considered marginal, electing a total of 194 councillors.

Most of the Lib Dems' wards were held by less than a 15% margin - 32 wards electing a total of 95 councillors.

That the Conservatives held more wards marginally is partly due to a greater efficiency in spreading their vote. However, it also makes their already small number of councillors vulnerable to any further advance in the Labour vote share in 2022.

## The marginal wards as they were in 2018

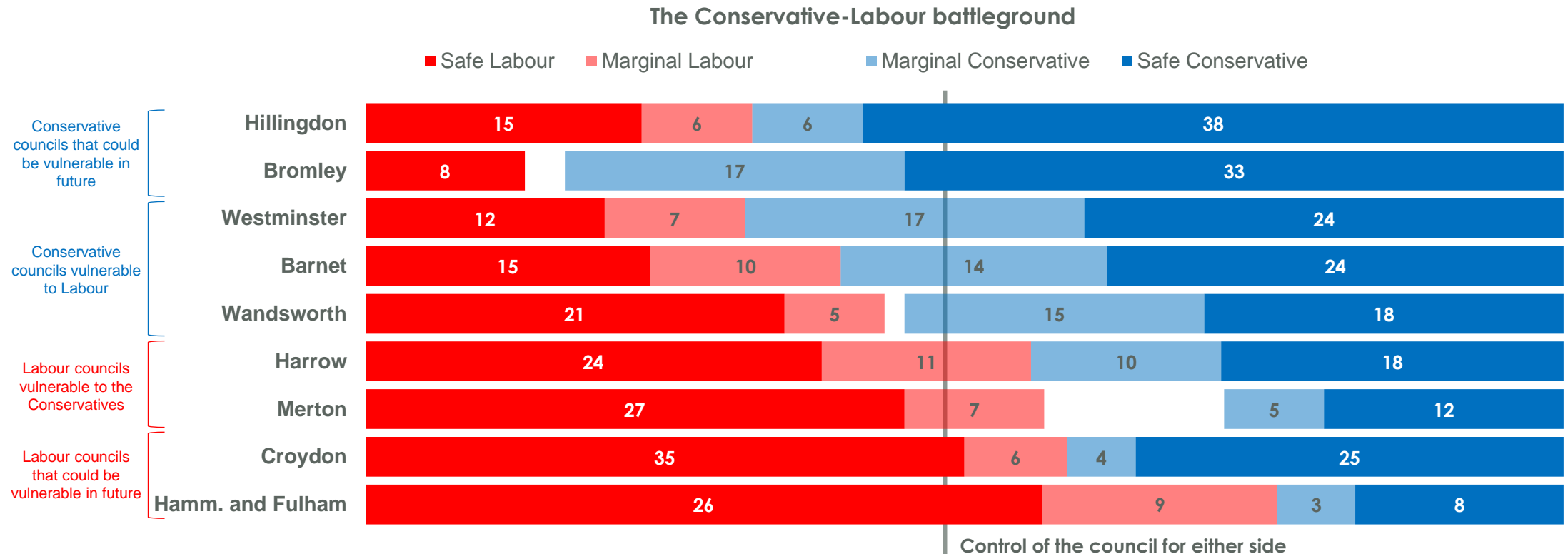


Labour 57 wards / electing 161 councillors  
 Conservative 66 / 194  
 Lib Dem 32 / 95  
 Green 4 / 12  
 Other 4 / 11

These are the wards where the gap between the largest party and the second largest party (excluding independents) is less than 15% of the votes (or requiring a swing of 7.5% or less to take).

# The Conservative-Labour battleground

**Wandsworth** is the most vulnerable Conservative council in London, followed by **Barnet**. If Labour wins most of the Tories' marginal wards in **Westminster** they could also take overall control there. In the longer term the Conservatives could be more vulnerable in **Bromley** than the current tally of councillors appears. The Tories' greatest opportunities are taking **Harrow** or depriving Labour of overall control in **Merton**.

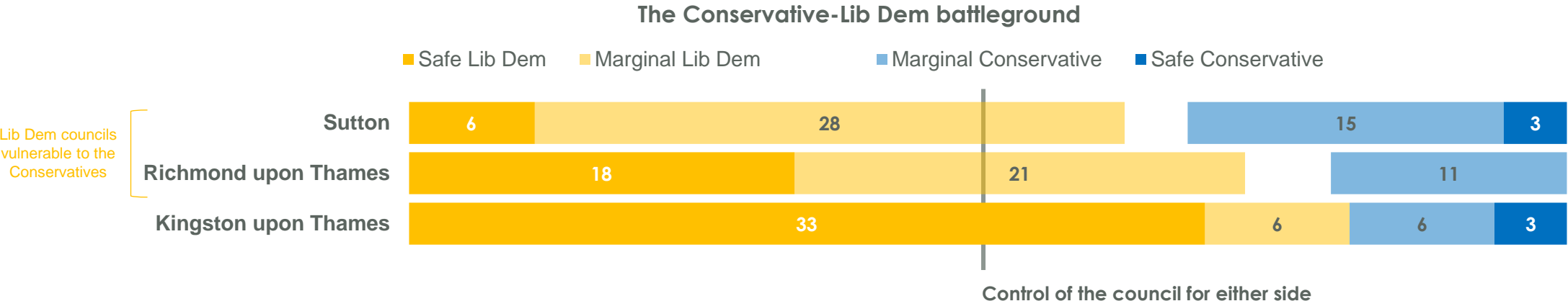


These are the number of marginal councillors for Labour and the Conservatives. This means they were elected in a ward where the gap between the largest party and the second largest party (excluding independents) is less than 15% of the votes (or requiring a swing of 7.5% or less to take). For example, this tally might include a Labour councillor elected alongside two Conservatives in a marginal Conservative ward.

# The Conservative-Lib Dem battleground

**Sutton** is the most vulnerable Liberal Democrat council in London, and the Conservatives' most likely gain considering the large number of marginal wards.

**Richmond upon Thames** has a much stronger base for the Liberal Democrats, including many safer wards in Twickenham, although it still could be vulnerable to a successful Conservative challenge. **Kingston upon Thames** appears to be solidly behind the Lib Dems, particularly nearer Surbiton which falls within the constituency represented by the party leader, Sir Ed Davey.



Lib Dem councils vulnerable to the Conservatives

These are the number of marginal councillors for the Lib Dems and the Conservatives. This means they were elected in a ward where the gap between the largest party and the second largest party (excluding independents) is less than 15% of the votes (or requiring a swing of 7.5% or less to take). For example, this tally might include a Lib Dem councillor elected alongside two Conservatives in a marginal Conservative ward.

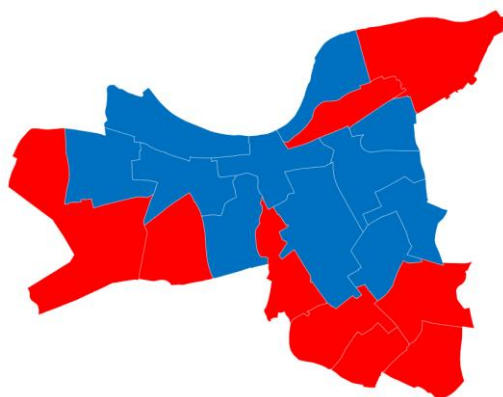


# The battleground boroughs

A focus on the key battleground boroughs and what to look out for on election night

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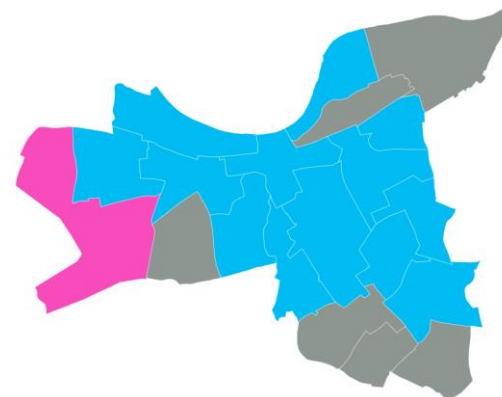
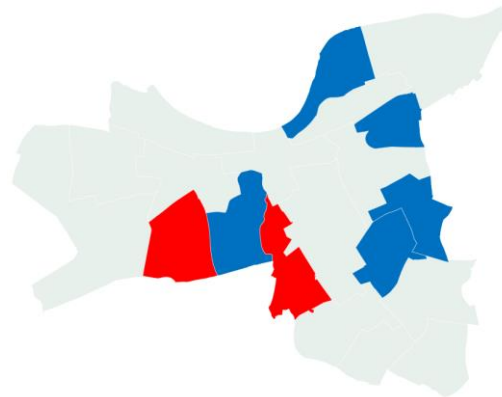
# Wandsworth: background and marginal wards



## Political makeup

While Wandsworth has been a Conservative council for over four decades, the Tories' hold on the council is now precarious and now all three constituencies have a Labour MP. The Conservatives' strength is around Wandsworth Common and Putney. Labour's strength is around Tooting, with growing pockets of support around Battersea and Roehampton.

Labour's opportunities are focused on the two marginal wards around Balham (which elected 6 Conservative councillors in 2018), and the two marginal wards around Clapham Junction and Battersea (which elected 5 Conservative councillors). The Conservatives only need to lose 3 councillors to lose overall control. If Labour gains 5 councillors, they will take overall control.



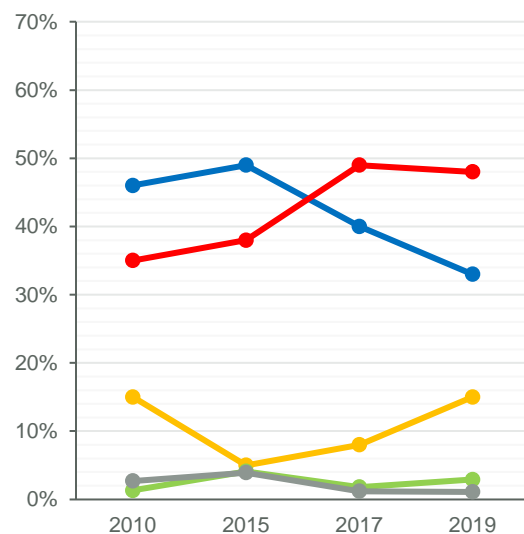
## Demographic makeup

Wandsworth is predominantly made up of **professional graduate neighborhoods**, with several **young and urban districts** at various corners of the borough. Labour controls the latter districts, with Tooting being the best example, as it is much more ethnically diverse than other parts of the borough. On the other hand, the Tories control the leafier and more affluent neighbourhoods stretching from Clapham Common in the east to Barnes Common in the west.

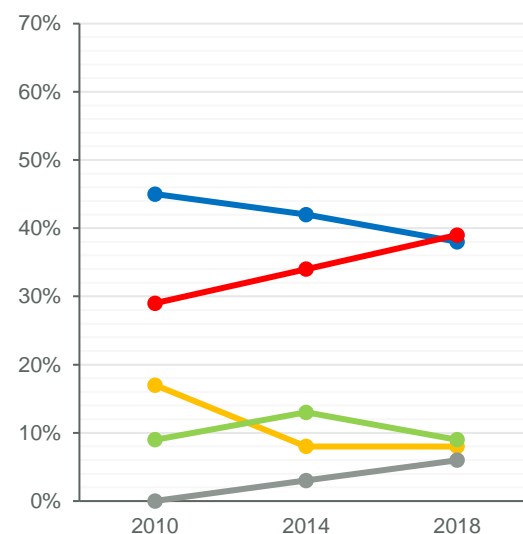
The Conservatives' line of defence is predominantly in the east of the borough. 8 of their 15 vulnerable councillors are from wards within the Battersea constituency alone. Wandsworth is undergoing boundary changes at this election. Most have related successor wards. The key Tory defences will be: *Balham, Lavender, Trinity, St Mary's, Southfields*.

# Wandsworth: electoral history

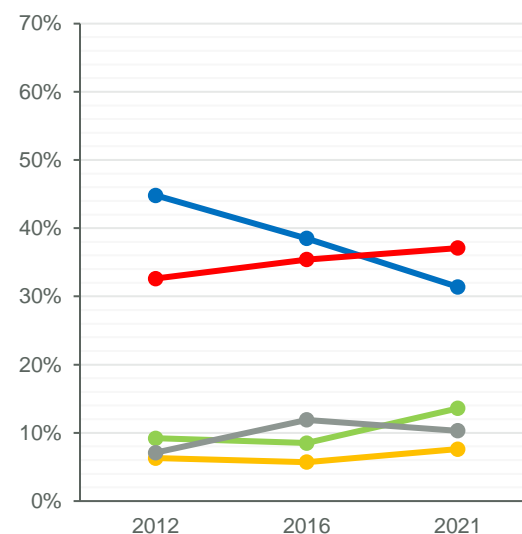
The Conservatives have seen a drastic drop in their fortunes in Wandsworth. They generally did better here than in London as a whole until 2015 and larger than average swings away from the Conservatives begin to be clear from 2016. As late as the 2018 local elections, the Conservatives still have a considerable advantage compared to rest of London where Labour has a large lead. This had almost completely evaporated in the 2019 general election – Wandsworth is where Labour made their one and only gain – and in the 2021 Assembly elections. Even assuming a few additional points at borough council level, it will be an uphill struggle for the Conservatives to reverse this trend to the extent that they will be able to hold onto the council.



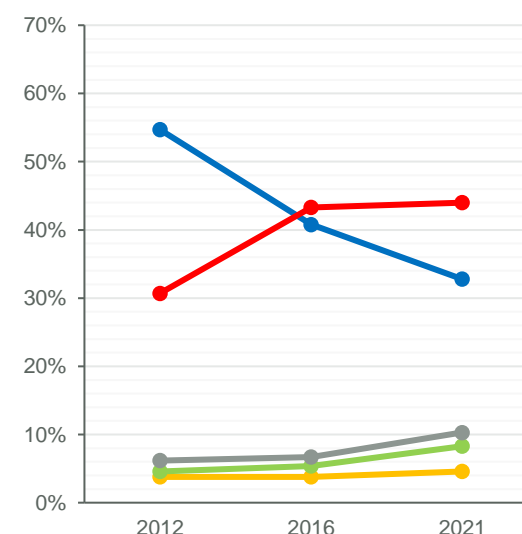
GENERAL ELECTIONS



LOCAL ELECTIONS

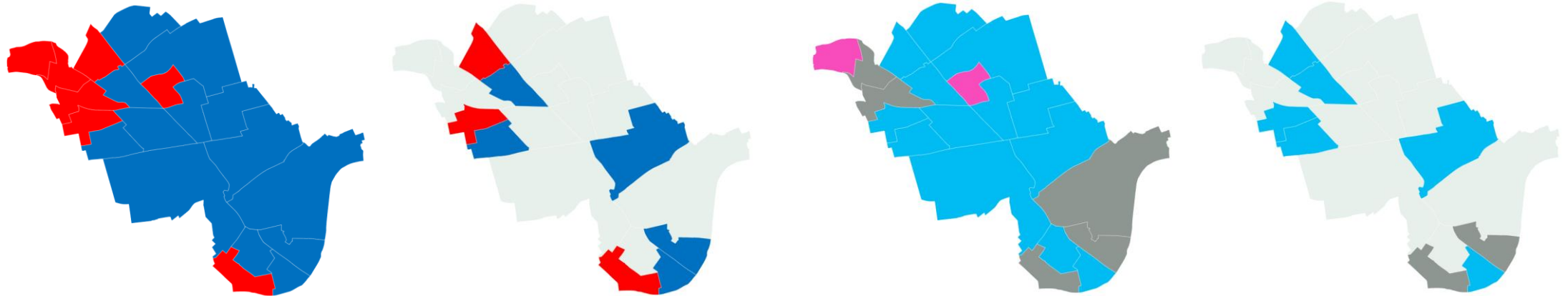


ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS



MAYORAL ELECTIONS

# Westminster: background and marginal wards



## Political makeup

The City of Westminster is often aligned closely with the historically Conservative seat of the same name, including famous areas such as Belgravia and Marylebone. But it also contains historically Labour areas. For example, the former Paddington North constituency was Labour solidly from 1945 until it was abolished. It now makes up a part of the Westminster North constituency, which has been Labour since it was created in 2010.

Currently there are three main battlegrounds.

1. The three wards around Pimlico are marginal, which elected seven Conservative councillors between them.
2. The two wards around Bayswater elected 5 Conservative councillors.
3. Other vulnerable Tory councillors can be found in Little Venice and the West End.

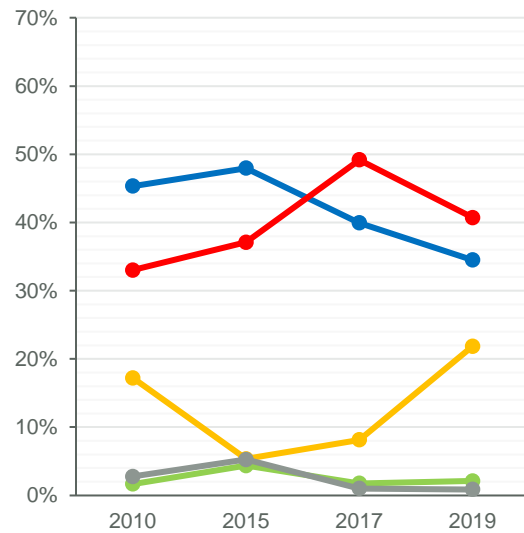
## Demographic makeup

Westminster is predominantly made up of **professional graduate neighborhoods**, with large pockets of **young and urban districts** and **working-class estates**. The political pattern in the north of the constituency is more predictable, with Labour controlling the latter two areas and the Conservatives maintaining a lead in the professional areas.

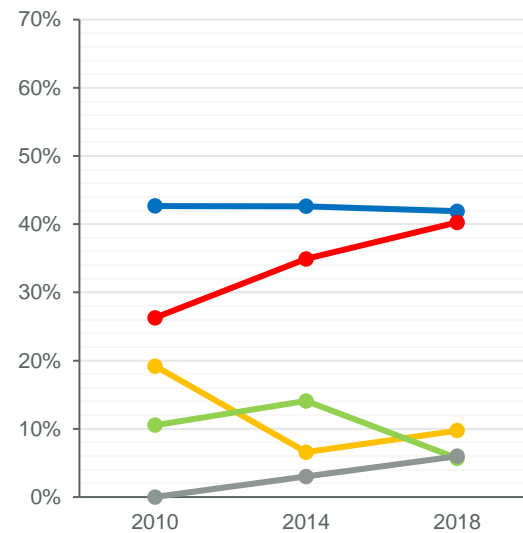
However, the picture is more complex in the south with very atypical areas and the demographics of electors not necessarily matching those of the general residents of the area. The Tories are attempting to defend two or more councillors in these wards: *Bayswater, Lancaster Gate, Little Venice, Tachbrook, West End, Vincent Square*

# Westminster: electoral history

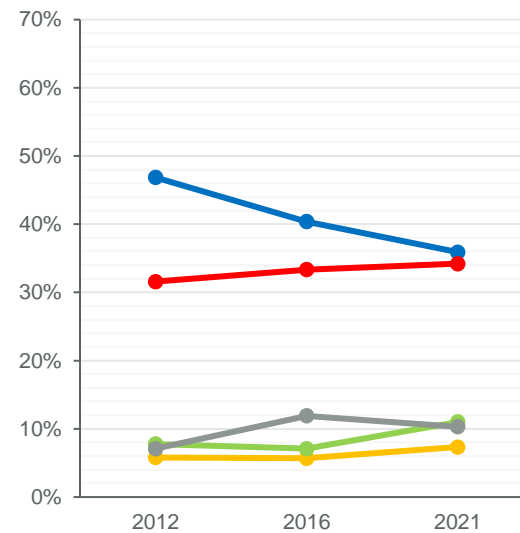
Westminster and Wandsworth voted Conservative by a similar degree at all levels up until 2015. However, the rate at which the Conservatives' advantage in Westminster has dropped has been much slower since 2016. Although Labour has been in contention for the most votes at local level since 2018, this is in the context of Labour having a large lead across London and Labour having the most votes at a general election since 2017. There may be a trend in Labour's direction which makes future gains appear likely, but taking control of the borough council still looks like a challenge too far for Labour this year.



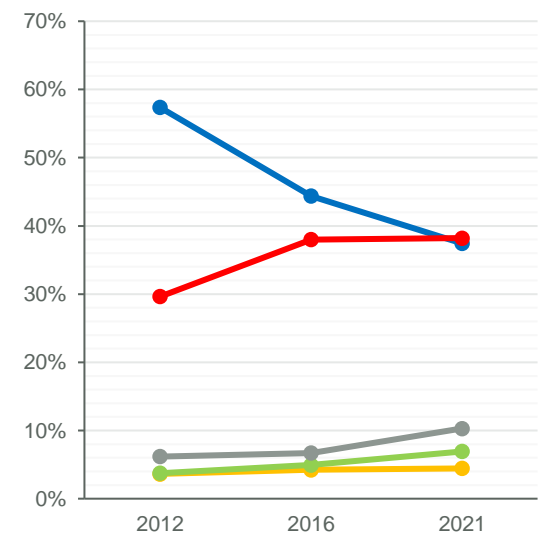
GENERAL ELECTIONS



LOCAL ELECTIONS

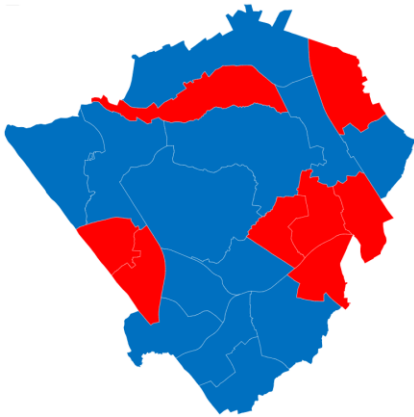


ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS



MAYORAL ELECTIONS

# Barnet: background and marginal wards

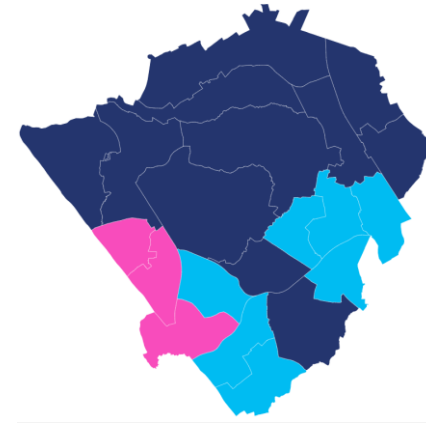
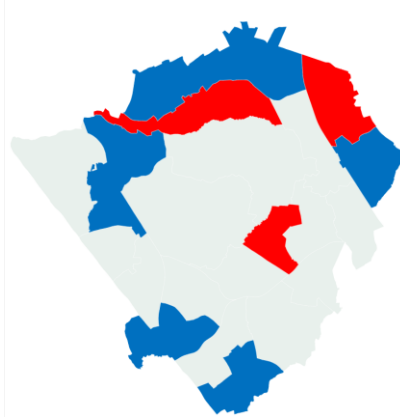


## Political makeup

The Conservatives have been the largest party at local level in Barnet since its inception in 1964 and have controlled the council for all but 8 years of that time. It includes Margaret Thatcher's old seat of Finchley and former cabinet minister Theresa Villiers' seat in Chipping Barnet.

Traditionally a Tory corner of London, Barnet voted for Tony Blair's New Labour in big numbers. Since 2010 it has elected three Conservative MPs but not always by comfortable margins. Historically Chipping Barnet in the north was the strongest part of the borough for the Tories, now all corners of the constituency are a complicated mixture of Conservative and Labour voters.

The primary battleground is in the north of the constituency, stretching from Hale in the west to Brunswick Park in the east. That includes five wards which elected 9 Conservative and 6 Labour councillors. The Tories are also defending 5 more marginal councillors in and around the Golders Green area.



## Demographic makeup

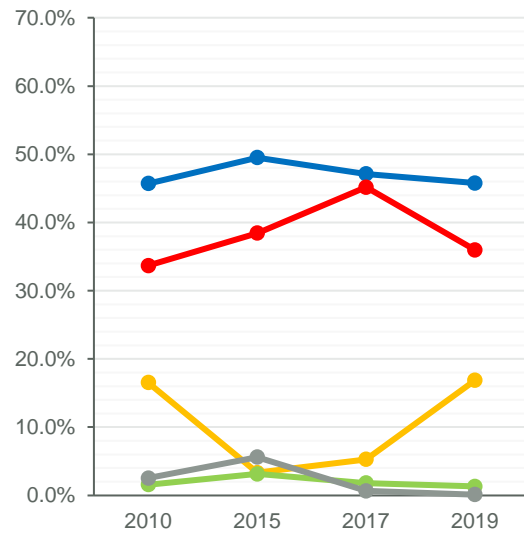
Barnet is for the most part made up of the **older homeowners suburbs**, with **professional graduate neighborhoods** around Finchley and Golders Green, and **working-class estates** in Hendon.

Labour's base is amongst the graduates in Finchley and the large number of minorities in the working-class areas around Colindale. In addition, Labour has made advances in the leafier suburbs in the further north of the borough, with some demographic change impacting this. Barnet is also the local authority with the largest number of Jews in the country, which also makes the political patterns in recent times heavily specific to the area.

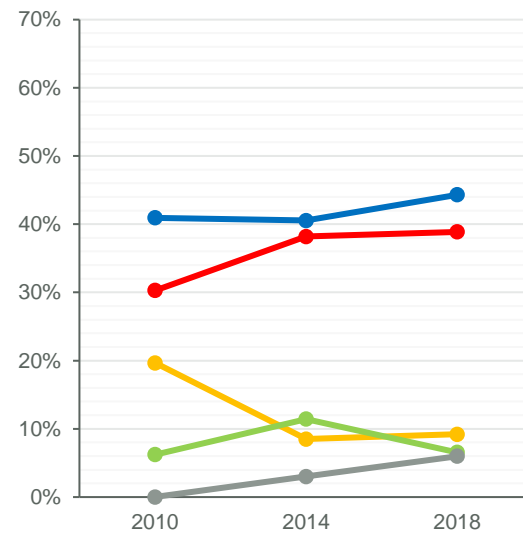
There are boundary changes, Tories will be looking to return councillors in: *Brunswick Park, High Barnet, Underhill, Edwgare, Edgwarebury, West Hendon, Cricklewood and Childs Hill.*

# Barnet: electoral history

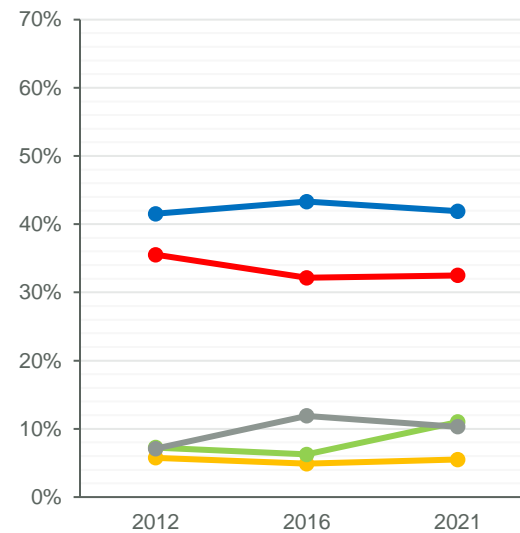
Almost nothing about Barnet looks like the story from Wandsworth or Westminster. Firstly, it is less central, mostly in zones 4 or 5. Then it is also the opposite electoral story, Labour is stronger at borough council level than any other, but also there is very little evidence that it is trending against the Conservatives. Hence, while Barnet might have a large number of marginals wards, a Labour takeover of this council would suggest a far wider wipe out for the Conservatives in London.



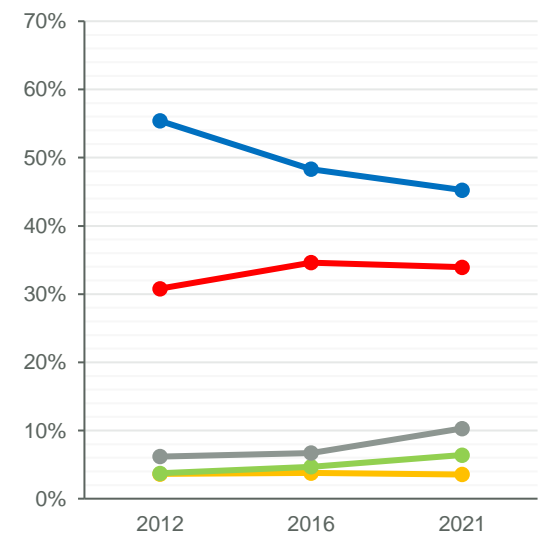
GENERAL ELECTIONS



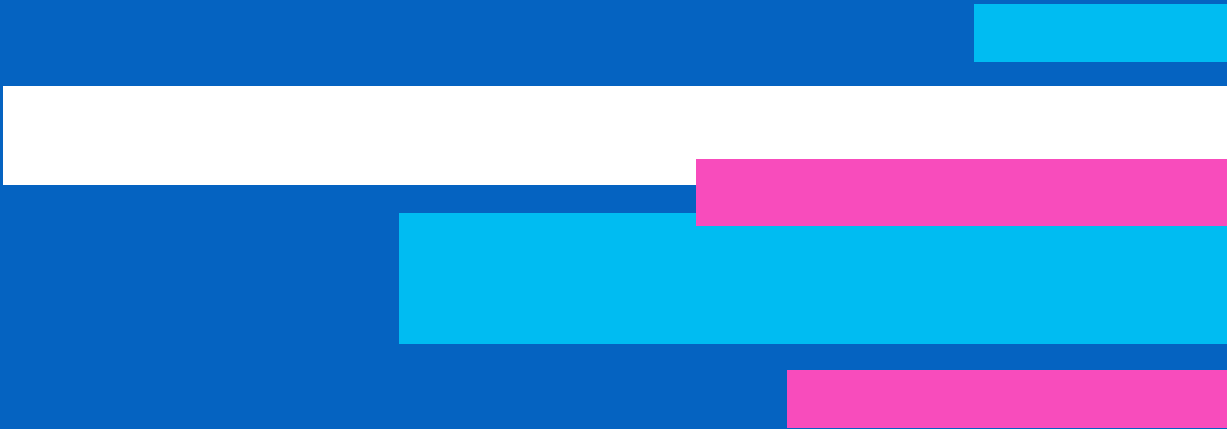
LOCAL ELECTIONS



ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS



MAYORAL ELECTIONS



# Past elections

What recent elections in the capital can tell us about the direction voters are heading

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# The London blues: A story of two halves

It is often assumed that the Conservatives have done poorly in London since the 2016 referendum, with comparatively little attention given to the city re-electing a Conservative mayor as recently as 2012.

In reality, the Conservatives have performed poorly in London for at least the last twenty years, if not longer. David Cameron was the first Conservative prime minister not to win a plurality of votes in London, a position that got worse in 2015 even when he won an overall majority in the general election. Demographic change is the barrier he could not overcome. Even Boris Johnson's re-election in 2012 provided few coattails for his party at the Assembly level where it was trounced by 9 points.

However, this failure of the Conservative Party in London has two phases, and the second, post-referendum, chapter is more ominous for the party in the longer term.

David Cameron maxed out his support in the homeownership suburbs and the well-to-do graduates of inner London in opposition to a divided left-of-centre vote. Since then Labour has consolidated much of left-of-centre vote and the Tories have done badly amongst those successful graduates in central London. The former looked bad, but the latter was lethal in battleground areas such as Kensington and Wandsworth.

Peculiarly, the Conservatives have shed their graduate votes and ended up gaining supporters in the diverse working class estates in London – the 2019 election anticipated this trend before it was replicated in the 2021 assembly and mayoral elections. A trend useful for keeping their city-wide vote share steady, terrible in terms of winning seats or councils.

Key to understanding the results will be 2022 council elections will be spotting if this trend continues or not.

# General elections: average vote share

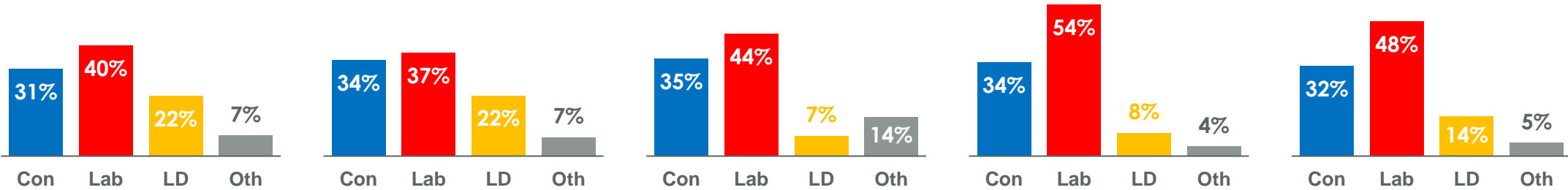
2005

2010

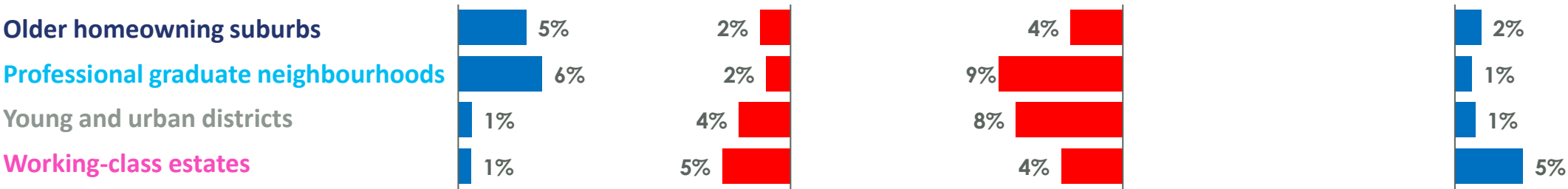
2015

2017

2019

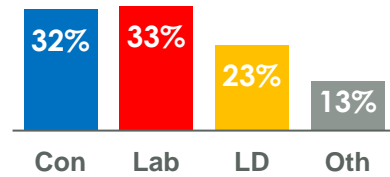


## Conservative-Labour swing by constituency type

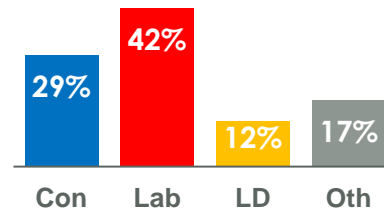


# Local elections: total vote share

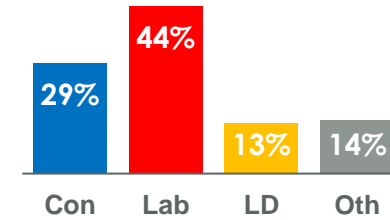
2010



2014



2018



## Conservative-Labour swing by ward type

Older homeowning suburbs

Professional graduate neighbourhoods

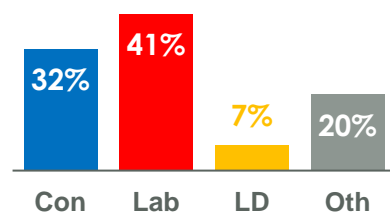
Young and urban districts

Working-class estates

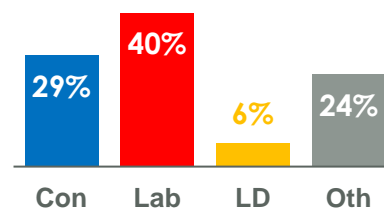


# Assembly elections: total vote share

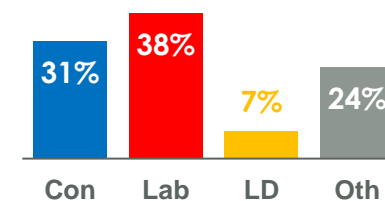
2012



2016



2021



## Conservative-Labour swing by ward type

Older homeowning suburbs

Professional graduate neighbourhoods

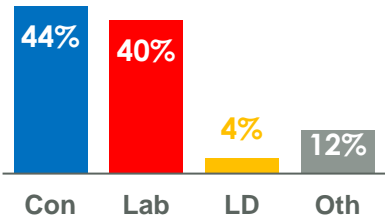
Young and urban districts

Working-class estates

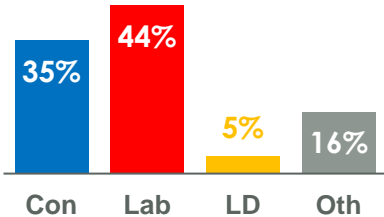


# Mayoral elections: total vote share

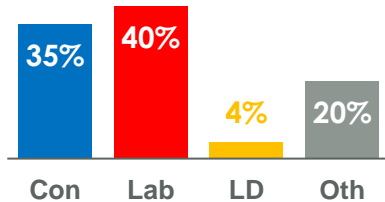
2012



2016



2021



## Conservative-Labour swing by ward type

Older homeowning suburbs

Professional graduate neighbourhoods

Young and urban districts

Working-class estates





# Our polling

What our latest poll in London tells us about the borough council elections taking place this year

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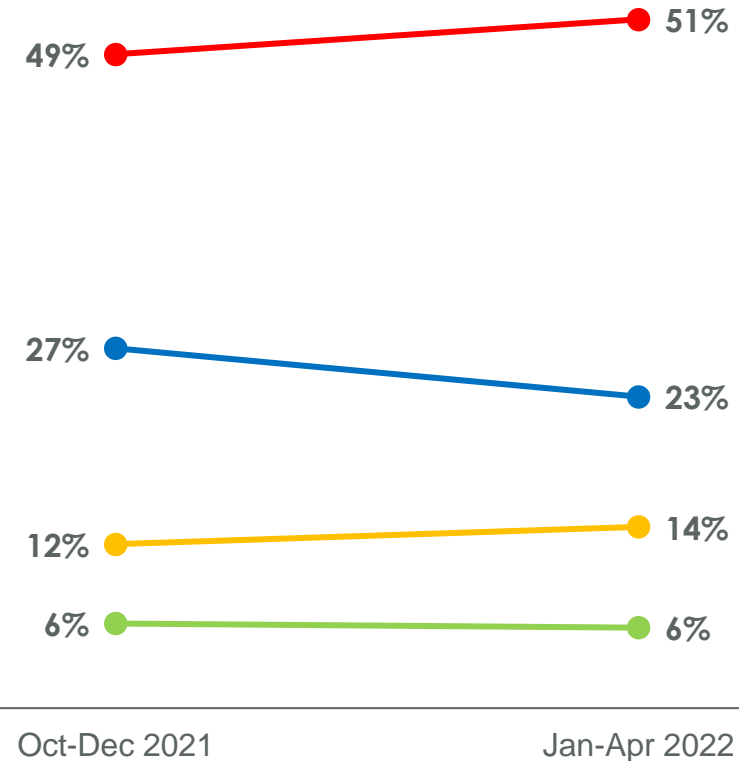
## At a Westminster level, the Conservatives have lost a lot of ground to Labour

We have compared the average polling figures from the London region across 6 polls at the end of 2021, and 9 polls since the start of 2022.

The Conservatives have dropped 4 points between those two periods, from 27% to 23%. Labour has seen an increase of 2 points to 51%, and the Lib Dems have seen an increase of 2 points to 14%.

This suggests a general movement from the Conservatives to the other parties from the end of last year.

### Average Westminster voting intention in London



# Voting intention at the 2022 local elections

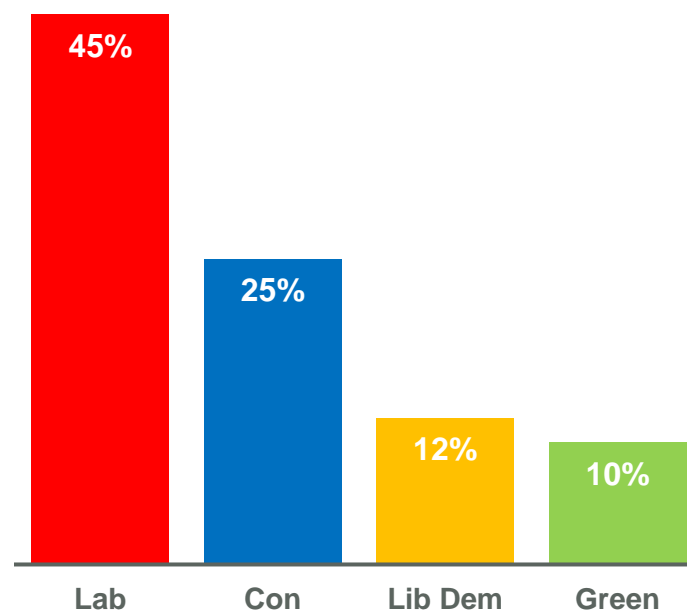
While Labour might be looking at a 20-point lead in vote share at the local elections, this would still be equivalent to a swing of only 2.5% from the Conservatives.

While 25% would be a very bad performance for the Conservatives in the capital, it means that Labour's chances at taking their target councils are far from certain.

At a local level Labour's voting intention lags quite far behind what it is at a Westminster-level, either due to differential turnout or because the Labour coalition is more likely to fracture in favour of other parties such as the Greens.

Despite this, the polling evidence appears to be that the Conservatives are likely to lose ground at these local elections but the scale or impact of these losses is unclear.

## Implied vote share in the 2022 local elections in London



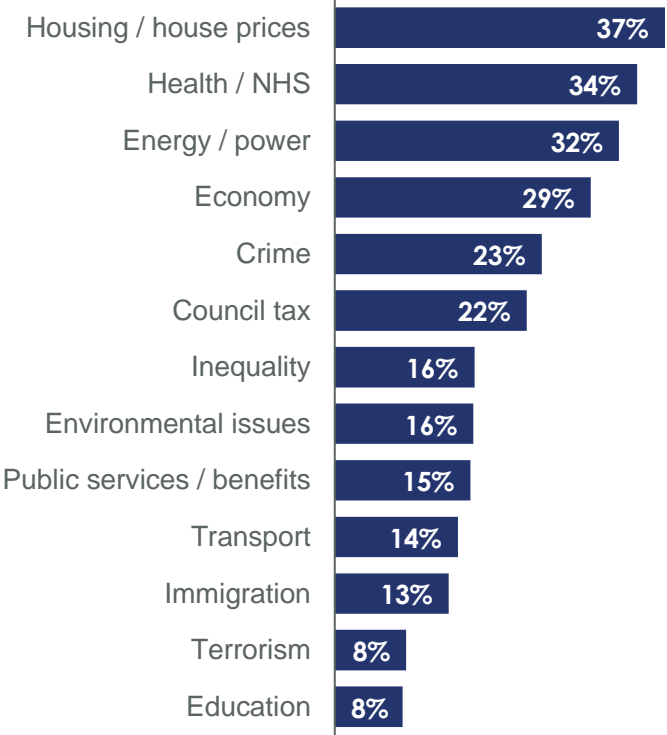
Implied swing to Labour

**2.5%**

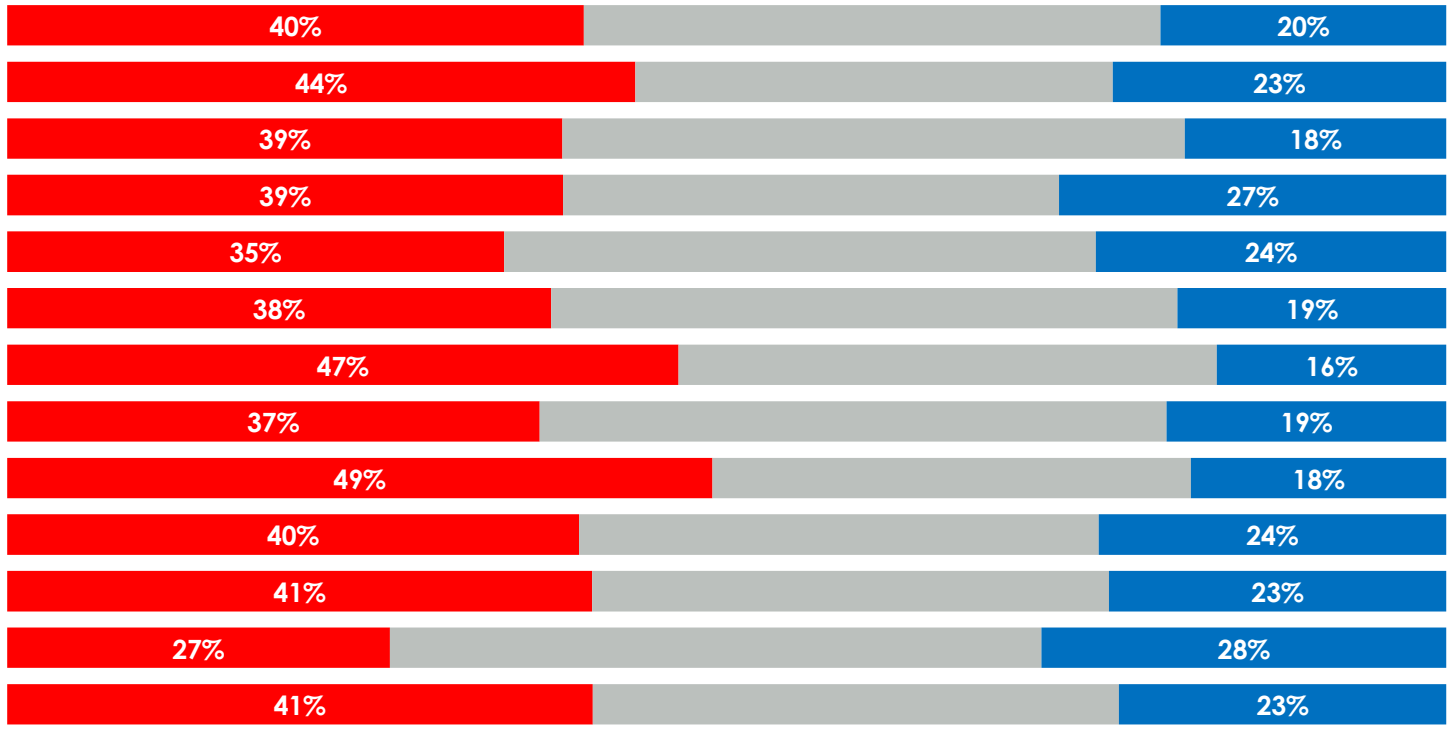
# Housing is the most important local issue

Labour also holds significant leads on the most important local issues. This is true of both traditionally strong Labour subjects (health/NHS, public services) but also more traditionally strong Conservative subjects like crime and council tax. Labour also lead on energy/power which has climbed up the importance ranking recently.

### Most important local issues



### Most trusted party on each issue



A representative study of 1,000 London adults (aged 18+) conducted between 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> April. V1021. And which of the following do you think will be the biggest issues facing Londoners at the moment? Please select up to three options. V104A. And which party locally do you think has the best approach or responds best on...?



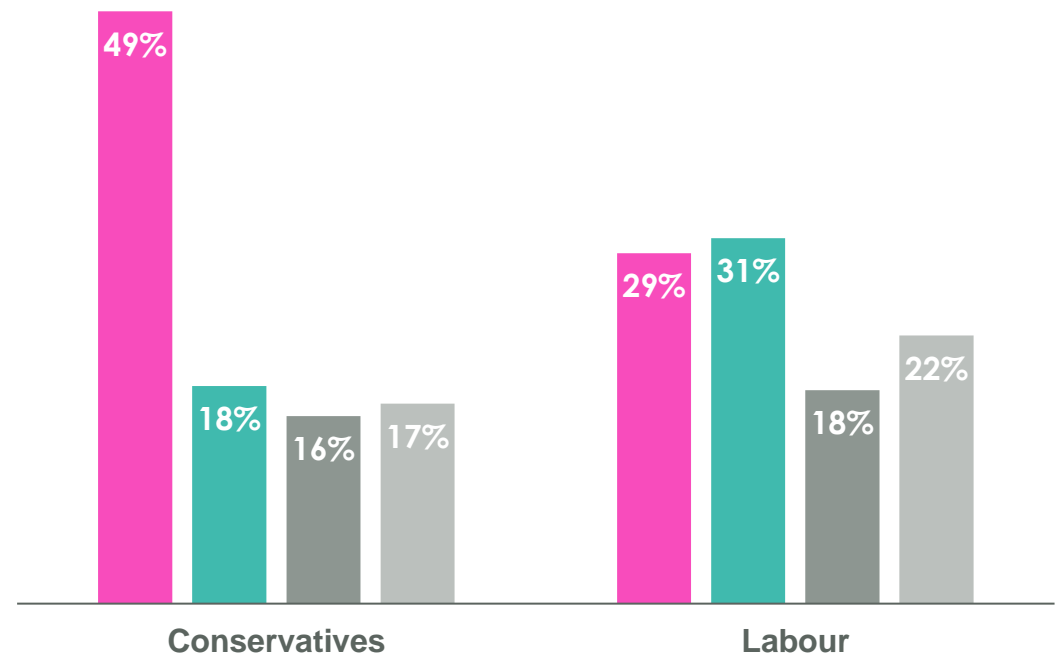
# The Conservatives are seen as a tax raising party at a local level

Half (49%) of Londoners think that the Conservatives are a tax raising party at a local level, while only 29% think that of the Labour Party.

There are specific battleground areas, such as Wandsworth, where the Conservatives are fighting on a low council tax platform. The outcome could depend on if the London-wide perception holds even in these battleground areas, or if intense campaigning at a local level can overturn this perception.

## When it comes to council tax, are these parties...

■ ... a tax raising party ■ ... a tax cutting party ■ Neither ■ Don't know





# About us

Find out a little more about Opinium and what we do

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# The senior political team at Opinium

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The senior political team at Opinium have experience running research and polling around elections, campaigns, and for policy. Get in touch with us to find out more or to receive additional insight about the upcoming local elections.



**ADAM DRUMMOND**



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## Get in touch

Whether you'd like to discuss a project or simply learn more – we'd love to hear from you.

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