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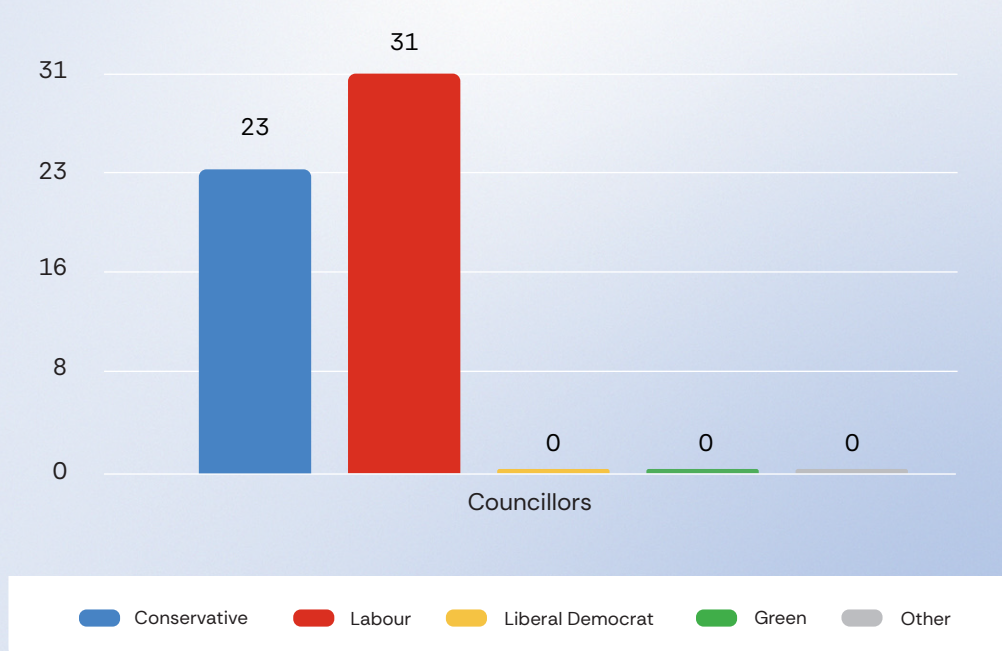
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour’s capture of the City of Westminster for the first time in the borough’s history brought exultation for party activists, some of whom had been striving and failing to replace the Conservatives since the years of gerrymandering under Dame Shirley Porter. A swing of 4.7 per cent was enough to convert a Labour deficit of 12 seats in 2018, when 60 were up for grabs, into a winning distance of eight – 31 out of 54 against the Tories’ 23 under new boundaries.

The glow of victory, though, has been superseded by a sense of an administration under siege. A September 2024 by-election in the critical, marginal West End ward, where Labour won all three seats in 2022, saw a Conservative comeback. The same thing happened in February 2025. The following April, Tory ascendancy in West End was restored when one of Labour’s winners crossed the floor, reducing the majority to just two.

Westminster Council results May 2022 | Total seats: 54



By-elections since May 2022

04 JULY 2024	ABBEY ROAD	CON HOLD
19 SEPTEMBER 2024	HARROW ROAD	LAB HOLD
19 SEPTEMBER 2024	WEST END	CON GAIN FROM LAB
27 FEBRUARY 2025	VINCENT SQUARE	CON GAIN FROM LAB

Not that the Tory ship has enjoyed entirely plain sailing. In June 2025, a member of its crew leaped aboard the rival craft Reform: she has since been anointed her new party’s candidate for Mayor of London in far-off 2028. Another followed in November. There have been two other by-elections, one of them producing a Tory hold, the other a Labour hold. The net outcome is that Labour currently has 28 seats, the Tories 24 and Reform two. Several Westminster wards turn on tight margins and with Reform and the Greens trying to get in on the two-party act, every vote is going to count.

Local landscape

The City of Westminster is in one sense just another of the 32 London boroughs, providing services and functioning as a democratic representative body. But in another it is a uniquely prestigious local authority whose concerns embrace places of national and international importance within its boundary. No other council has as much to do, day to day, with central government and even the royal household.

Westminster is also the location of a lot of strategic London assets that attract the attention of the Mayor of London, such as the entertainment and tourist economy of the West End. The council's perspectives on these things, like those of its residents, does not always chime with those of other levels of government. For example, in its early days the last Labour national government

and the then Conservative-controlled Westminster fell into conflict over the pedestrianisation of the north side of Trafalgar Square. The government was in favour, the council was not. Then, from 2000, the strategic role in the capital was inherited by London's first Mayor, Ken Livingstone. He too wanted pedestrianisation and his will prevailed.

There are parallels with Sadiq Khan's intervention over Oxford Street. The Labour Mayor and the Labour then-Secretary of State, Angela Rayner, announced the plan to pedestrianise it having given the Labour council very little notice and despite its having spent two years painstakingly assembling a plan for improving the Oxford Street area, without pedestrianisation, that residents, businesses and property owners, not always on the

same page, felt able to support. Senior councillors were not amused. But a section of "the nation's high street" is scheduled to go traffic free in the summer.

Westminster isn't all pomp and glamour, though. Its 210,000 people include many who are poor – its overall poverty rate is 42 per cent, higher than that of most of the boroughs, and its child poverty rate is a mid-range 36 per cent. There are working-class communities of long standing even in the wealthiest wards, and whole neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation, notably in the north. Labour has put helping its less affluent residents at the heart of its policy programme.

Local landscape

The Tories' losing the council was predicted by some, though not all analysis took into account the distribution of political support across the wards, which tended to work against Labour: in 2018, Labour got almost as much of the popular vote as the Conservatives – 41.1 per cent compared to 42.8 – but lost by 41 seats to 19. The 2022 result was the result of shrewd campaigning, a shock win in a bedrock Tory ward, Tory voters appalled by “Partygate” staying at home and the high-profile debacle of the Marble Arch Mound, an artificial hill commissioned as a well-intended tourist attraction to draw visitors back to the West End after the pandemic that became costly embarrassment.

Circumstances this time round could hardly be more different. Current leader Adam Hug hit the ground running in 2022 with initiatives for purging Oxford Street of its dodgy “candy shops”. But he now sits on the board of Mayor Khan’s Oxford Street Development Corporation openly opposing its creation and perhaps soon to be replaced by Tory group leader Paul Swaddle.

Westminster Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	48	12	-	-	-	-
2006	48	12	-	-	-	-
2010	48	12	-	-	-	-
2014	44	16	-	-	-	-
2018	41	19	-	-	-	-
2022	23	31	-	-	-	-

 WESTMINSTER

Electoral prospects

Westminster's wards are a collection of oddities and outliers, most of which tended to the Conservatives before 2022. It also has a bit of (hitherto) solid Labour inner-city London within its boundaries. Labour will hope its local endeavours limit the damage done by the party's national brand. The Conservatives will hope their own government's past failings and the populist posture of its current leadership don't impede their recovery. The Greens could eat into Labour's support in a way that Reform won't eat into the Tories'.

Harrow Road

9 seats

The stretch of Harrow Road from where it passes beneath the Westway to the boundary with Brent near Kensal Green Cemetery goes through a diverse working-class neighbourhood. The social housing proportion in these wards is 44-55 per cent and the White British share is 19-25 per cent.

Queen’s Park ward has the distinction of being the only civil parish within London. Established in 2014, it seemed at the time to be a way of getting a measure of devolution for a Labour area in a permanently Tory borough. Much of Queen’s Park consists of a Victorian cottage estate, which is why it has Westminster’s highest proportion of people living in whole houses (34 per cent) rather than flats.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Harrow Road	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.5	72.8	9.7	-	-
Queen’s Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.4	76.4	7.1	-	-
Westbourne	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.9	68.6	6.6	-	6.9

These wards have voted Labour at every opportunity since 1971 – Queen’s Park even survived the 1968 deluge. They returned very high Labour vote shares in 2022 thanks in part to the lack of Green candidates. Council leader Adam Hug represents Westbourne.

Westminster Labour is well-organised and seems unlikely to lose any of these seats. However, the Labour share

slumped by 28 percentage points in the Harrow Road by-election (admittedly on a grim 15 per cent turnout). The beneficiaries were the Workers’ Party and the Greens, who are targeting the ward this time.

Maida Vale

9 seats

These wards fall within Georgia Gould MP's Queen's Park & Maida Vale constituency and form a transitional area between the endearingly scruffy Harrow Road and the imposing but sterile blocks around Regent's Park. As with much of Westminster, nearly everyone lives in flats but the composition varies from council estates - Church Street is the sixth most social-renting ward in London, with 58 per cent of households - purpose-built mansion blocks and converted houses.

Of the three, Little Venice is the wealthiest, the canal basin being a magnet for a particularly upmarket form of gentrification. Church Street is based on the council estates and terraces around Lisson Grove, a resiliently working-class enclave on the more Tory side of the Edgware Road. It is one of the centres of London's Arab community, with a 49 per cent Muslim population.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Church Street	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.8	73.0	8.2	-	-
Little Venice	Con	Con	Lab	46.9	45.0	8.2	-	-
Maida Vale	Lab	Lab	Lab	30.6	61.9	7.6	-	-

Politically, Maida Vale and Little Venice fall between the hitherto Labour wards along Harrow Road and the Conservative redoubt of Marylebone. Church Street has been a loyal Labour island, although even this ward elected a Tory in a by-election in 2008. Maida Vale is another Westminster ward which was usually Labour before 1990 then voted Conservative until the 2010s.

After that, Labour won a seat in 2014, all three in 2018 and its majority in 2022 was healthy. The Conservative bid to recover Maida Vale is spearheaded by controversial former Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski.

Little Venice has seemingly shifted Right more durably. It was all-Labour in 1978 and 1986, but only one Labour candidate out of three won in 2022.

Paddington

9 seats

These three wards are basically the stretch of north Westminster between Hyde Park and the Westway (although the corner by the Brunel Estate is in Westbourne). Hyde Park includes Paddington station and the development area around the canal, with Bayswater (and Lancaster Gate which is essentially east Bayswater) to the west. Like the adjoining part of Kensington & Chelsea it is a densely populated area that veers between genteel and shabby, with wealth and poverty living in close quarters among the stucco terraces. Over 50 per cent of all households rent privately in all three. The population is transient and international, with a high proportion of EU citizens. Parties and, indeed, registration officers, often find it difficult to contact them.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bayswater	Lab	Lab	Lab	32.6	57.8	9.6	-	-
Hyde Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	41.4	45.9	12.7	-	-
Lancaster Gate	Con	Lab	Lab	40.0	40.0	8.4	11.6	-

The Conservatives won every seat here from 1990 until 2018 and it produced some of their most prominent local figures – Shirley Porter in Hyde Park, Simon Milton and Robert Davis in Lancaster Gate. Bayswater was targeted in Porter’s “gerrymandering” scheme for altering the social composition of marginal wards after a close shave in 1986.

The Tory monopoly was broken when Labour gained one of the Bayswater seats in 2018 and emphatically picked up the other two last time. The other two wards joined the charge. Labour’s success in Hyde Park was arguably the most astonishing result of the entire 2022 elections. It had been a safe Conservative ward ever since the first Westminster elections in 1964 and Labour, perhaps tired of getting 15 per cent of the vote, did not contest it in 2010. But the stars aligned in 2022, helped by the

troubled mound being positioned very visibly at the corner of Hyde Park ward. One of the Labour candidates was Paul Dimoldenberg, who had been Labour group leader at the time of the Porter scandal. Winning in her old ward was revenge served cold.

The Conservatives lost their last seat in these wards when Lancaster Gate councillor Laila Cunningham defected to Reform in June 2025 and was proclaimed mayoral candidate. She won’t be defending her seat, and as this is not natural Reform territory the Conservatives must have hopes of clawing back their recent losses, particularly in Hyde Park. Labour’s 2022 miracle in these wards, as across Westminster generally, was facilitated by the Greens standing fewer candidates than before – in 2014, the last time they fielded candidates in all three, they averaged 15 per cent.

Marylebone

9 seats

This subsection of Westminster, which covers most of the pre-1965 borough of St Marylebone (Church Street and part of West End were also included), stretches north from Portman Square through residential Marylebone up past Lord’s cricket ground to St John’s Wood. Its reputation as a district of mansion blocks inhabited by the upper middle classes is largely justified, although there are some very expensive terraced and even detached houses at the Abbey Road end in particular

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Abbey Road	Con	Con	Con	47.5	29.8	10.5	12.2	-
Marylebone	Con	Con	Con	46.5	22.8	30.6	-	-
Regent’s Park	Con	Con	Con	47.3	29.2	9.9	13.6	-

Marylebone is the ward with the highest proportion of private renting households in London – 60 per cent – other than the always anomalous Wembley Park ward in Brent. It is also the Westminster ward with the highest proportion of professionals and managers – the idle rich are not as numerous as in Knightsbridge & Belgravia. All three wards voted Conservative in 2022 as those of this area have continuously since 1964.

The area did, however, contribute to Labour’s majority in another way. Its population and registered electorate have been dropping for years. Second homes and pieds-à-terre are only intermittently occupied, and often in the name of a single individual. Mansion blocks are difficult for electoral registration officers to enumerate properly.

This means that while Paddington, Harrow Road and Maida Vale have kept the same numbers of councillors, Marylebone and Victoria have not. Compared with 1986, Labour’s previous best year, this, along with a boundary change, has resulted in the number of councillors representing this part of Westminster, a fall from the earlier 14. Damien Moore, Conservative MP for Southport from 2017 until 2024, is contesting Abbey Road.

Central

9 seats

The central wards are Westminster’s most anomalous. An area famous for government, entertainment, tourism, law and matters of national and international significance that generate an outsize share of GDP is less noted as a place where people live. There are residential areas tucked away amid the bustle and flats in even the most commercial areas.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
St James’s	Con	Con	Con	49.0	37.0	14.0	-	-
Vincent Square	Con	Lab	Con	46.3	43.1	10.6	-	-
West End	Lab	Lab	Lab	41.1	49.7	9.2	-	-

West End ward covers Westminster’s part of Fitzrovia, Mayfair and Soho, with its politics dominated by the concerns of the latter. St James’s ward includes the Palace of Westminster, Theatreland, Charing Cross station and Buckingham Palace. Royal family members don’t vote, but there are resident staff who do and their political allegiances are disputed. Guess rang from “die-hard Labour” to “more Conservative than the royals themselves”. Social housing accounts for 24 per cent of households in West End and 28 per cent in St James’s. Both wards are around half private rented.

Vincent Square ward is a quiet corner of central London lying south-west of the Parliament. It combines several sorts of residential area – social housing at the Edwardian Millbank estate near Tate Britain and at the Grosvenor Estate, wealthy mansion blocks near Westminster Cathedral and some more recent development near Vincent Square itself. It is politically polarised and gave a split result in 2022.

Labour won four seats out of nine in 2022 but has since lost three of them – two through the West End and

Vincent Square by-elections one due to their defector to the Tories. The pedestrianisation of Oxford Street is a major issue for voters in West End.. Even at the heart of London, politics is local as well as national.

Victoria

9 seats

This is the southwestern part of Westminster, marked off by Grosvenor Place and Vauxhall Bridge Road. Knightsbridge, which forms a salient stretching west as far as the Royal Albert Hall, and Belgravia have long been wealthy, elite parts of the global capital. The concentration of international wealth and old money creates a hard-core Conservative vote, but even here London is complicated and there are poorer communities close by.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Knightsbridge & Belgravia	Con	Con	Con	62.0	22.4	15.6	-	-
Pimlico North	Con	Con	Con	48.4	35.8	15.8	-	-
Pimlico South	Lab	Lab	Lab	43.3	49.0	7.7	-	-

Pimlico is the raffish shadow of Belgravia, the other side of the tracks heading into Victoria. But these things are relative, and its stucco terraces would be regarded as exclusive anywhere else. The curve of the Thames, running west to east here before it takes a northward turn at Vauxhall Bridge, is where the most interesting buildings are to be found. Pimlico South combines the 1950s Churchill Gardens estate (the ward is 44 per cent social housing) with some private developments looking out on the river, the most famous being Dolphin Square where there are over 1,200 flats.

Labour did very well to win Pimlico South in 2022. Its predecessor Churchill ward was a Labour-inclined marginal (though Tory from 1990 to 2014) but boundary changes were very adverse. It will require a mighty effort to hold in 2026. The 2022 result in Pimlico North was also surprisingly close, given that the predecessor Warwick ward favoured the Conservatives by 60 per cent to 28 in 2018, though a new boundary probably helped Labour a bit by taking in the Lillington Gardens estate.

Knightsbridge & Belgravia has usually been one of the safest Conservative wards in London: the Tories got 96 per cent of the vote in the former Knightsbridge ward in 1968 and 81 per cent in today's ward in 2018. The 2022 result did not exactly make it a marginal, but it dropped from having the highest Conservative share in London in to being outside the top five.



WESTMINSTER

What to watch for

There is a feeling that Labour has done a good job in its four years and the experience of Westminster Tories in the 1990s suggests incumbents can win there despite their parties being disliked nationally. Electors in marginal wards may still bear the Tories ill-will. But the dire state of the polls, the by-election outcomes and the incursions of the Greens amount to formidable headwinds for Labour. The Tory path back to power looks quite easy.