

Liberal Democrat leader

HAVING PUBLISHED THE last summary of Liberal Democrat leadership performance in the autumn 2019 edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* (issue 104), we had not expected to need to update it so soon. However, Jo Swinson's loss of her seat in the December 2019 general election, and her subsequent resignation as leader, means that, sadly, we need to.

The table here therefore compares the performance of the seven Liberal Democrat leaders to date in terms of their personal ratings and party ratings in the opinion polls, performance in general, European and local elections and numbers of party members, at the beginning and end of their leaderships.

Although these statistics of course ignore the political context of the leaders' periods in office, and can mask large swings within the periods – and other, non-quantitative, measures of a leader's performance may be just as, if not more, important – these figures do have value in judging the effectiveness of any given leader.

Notes and sources

- a Ipsos-MORI series on 'satisfaction with party leaders'. Ratings are given for the nearest available date to the leader's election and resignation.
- b Ipsos-MORI did not ask this question during Jo Swinson's leadership after October 2019.
- c Ipsos-MORI series on 'voting intention trends'. Where resignation immediately followed an election, the election result is given.
- d Willie Rennie was elected in the Dunfermline & West Fife by-election during the 2006 leadership election.
- e In December 2018 Stephen Lloyd, one of the 12 Liberal Democrat MPs elected in 2017, resigned the whip to sit as an independent. In June 2019 Chuka Umunna MP joined the party.
- f Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, Elections Centre, Plymouth University. For voting figures, years in which local elections coincided with general elections are excluded.
- g The total number of councillors has been falling since the mid 1990s, as unitary authorities have replaced district councils in some areas; from 1994 to 2013, for example, the total number of councillors fell by about 15 per cent.
- h Before 2015: Mark Pack. 'Liberal Democrat

Leadership performance				
	Ashdown (1988–99)		Kennedy (1999–2006)	
<i>Personal ratings (net score satisfied minus dissatisfied (per cent) and date)^a</i>				
When elected	–4	Aug 1988	+11	Aug 1999
Highest during leadership	+58	May 1997	+42	June 2001
Lowest during leadership	–24	July 1989	+8	June 2004
When stood down	+39	July 1999	+20	Aug 2005
Range (highest – lowest)	82		34	
<i>Party poll ratings (per cent and date)^c</i>				
When elected	8	July 1988	17	Aug 1999
Highest during leadership	28	July 1993	26	Dec 2004, May 2005
Lowest during leadership	4	June – Aug, Nov 1989	11	Oct 99, July 00, Jan, May 01
When stood down	17	Aug 1999	15	Jan 2006
<i>Westminster election performance: Liberal Democrat MPs and vote (%)</i>				
MPs when elected	19		46	
MPs when stood down	46		62	
Highest election vote (%), date	17.8	1992	22.0	2005
Lowest election vote (%), date	16.8	1997	18.3	2001
<i>European election performance: Liberal Democrat MEPs and vote (%)</i>				
MEPs when elected	0		10	
MEPs when stood down	10		12	
Highest election vote (%), date	16.7	1994	14.9	2004
Lowest election vote (%), date	6.4	1989	n/a	
<i>Local election performance: councillors and vote^{f,g}</i>				
Councillors when elected	3,640		4,485	
Councillors when stood down	4,485		4,743	
Highest election vote (%), date	27	1994	27	2003, 2004
Lowest election vote (%), date	17	1990	25	2002
<i>Party membership^{h,i}</i>				
Membership when elected	80,104		82,827	
Membership when stood down	82,827		~72,000	
Change (per cent)	+3		–13	

membership figures', <https://www.markpack.org.uk/143767/liberal-democrat-membership-figures/>; 2015 on: Liberal Democrat HQ.

- i Ashdown, Farron and Cable announced their intention to resign in advance, and stood down on the election of their successor; the membership figures for the end of their period in office and the start of their successor's are therefore identical. Kennedy, Campbell and

Clegg all resigned with immediate effect; the exact membership figures are not available at the point of Kennedy's and Campbell's resignations, so figures given here are approximate. While we know that membership increased sharply after Clegg's resignation, in the run-up to the 2015 leadership election, it is not known whether this happened after Kennedy's resignation in 2006 or Campbell's in 2007.

Leadership performance

<i>Campbell (2006–07)</i>		<i>Clegg (2007–15)</i>		<i>Farron (2015–17)</i>		<i>Cable (2017–19)</i>		<i>Swinson (2019)</i>	
+5	Mar 2006	-3	Jan 2008	-7	Sept 2015	-1	Sept 2017	0	July 2019
+6	May 2006	+53	Oct 2010	-1	Dec 2016	-1	Sept 2017	0	July 2019
-13	May 2007	-45	Oct 2012, Sept 2014	-19	May 2017	-19	Oct 2018	-12	Oct 2019
-11	Sept 2007	-21	April 2015	-19	May 2017	-7	June 2019	n/a ^b	
19		98		18		18		12	
19	Mar 2006	14	Dec 2007	10	Sept 2015	9	July 2017	20	July 2019
25	Apr 2006	32	Apr 2010	14	Dec 2016	22	June 2019	23	Sept 2019
11	Oct 2007	6	Feb 2015	6	Feb, Apr, Sept 2016	6	Mar 2018	12	Dec 2019
11	Oct 2007	8	May 2015	7	June 2017	20	July 2019	12	Dec 2019
63 ^d		63		8		12		12	
63		8		12		12 ^e		11	
n/a		23.0	2010	7.4	2017	n/a		11.5	2019
n/a		7.9	2015	n/a		n/a		n/a	
12		12		1		1		16	
12		1		1		16		16	
n/a		13.7	2009	n/a		19.6	2019	n/a	
n/a		6.6	2014	n/a		n/a		n/a	
4,743		4,420		1,810		1,803		2,536	
4,420		1,810		1,803		2,536		2,549	
25	2006	25	2009	18	2017	17	2019	n/a	
24	2007	11	2014	15	2016	14	2018	n/a	
72,064		64,728		60,215		104,925		110,960	
~64,000		44,568		104,925		110,960		127,577	
-11		-31		+74		+6		+15	

