

# Raising money for the local campaigns

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*Money is a necessary component of a candidate's constituency campaign, supporting the work of agents, activists and volunteers promoting the party's cause. Much of that money is raised through donations. So how much have the parties raised locally since the last election – and where? [Ron Johnston](#), [Charles Pattie](#) and [David Cutts](#) have analysed the latest available data from the Electoral Commission's records.*

Money is essential to election campaigns. In the individual constituencies much of it pays for printing leaflets and posters, publicising the local candidate as an aid to winning support. Some sustains the party's local office, its agent's work (even if she is unpaid), and its IT and databases.

Parties are increasingly involved in continuous campaigns between elections, especially in target seats central to their overall strategies; most of those were marginal at the last election. The tempo of campaigning and spending builds up as election day nears, but campaign spending is controlled in the last months before the election: from late December 2014 on, legislation limits candidates' spending to a maximum of around £50,000 some 23 per cent higher than in 2010.

Much of the money spent is obtained from either fund-raising events or donations: few local parties can draw on substantial assets. So as May 2015 approaches, how well have they done in getting donations – and to which constituencies? All donations to a local party above £1,000 are reported to the Electoral Commission and data covering the period from July 2010 (i.e. immediately after the last election) to September 2014 are [now available](#). These have been assembled by constituencies, grouped for each party in the [accompanying table](#) according to their margin of victory/defeat in 2010.

Over that 54-month period, Conservative local parties received more than their two main rivals combined: Labour local parties got as many donations as the Conservatives but they were on average only half as big (£2,129 as against £4,712: the Liberal Democrats' average was £2,741).

Each party received much more where it won in 2010 than in those lost then (77 per cent for the Conservatives, 64 per cent for Labour, and 59 per cent for the Liberal Democrats). Each, it seemed, was preparing for a defensive campaign – focusing on hanging on to what it already held. Each got at least one donation in most of the marginal seats it was defending, but in only around half of the seats where it could unseat the incumbent with a small swing. Thus the Conservatives raised a total of over £1 million in some of the seats lost by less than 10 percentage points in 2010, but nothing in half of them; by contrast they raised £2 million in seats they were defending by those margins. They also raised over £2 million in 89 of their 147 safest seats – and £0.45 million in 24 of those where they lost by over 20 points in 2010.

Labour, too, got many donations in seats surely classed as hopeless in its 2015 strategy – almost as much as in those lost by less than 10 points in 2010, where its chances of forming the next government hang. And it raised over £750,000 (23 per cent of the total) – in seats where victory again is pretty certain. The Liberal Democrats also raised much more in the seats they are defending – and in most of them.

These data do not quite tell the full story. Some local Labour parties cover two – in a few cases more – constituencies, which are not included in the table. The Liberal Democrats had many more of these: as well as the £3.2 million donated to individual constituency parties, £1.7 million went to county or borough multi-constituency parties, and £0.6 million to regional party organisations.

Of the other parties, UKIP raised £4.1 million in total over the period, but of that only £180,000 went to individual constituencies, and a further £290,000 to regional-level organisations.

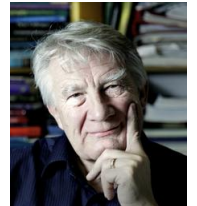
Conservative local parties spent £9.8 million campaigning in the three months before the 2010 general election: Labour spent £6.5 million and the Liberal Democrats £5.0 million. Between then and September 2014 the three raised c.£14 million in donations to local parties. Some (much?) of it will already have been spent, either preparing for 2015 or fighting other campaigns (local, devolved body and European elections, for example). On previous experience, few will have built up substantial war chests to spend as the general election approaches – and it remains to be seen how much more they can extract from donors between last September and election day. Meanwhile, three conclusions stand out:

- The Conservatives have so far raised much more in donations than their opponents;
- All three parties are attracting – and presumably seeking – more money in marginal seats they are defending than in those where unseating the current incumbent could increase their chances of being in government next time; and
- A lot of money is being donated in constituencies where it is needed less (because the party is almost certain either to win or lose there) than in the marginal seats.

Each seems to be fighting a pessimistic, defensive campaign so far.

### About the Authors

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