

# Euro elections – the contest in the North East

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When North East voters go to the polls on 22 May to elect MEPs to the European Parliament for another five years, they will be electing only three MEPs, and the most likely outcome is that they will represent Labour, UKIP and the Conservatives. The **Democratic Audit** team explain how the List PR system works in such a small region and present a simplified ballot paper that should help voters in making a decision. We also give some background on the big six parties' main candidates.



In the three previous North East elections for MEPs (in 2000, 2004 and 2009) held under proportional representation, Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats each won a single seat. Our table shows the 2009 version of this three times repeated pattern:

**Table 1: What happened in the North East last time, June 2009**

	Votes (in 000s)	Vote share %	MEPs elected	Name of MEP elected
Labour	147.3	25.1	1	<a href="#">Stephen Hughes</a>
Conservatives	116.9	19.9	1	<a href="#">Martin Callanan</a>
Liberal Democrats	103.7	17.7	1	<a href="#">Fiona Hall</a>
UKIP	90.7	15.5	0	
BNP	52.7	9.0	0	
Green party	31.1	5.3	0	
Six smaller parties	44.2	7.5	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>586.6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	

Note: Our vote data are rounded to the nearest thousand votes. Exact 2009 results are available from UK Polling

Report [here](#). Martin Callanan is the only incumbent MEP seeking re-election in 2014.

This outcome may look surprising, because we traditionally tend to think of the North East as being a Labour dominated area, as it is in Westminster elections. Yet here they are under proportional representation, only level-pegging in seats with the other top parties and with only a single MEP in this stronghold region.

The key is to understand how the List PR system works for European elections. Essentially in 2009 Labour won the first seat easily under PR, but it did not have enough support compared with the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to do better than them in the second or third seats. The large amount of votes for fourth, fifth and subsequent parties (37 per cent) was also too fragmented across parties to gain any seat in 2009.

### What could happen in 2014?

This year the polls show that that Labour support has rebounded strongly compared with 2009, while UKIP support has surged, partly because the British National Party (BNP) has shrunk away in terms of political salience and most of 6-8% BNP vote last time will likely go to UKIP.

### Chart 1: Simplified ballot paper

#### NORTH EAST REGION (3 MEPs)

	LABOUR	UKIP	CONSERV -ATIVES	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	GREEN
1	Jude Kirton-Darling	Jonathan Arnott	<u>Martin Callanan</u>	Angelika Schneider	Shirley Ford
2	Paul Brannan	Richard Elvin	Ben Houchen	Owen Temple	Alison Whalley
3	Jayne Shotton	John Tennant	Andrew Lee	Christian Vassie	

Key:

Certain to be elected	Could well win a seat
Remote chance of winning a seat	No chance of winning a seat

Candidates with names underlined are current MEPs

Meanwhile the Conservatives are not changed in support since 2009, and the Liberal Democrat poll ratings have plunged. Assuming that all these trends are reflected in the North East our Chart shows a simplified ballot paper rating the chances of all the main six parties' candidates.

Labour's first choice candidate is almost certain to be elected, but its second-placed candidate would have to rely on Labour running very well to do likewise. UKIP should win one seat in the region this time, which is good news for its top candidate. The Conservatives' top candidate looks pretty safe, but not rock sure if UKIP's surge damages Tory voting differentially. It seems unlikely that the Liberal Democrats could retain their MEP from last time and their candidate is a first-timer. She will have to hope that some Liberal Democrat voting strength remains from local authority elections held at the same time. The Greens are running a bit higher nationally, but the North East is not one of their strong regions and they would have a mountain to climb to win a seat.

### The major parties' candidates

**The top Labour candidate** in the North east is always well nigh certain to be elected. In 2014 she is [Judith Kirton-Darling](#), the current Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Congress. She has worked in the trade union and labour movements for 15 years in a variety of roles, and was particularly active during the 'save our steel' campaign. Her Twitter profile is [here](#). The second Labour candidate is **Paul Brannen**, a former candidate for the Parliamentary seats of Hexham and Berwick-upon-Tweed, and a former Newcastle City councillor. He has extensive campaign experience, including within the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Labour Party and Christian Aid, and his Twitter profile is [here](#). Labour should grow its vote sharply in this election compared with 2009, and he will have to hope that this plus an unusual pattern of votes dividing between Conservatives and UKIP is enough to let him just squeeze in.



**The Conservatives top candidate** is [Martin Callanan](#), a sitting MEP (since 1999) who has a strong chance of being re-elected if the Tory vote holds up and does not fall away to UKIP. He is currently the chairman of the European and Reformists Group in the European Parliament. The well respected website Votewatch EU gives a complete and impartial analysis profile of his voting and activity record as an MEP [here](#). He has a background in engineering. The second Tory candidate, [Ben Houchen](#), is a Stockton Borough councillor for Yarm ward, and his Twitter profile is [here](#). It would take a political earthquake for him to win a seat in Brussels.



**The top UKIP candidate** is [Jonathan Arnott](#), a former maths teacher from Sheffield, who may be somewhat disadvantaged in coming from outside the region. He contested Sheffield Attercliffe in 2005 for UKIP, then Sheffield South East in 2010; he also stood at the South Yorkshire Police Commissioner election 2012. He also contested the Yorkshire region for UKIP in the 2004, and 2009 European elections. His Twitter profile is [here](#). The north east has not historically been a strong UKIP area, but with the British National Party (BNP) in decline, and UKIP's vote flourishing nationally, Mr Arnott has a very good chance of becoming an MEP. The second UKIP candidate is [Richard Elvin](#), another former teacher who now runs a travel company. He contested the previous 2009 European election for the short-lived right wing party Libertas (now defunct). In Westminster elections he also contested the Houghton and Sunderland South constituency in 2010, Middlesbrough in the 2012 by-election and the South Shields 2013 by-election. His Twitter profile is [here](#). It would take an enormous surge of UKIP support for him to be elected.



The **Liberal Democrats' top candidate** is [Angelika Schneider](#), currently assistant to the party's outgoing MEP Fiona Hall (who is not standing again). A resident in the region for ten years her Twitter profile can be found [here](#). Her unenviable task will be to try and hold on to the substantial vote that Hall got last time, even though Liberal Democrat support nationally has fallen away because of supporting the coalition government. It would be a political miracle if she could win a seat. Although the Liberal Democrats are fielding two other candidates, neither has any effective chance of being elected.



**Fighting for the Greens** is [Shirley Ford](#) from South Shields, now a school community worker and with a long pedigree of working in anti-poverty projects. She contested the North East region in the 2009 European election, and stood for Westminster in South Shields in the 2010 general election. The Greens' vote share may rise if left-wing people become disillusioned with Labour, but the party's vote share in the North east seems too low to give her any chance of winning a seat this time. She will be looking to boost the party's long-run visibility here.



Finally, in this region there are two candidate for the BNP, who seem unlikely to do well compared to 2009, and single candidates also from the English Democrats and the look-alike party called 'An Independence from Europe', that may confuse some intending UKIP voters.

**The North east region** is the most northerly and smallest of all the English regions, stretching from the Tees Valley

in the south, to the border between Northumberland and Scotland border in the north. You are in the North East region if you live in the Tees Valley, County Durham, Northumberland, or any of the Tyne and Wear local authorities.

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