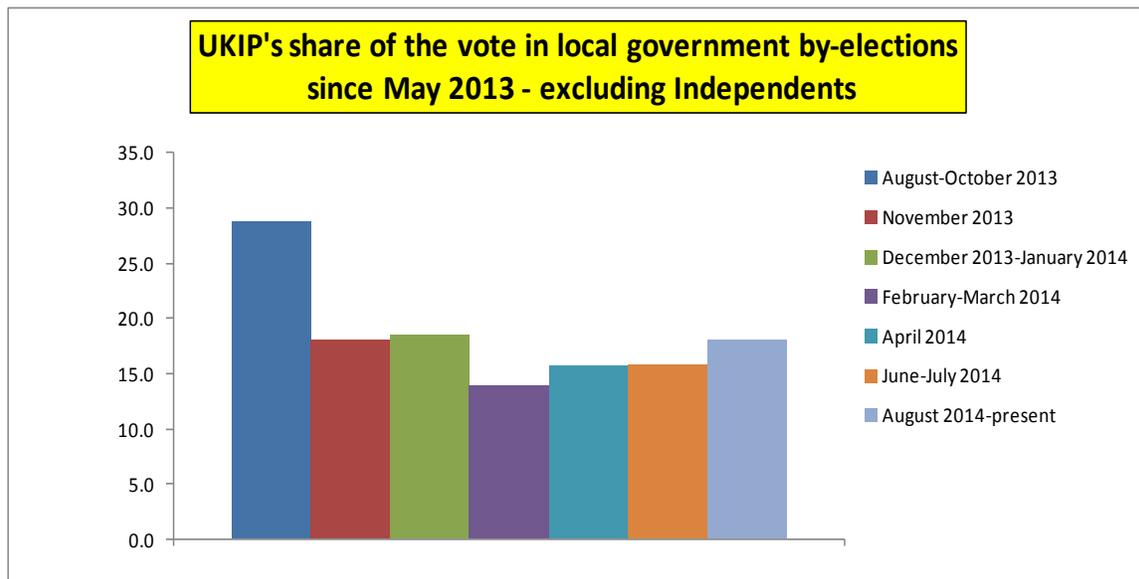


UKIP's surprisingly strong by election showing in August and early September

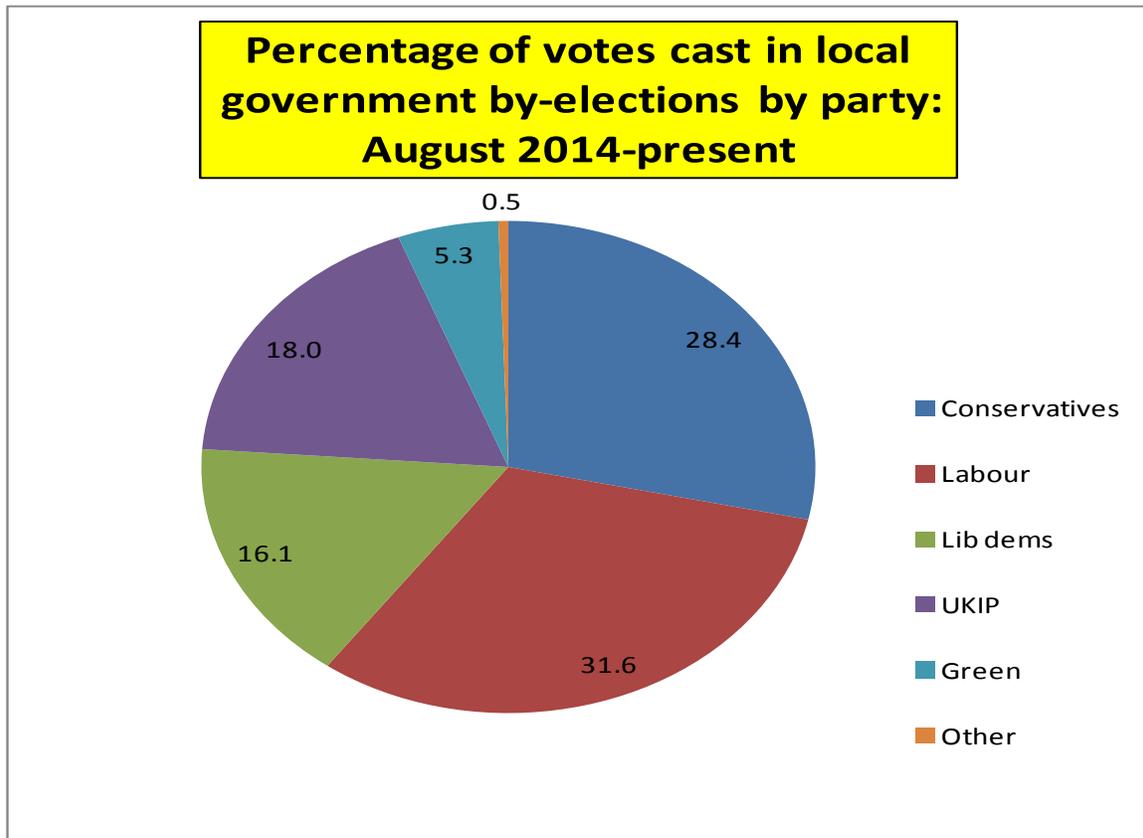
Since the European parliamentary elections in May, UKIP hasn't hit the headlines very often until Douglas Carswell's decision to join the party at the end of August. In previous years, it has been common for the party's support to fall in the aftermath of a big campaign, but this hasn't been the case this year.

In March and April, when serious campaigning for May's elections to the European Parliament got under way, UKIP support averaged 14.2% (or 15.7% if independents were excluded) in the 45 District and County Council elections which took place. Taking only those elections in which a UKIP candidate was standing, the percentages rose to 15.4% and 16.7% respectively. As the graph below shows, UKIP's high profile in the run-up to 22nd May caused only a modest increase in the level of support, which surprisingly remained well below the party's share of the vote between August and October of last year, when it was averaging over 20% excluding independents. The party maintained its share of the vote during June and July. However, in the 18 by-elections held since the start of August - a period when it would have been expected that UKIP's support would start to decline - it has risen slightly to 17.5% (or 18% excluding independents), with the party winning two seats, one in Worthing and one in Folkestone.



On 7th August, the party did exceptionally well. It won the seat in Worthing, polled 31.5% of the total votes cast in the five by-elections held and was only three votes short of matching the combined vote for the Labour, Lib Dem and Green parties. Of course, only limited significance can be placed on such a small sample size, but the increase in support for the party seems to have been maintained at a more modest level through the rest of the month and on into September. So far this month, UKIP has gained more than 20% of the vote in five of the nine by-elections held. The "Carswell factor" may have

been an influence in the last two weeks, in which case the upswing in support could well continue into October or beyond. Since its dramatic success in last year's local elections, the party has maintained its third place in terms of overall votes cast, consistently ahead of the Lib Dems in all the periods analysed, while polling more than three times as many votes as the Greens since the start of August.



Of course, the level of support is uneven across the country. It is significant that Worthing and Folkestone, like Douglas Carswell's constituency of Clacton, are seaside towns, many of which boast a substantial number of UKIP supporters. By contrast, the party has a long way to go in much of the London area and in strongholds of the Green and Lib Dem parties. In an Oxford City Council by-election, UKIP only polled 6.3% of the vote while in Lambeth, the party's share of the vote was a mere 5.1%. However, there have been some strong performances in a cross-section of wards right across the country, including 30.2% (excluding independents) in a by-election in the Barnsley area during July. At local government level, the message across many areas is now very much that if you vote UKIP, you get UKIP. How easy it will be to convince voters of this logic at the General Election remains to be seen. All eyes will be on Clacton.