

# Directly Elected Mayors: Guaranteeing Better Urban Governance?

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# Elected executive mayors: an American export...

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- ❑ The United States is well-known for its system of elections for individuals at the Federal, State and city level
  - ❑ Ireland, the UK, Australia, Canada and many other countries have evolved 'party leader' models, without direct elections to national or local government leadership roles
  - ❑ France has 'indirectly elected' mayors
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# The UK's experience of elected executive mayors?

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- ❑ Councils in England and Wales have long had 'lord mayors' or 'mayors' who are ceremonial and non-political figures
  - ❑ Tony Blair favoured a directly-elected executive mayor for London
  - ❑ Subsequently, 14 authorities have voted in a referendum to introduce a mayor, though Stoke then reversed the decision
  - ❑ Today, there are 13 directly-elected mayors in England, plus the Mayor of London
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# The politics of reform

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- Most existing politicians in most parties in the UK are opposed to directly-elected executive mayors
  - Many see the idea as an alien import to Britain's long-developed democratic structures
    - Also, the awkwardness of directly-appointed deputies, advisors, etc
  - Many also fear losing their own power as and when a mayor is introduced
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# The Mayor of London

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- ❑ Created in 2000, following the abolition of the Greater London Council by Mrs Thatcher in 1986
  - ❑ Thus, created in a vacuum
  - ❑ A directly-elected figurehead for a city of eight million people
    - 'Supplementary Vote' elections
    - 4-year term, no 'term limits'
    - Powers over transport, planning, economic development, fire & emergencies, the police
    - Overseen by a 25-member Assembly (elected using a form of PR)
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# The wider London government system

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- Central government strong in UK/England
  - 32 boroughs and the City of London provide 'local government' services within London
  - Thus, London has a system with two 'balanced' tiers of government
    - Mayor for 'city-wide' issues such as transport
    - Boroughs for local and neighbourhood issues
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# Key impacts

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- The Mayor of London has become a powerful political figure within Britain
    - A voice for London in an unsympathetic political environment
  - Has effectively lobbied for resources and powers for the city
  - Successes:
    - Massive Underground re-investment
    - Crossrail
    - Congestion Charge
    - Bike Scheme
    - A powerful civic leader
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# Extending the mayor's powers

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- Original powers have been increased in 2007 and 2011
    - Planning, Housing, Royal Parks
  - Devolution within Britain has seen more powers for Scotland, Wales and London
  - But nothing for the rest of England...
  - However, the Mayor of London is widely seen as giving London a greater international profile
    - More powers strengthen this potential
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# Drawbacks

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- Thus far, a 'celebrity' contest
    - Ken Livingstone x 4 elections
    - Boris Johnson x 2 elections
  - Expectations of mayor probably exceed reality of powers
    - London's government is still very complex
  - Too much power in one pair of hands?
    - Much media scrutiny, however
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# Referenda in other cities

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- ❑ Referenda will take place in Birmingham (1m); Leeds (750,000), Bristol (450,000), Liverpool (450,000) and several other English cities next May
  - ❑ If a 'yes' vote, a mayoral election will follow
  - ❑ Mayors in these cities would be relatively more powerful than the London mayor
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# Conclusions

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- ❑ It is possible to add directly-elected executive mayors into a very different (democratically conservative) system
  - ❑ London and other British local authorities have generally prospered
  - ❑ Hard to 'prove' the benefits
  - ❑ But mayors have generally been popular where introduced
  - ❑ A number of cities are introducing this kind of office
    - There is a trend...
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