

# **The National Assembly for Wales Elections of 2011**

## **Report to the Electoral Commission**

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### **Summary**

- The elections were fought on the basis of the same constituency and region boundaries as the previous NAW elections in 2007
- The number of constituency candidates fell to 176 compared to 197 in 2007
- Thirteen parties or groups were represented in the regional lists together with 1 individual.
- Labour won 28 out of the 40 constituency seats with a 42.3% share of the vote. The Conservatives were second with 6 seats (25.0% share of the vote) followed by Plaid Cymru (5 seats and 19.3% share of the vote) and the Liberal Democrats (1 seat and 10.6% share of the vote).
- When the list seats were added, Labour had 30 out of 60 seats. The Conservatives had 14, Plaid Cymru had 11 and the Liberal Democrats had 5. No other party or Independent candidate won a seat.
- Almost 2.29 million electors were eligible to vote at these elections: an increase of over 40,000 compared with 2007.
- Over 5,500 electors (0.2% of the total) registered in the weeks leading up to the election under the so-called '11 day rule'.
- More than 950,000 votes were counted in both the constituency and regional level polls, making the overall turnout 41.8% -slightly down on the 2007 figure.
- The proportion of ballot papers rejected at the count was very small – 0.82% of constituency ballots and 0.75% of list ballots.
- Across Wales, 389,150 postal ballots were issued, representing 17.0% of the electorate. This is the largest proportion to date.
- More than seven in 10 of postal ballots issued were returned. Of these, 4.7% (constituency) and 4.8% (regional list) were rejected because of failures relating to personal identifiers or non-inclusion of either a ballot or statement in the envelope.

## **Context**

The fourth round of elections to the National Assembly for Wales was held on 5th May 2011, following earlier elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007. The electoral system for the Welsh Assembly follows the 'additional member' or 'top up' system. The Assembly has 60 elected members and each registered voter has two votes. The first vote is used to elect a constituency Assembly Member (AM) using the traditional first past the post system. Forty AMs are elected this way, one from each of the 40 parliamentary constituencies in Wales. The second vote is used to elect 20 additional members, on a regional basis, to try and ensure that the overall number of seats for each political party reflects their share of the votes. There are five regions and four additional members are elected to the Assembly for each region by means of a party list. The d'Hondt formula is used for deciding which parties win regional list seats, with constituency results being taken into account in the allocation. There has been no change in the constituency or regional boundaries since the 2007 contest.

A total of 176 candidates (including 160 from the four major parties and 7 independents) were nominated for the constituency contests. This compares with 197 in 2007. In the regional list voting, 10 parties contested all 5 regions and a further 3 parties were represented in at least one region with 1 individual running as an independent.

## **Summary results: votes and seats**

Table 1 reports the votes counted and the seats won at constituency and regional level for Wales as a whole and Table 2 details the changes from the previous election in 2007. As in 2007 Labour polled the most votes in both contests with their share of the vote rising by 10 percentage points to 42.3 % in the constituency contests and by 7 percentage points to 36.9% in the regional contests. Labour gained the constituencies of Blaenau Gwent, Cardiff North, Cardiff Central and Llanelli; the two Cardiff constituencies saw a swing to Labour of 9.8% away from the Conservatives in Cardiff North and of 14.7% away from

the Liberal Democrats in Cardiff Central. The Conservatives increased their vote share from 2007 –by over two percentage points to 25% in the constituency contests and by one point to 22.5% in the regional contests. The Conservatives gained Aberconwy from Plaid Cymru and Montgomeryshire from the Liberal Democrats.

Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats both did badly compared to 2007. Plaid Cymru arguably came off worse given that they finished in second place then, beating the Conservatives in the constituency contest (7 seats to 5 seats) and having the most seats of all the parties in the regional contest (8). Indeed, whilst it may have been expected for the Liberal Democrats to fare poorly given their ratings since they joined the Conservatives in the coalition Government at Westminster, the party only lost one seat in the Assembly compared to the four seats lost by Plaid Cymru. This is because the Liberal Democrats did better in the regional contest, winning an additional seat compared to 2007. Overall , the Liberal Democrats saw a decline in their share of the vote by 4.2 percentage points in the constituency contests, losing 2 of their 3 seats (Montgomeryshire and Cardiff Central) and a decline of 3.7 percentage points in the regional contests. They lost a regional seat in South Wales East but gained ones in Mid and West Wales and in South Wales Central. Plaid Cymru saw a smaller decline in their share of the vote (3.1 percentage points) in both contests and lost the constituency seats of Aberconwy and Llanelli as well as regional seats in South Wales Central and South Wales West.

**Table 1**  
**The Distribution of Votes and Seats in Wales 2011**

	Constituencies			Regional Lists		
	Votes	Votes %	Seats	Votes	Votes %	Seats
Conservative	237,389	25.0	6	213,773	22.5	8
Labour	401,677	42.3	28	349,935	36.9	2
Lib Dem	100,259	10.6	1	76,349	8.0	4
Plaid Cymru	182,907	19.3	5	169,799	17.9	6
Others	27,021	2.8	0	139,032	14.7	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>949,253</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>948,888</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20</b>

**Table 2**  
**Changes in the Distribution of Votes and Seats in 2007- 2011**

	Constituencies		Regional Lists		Total Seats
	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	
Conservative	+2.6	+1	+1.1	+1	+2
Labour	+10.1	+4	+7.2	0	+4
Lib Dem	-4.2	-2	-3.7	+1	-1
Plaid Cymru	-3.1	-2	-3.1	-2	-4
Others	-5.4	-1	-1.5	0	-1

The largest decline in the share of the vote was experienced by the minor parties and others, with a decline of 5.4 percentage points in the constituency contests compared to 2007 and the loss of the only seat in the Assembly not held by one of the four main parties (the constituency seat of Blaenau Gwent held by an Independent – Blaenau Gwent People’s Voice).

In summary, Labour won exactly half of the seats (30) in the Assembly, up by four on 2007 and the same number as in 2003. The party polled the largest share of the vote in four out of the five regions in the constituency and regional contests, with Plaid Cymru having the largest share of the vote in the Mid and West Wales region in both contests. The Conservatives had their best result in the Assembly elections with 14 seats and are now the main opposition party to Labour, replacing Plaid Cymru. Plaid Cymru had their worst Assembly election result winning 11 seats, becoming the third largest party in the Assembly. The Liberal Democrats also had their worst result in the Assembly elections winning only 5 seats compared to 6 seats in the previous three Assembly elections. For the first time since the inaugural 1999 Assembly elections, no minor parties won a seat.

### **Minor parties and others**

No minor party or other candidate won a seat at either the constituency or regional contests. In the constituency contests the four Independents totalled 11,977 votes (1.3% share). The BNP (7 candidates) polled 7,056 votes (0.7%

share), followed by Voice of Gwynedd (1 candidate, 3,225 votes), Putting Llanelli First (1 candidate, 2,004 votes), the Green Party (1 candidate, 1,514 votes) and the English Democrats (1 candidate, 744 votes). One person stood without a description and received 501 votes. Together the minor parties and other candidates gained a 2.8% share of the vote, a decline of 5.4 percentage points on 2007.

More minor parties and independent candidates stood in the regional contest, as would be expected given the nature of the ballot. The regional votes received by the 'Others' are reported in detail in Table 3. Together, the minor parties and other candidates gained a near 15% share of the vote in the regional contests, slightly down on 2007 by 1.5 percentage points. Four parties dominate the list with UKIP at the top having increased their share of the vote by 0.6 percentage points since 2007. The Socialist Labour Party almost doubled its vote and share compared with 2007 whereas the BNP, on the other hand, did only half as well as it did then. The Green Party remained stable with a share of 3.4% of the vote in the regional contests.

**Table 3**  
**The Distribution of Regional Votes for Minor Parties in Wales 2011**

Party	Regions Contested	Vote	Share of Vote (%)
UKIP	5	43,256	4.6
Green	5	32,649	3.4
Socialist Labour Party	5	23,020	2.4
BNP	5	22,610	2.4
Welsh Christian Party	5	8,947	0.9
Welsh Communist Party	5	2,676	0.3
The English Democrats	1	1,904	0.2
Trade Unionists & Socialists Against Cuts	2	1,639	0.2
Monster Raving Loony Party	1	1,237	0.1
Independent	1	1,094	0.1

## **Electorate and turnout**

The eligible Welsh electorate increased by over 40,000 or 1.9 % from 2,248,122 in 2007 to 2,289,735 in 2011. Two constituencies recorded an increase in electorate of more than 4,000 since 2007 – Newport West and Cardiff South and Penarth; and two, Ynys Min and Dwyfor Meirionnydd, a decrease in excess of 2,000 people. Some 5,559 electors (0.2% of the electorate) took advantage of the so-called ‘11 day rule’ (which was introduced by the 2006 Electoral Administration Act and allows people to register to vote until 11 working days before an election or referendum) and chose to register during the pre-election period. The number varied from 30 or fewer in the constituencies of Clwyd South (30), Torfaen (30), Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (12), Delyn (0) to over 300 in Ceredigion (330) and Vale of Glamorgan (501).

The number of votes cast at the separate constituency and regional contests varied by less than 1,000 out of a total of more than 950,000 in each case. The overall turnout was therefore almost identical in each contest: 41.8%. This is 2 percentage points less than in 2007. Figures for the valid vote turnout (that is, all votes which were cast and deemed allowable) at all Welsh Assembly elections to date are reported in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Valid vote turnout in Welsh Assembly Elections 1999-2011**  
(turnout at regional contests in brackets)

<b>1999 (%)</b>	<b>2003 (%)</b>	<b>2007 (%)</b>	<b>2011 (%)</b>
46.4 (46.1)	38.2 (38.1)	43.5 (43.4)	41.5 (41.4)

Turnout has varied by around 8 percentage points across the four elections with the highest turnout in the first election and the lowest in the election immediately afterwards. None of the elections has managed to draw half or more of the registered electorate with only two fifths of the registered electorate participating in the 2011 election. This compares to a valid vote turnout in Wales of 64.8% at

the Westminster parliament elections in 2010 (more than 20 percentage points higher) and 30.5% at the European elections in 2009 (more than 10 percentage points lower than the 2011 Assembly elections). At the March 2011 Referendum on the powers of the NAW 35.2% of electors in Wales cast a ballot

In the rest of this report we use the term ‘adjusted turnout’ to refer to calculations based on the number of *valid* votes cast; ‘minimal unadjusted turnout’ to refer to calculations which take into account votes which were rejected at the count; and ‘maximal unadjusted turnout’ to refer to calculations which take into account votes rejected at the count as well as postal ballots that had been rejected for being completed incorrectly. Table 5 shows that only a small fraction of voters (fewer than 1% in both contests) tried to vote but failed to do so successfully. The percentage point difference between maximal unadjusted and adjusted turnout has not changed since the 2007 election.

**Table 5**  
**Adjusted and unadjusted turnout at Welsh Assembly elections 2007-2011**

	2011			2007		
	Maximal %	Minimal %	Adjusted %	Maximal %	Minimal %	Adjusted %
Constituencies	42.4	41.8	41.5	44.4	43.8	43.5
Regional Lists	42.3	41.8	41.4	n/a	n/a	n/a*

\*Information as to rejected ballots for the 2007 regional contests is not available.

There is considerable variation in adjusted turnout across the constituencies, ranging from 31.4% (Swansea East) to 52.9% (Brecon and Radnorshire). Four constituencies saw more than half of their registered electorate successfully participate in the 2011 election: Ceredigion (51.0%), Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (51.3%), Cardiff North (51.4%), and Brecon and Radnorshire (52.9%). Conversely, in nearly half of Welsh constituencies (18) turnout in 2011 was less than 40% compared to only 12 constituencies at the 2007 election. These constituencies were concentrated in the Welsh Valleys and the urban areas of South and north east Wales.

Across the regions in Wales adjusted turnout, as reported in Table 6, was highest in Mid and West Wales (48.6%) and lowest in South Wales East and South Wales West – the two regions dominated by constituencies in the Welsh Valleys. Turnout declined in all regions compared to the 2007 election with the greatest decrease in the South East Wales region (down by 3 percentage points) followed by South Wales West and Mid and West Wales (down by 2.4 and 2.3 percentage points respectively). No region saw half or more of the registered electorate participate in the constituency elections.

**Table 6**  
**Adjusted turnout by region, Welsh Assembly elections 2007-2011**  
 (Figures are for constituency elections)

	2011 %	2007 %	Change
<b>Mid and West Wales</b>	48.6	50.9	-2.3
<b>North Wales</b>	41.2	42.7	-1.5
<b>South Wales Central</b>	41.2	42.4	-1.2
<b>South Wales East</b>	38.5	41.5	-3.0
<b>South Wales West</b>	37.9	40.3	-2.4
<b>Wales</b>	41.5	43.5	-2.0

As discussed previously, adjusted turnout for the regional contest as a whole was almost identical to the constituency contest and this applies to levels of turnout in the regional and constituency contests for individual constituencies. The only notable exception was for the constituency of Cynon Valley in South Wales Central where turnout for the regional contest was 1.0 percentage points higher than the constituency contest. This difference cannot be accounted for by differences in the numbers of rejected votes in each contest.

### **Ballots rejected at the count**

Table 7 reports the numbers of ballots rejected at the count for the 2007 and 2011 elections. The incidence of rejected ballots is very low (less than 1% of ballots are rejected at the count as a proportion of all ballots) although there has

been a marginal increase of 0.22 percentage points since 2007 in the constituency contest (data for the 2007 regional contests are not available). There are marginally more (0.07%) rejected ballots at the constituency contest than at the regional contest. Eight of the 40 constituencies had more than 1% of the ballots cast rejected in the constituency contests: all but one of them being urban constituencies. Newport West had the largest proportion of rejected ballots (1.4%) and Torfaen had the smallest proportion (0.5%). There were fewer constituencies with more than 1% of the ballots cast rejected in the regional contests (6) with Wrexham having the largest proportion of rejected ballots (1.3%) and Carmarthen East and Dinefwr the smallest proportion (0.5%).

**Table 7**  
**Rejected Ballots at count 2007 and 2011**

	Constituencies		Regional Lists	
	Number	% of all	Number	% of all
<b>2011</b>	7,837	0.82	7,205	0.75
<b>2007</b>	5,899	0.60	n/a	n/a*

\*Information as to rejected ballots for the 2007 regional contests is not available.

In Table 8 the reasons for the rejection of ballots in 2007 and 2011 are summarised. As in 2007, a paper being unmarked or there being uncertainty as to the voter's intentions is by far the commonest reason for rejection and has increased by 10 percentage points since the previous election. The next reason accounting for almost a fifth of rejections is the elector voting for too many candidates. The latter is proportionally more prevalent in the regional than the constituency contest by almost 10 percentage points, possibly indicating a greater uncertainty about how to mark the ballot paper in an election involving party lists rather than the more familiar first past the post.

**Table 8**  
**Reasons for Ballots Being Rejected**

	2007		2011	
	Constituency (%)	Regional (%)	Constituency (%)	Regional (%)
<b>Unmarked or void for uncertainty</b>	71.2	n/a*	80.1	72.2
<b>Voting for too many candidates</b>	26.6	n/a	18.7	27.3
<b>Writing or mark identifying voter</b>	2.2	n/a	1.1	0.5
<b>Want of official mark</b>	0	n/a	0.02	0.01

\*Information as to rejected ballots for the 2007 regional contests is not available.

### Postal Voting

In Wales, 389,150 postal ballots were issued representing 17.0% of the electorate. This compared to 12.2% in 2007 and 6.9% in 2003 so the uptake of the option to vote by post has continued to increase. The proportion of electors having postal votes ranged from 11.6% in Dwyfor Meirionnydd to 22.4% in Neath. In fact, one fifth or more of the electorate opted to vote by post in a quarter of all the constituencies (10), with the majority of them in the South Wales Valleys or Cardiff. Hence South Wales Central and South Wales West were the regions with the largest proportion of postal votes issued (18.7%) with North Wales being the region with the fewest (15.4%). At the UK-wide referendum held on the same day as the NAW elections, 16.3% of electors in England and 14.1% of those in Scotland had a postal vote.

Postal ballots returned totalled 276,641 or 71.1% of those issued. In 2007 the 'turnout' among postal voters was rather higher -78.9%. It is clear though that the proportion of postal voters who return their ballot papers continues to be almost twice as high as the turnout among 'in person' voters. In 2011 just 35.8% of those obliged to vote at a polling station did so. The constituency with the highest turnout of postal votes was Aberconwy (77.8%) and the lowest was Cardiff South and Penarth (61.3%). Postal votes accounted for 27.6% of all

ballots included in the counts in both the constituency and regional contests, up from 21.1% in 2007. This varied from 18.7% in both Ceredigion and Dwyfor Meirionnydd constituencies to 38.3% in Rhondda, all up on the 2007 election.

All postal votes were subject to verification before being forwarded to the count. In particular, electors are required to provide a specimen signature and give their date of birth both when applying for a postal vote and when casting their ballot. The number of postal votes included in the constituency count was 263,714 and in the regional count was 263,297 indicating that 12,927 or 4.7% of returned postal votes were rejected and not included in the constituency contests and 13,344 or 4.8% of returned postal votes were rejected and not included in the regional contests. This is a decline of 1.0 percentage point compared to the proportion of postal ballots rejected in 2007 election. A summary of reasons for rejecting returned postal ballots is reported in Table 9.

**Table 9**  
**Reasons for rejecting returned postal ballots in the Welsh Assembly elections 2011 (rounded)**

	<b>Percentage</b>
Want of a signature	4
Want of a date of birth	8
Want of both signature and date of birth	4
Mismatched signature	12
Mismatched date of birth	18
Both signature and date of birth mismatched	4
Statement or ballot paper not returned	50

The most common reason for rejection (half of all cases) was that either the statement or ballot paper was not returned. Otherwise there tended to be a mismatch in personal identifiers between those submitted with the ballot paper and those given on the original postal vote application (34.8%). Only one in eight postal votes returned was rejected due to missing personal identifiers. However, there were clear variations between constituencies in the reasons for rejections.

Over half of the rejections in Swansea West, Gower and Swansea East were due to missing personal identifiers, compared to less than 1% in the four Cardiff constituencies. A mismatch in personal identifiers accounted for more than half of all the rejections in over a quarter of constituencies -the largest in Islwyn (64.2%) and the lowest in Newport East (13.8%). Rejection due to the statement or ballot paper not being returned accounted for over four fifths of cases in Newport East, Wrexham and Clwyd South, but fewer than 10% of cases in Islwyn, Caerphilly, Ynys Môn and Torfaen. Why there should be such large differences in reasons for rejecting returned postal ballots between constituencies is unclear but are more likely to reflect the judgement and discretion of the individual returning officers and/or the way external software treats returns than gross differences in the success of postal electors in completing their forms correctly.

A total of 1,419 covering envelopes were received after the close of the poll and were, therefore, excluded from further consideration. This is an average of 35 per constituency but varied from 124 in the Vale of Clwyd and 118 in Monmouth to just 12 in Wrexham. No late returns were reported in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire.

### **Waivers**

A concession granted under the terms of the EAA 2006 was that postal electors who either had a disability, or were illiterate, or were unable to furnish a consistent signature could apply for a waiver to use their date of birth as their sole identifier. A total of 3,076 voters across Wales were granted such a waiver; an average of 77 per constituency. The largest number of waivers was 237 in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney; the smallest nineteen in Monmouth.

### **Proxy Voters**

Proxies were appointed in 3,378 cases (0.15% of the electorate) compared to fewer than 3,000 in 2007, of which 23 were emergency proxies. The number of

proxies averaged 84 per constituency but ranged from 16 in Cardiff North to 266 in both Vale of Glamorgan and Ceredigion.

### **Counting of Votes**

Overnight counting of votes took place in all constituencies with the exception of the nine constituencies in the North Wales region where counting began at 9.00am the next day. There were recounts in the constituencies of Llanelli, Cardiff Central, Cardiff North, and Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney but in no others.