

The 2010 General Election: aspects of participation and administration

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher

August 2010

LGC Elections Centre
University of Plymouth
Drake Circus
Plymouth
PL4 8AA



Summary

- The UK electorate at the 2010 general election was almost 45.6 million –the largest ever. The registers contained 1.35 million more names than in 2005 –an increase of 3.1%.
- More than half a million people registered to vote in the weeks leading up to May 6th many taking advantage of the so-called ‘11 day rule’ (which was introduced by the 2006 Electoral Administration Act). Late registration appeared particularly common in London.
- Nearly 29.7 million valid votes were cast, making the overall turnout across the UK 65.1%. This is 3.7 percentage points higher than in 2005, but the third lowest figure since universal male suffrage in 1918.
- Turnout rose in each country except Northern Ireland, and in every region of England. Turnout jumped particularly sharply in London where London borough council elections were held on the same day as a general election for the first time ever
- Almost 7 million postal votes were issued -15.3% of the entire electorate. Despite the new rules on personal identifiers, together with the need for electors to reapply for a postal vote, this is more than three percentage points above the level at the 2005 general election. Only in Northern Ireland, where different regulations apply, was there a decline in postal votes issued.
- 83.2% of those with a postal ballot returned it. By way of contrast, only just over six in 10 of those electors required to vote ‘in person’ did so.
- The number of postal votes at the count was almost one in five of the total. In the North East region of England more than a third of all votes were cast by post.
- The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was, at 3.8%, rather higher than in 2005. It is unclear how far this increase was a consequence of the additional requirement for electors to provide personal identifiers when applying for and casting a postal ballot. The verification and rejection of postal votes is the subject of a separate report.
- The proportion of ballots that are rejected at the official count continues to be very small. In 2010 it was less than three in every thousand votes cast.
- More than 140,000 electors (0.3% of the total) appointed proxies. This was an increase compared with 2005, itself perhaps reflecting greater interest in the election as evidenced by the higher overall turnout.

The 2010 general election was held on Thursday 6th May. The election in one of the 650 parliamentary constituencies, Thirsk and Malton, was postponed until 27th May following the death of the UKIP candidate. This is the second election in succession that a parliamentary election has been postponed in this way. The previous occurrence in 2005 was the first for more than 50 years. In this report both the commentary and Tables *include* the result for Thirsk and Malton.

The total number of seats is four more than were contested at the previous general election. This followed the implementation of the review of constituency boundaries in England which increased its representation from 529 to 533 seats. Similar boundary reviews in Wales and Northern Ireland led to no change in the number of seats, 40 and 18 respectively. A review of Scotland's representation had already been implemented prior to the 2005 general election. This reduced Scotland's seats in the Westminster parliament from 72 to 59.

Electorate

The electorate for the 2010 general election was, at almost 45.6 million, the largest ever. It showed an increase of over 1.35 million or 3.1% compared with 2005, the bulk of the rise being concentrated in England –see Table 1. It was most pronounced in the three southernmost regions, with London, the South East, and the South West each having more than 4% extra electors. Constituency level comparisons with 2005 have (except in Scotland) to be on a 'notional' basis because of boundary changes¹. The biggest increases in electorate appear to have been in parts of inner London such as Hackney and Islington; in other urban constituencies like Manchester Central; and in places where high numbers of students are registered such as Bristol West, Oxford West, and York Central. The electorate actually declined in each of the 'big four' cities of Scotland (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow) where we have accurate data for both election years, and appears to have done so as well in English cities like Bradford, Liverpool and Wolverhampton. The total electorate in Northern Ireland also showed an increase in contrast to 2005 when it decreased following the introduction of new procedures for individual registration and voter identification.

Some of the volatility in electorate numbers can be accounted for by those taking advantage of the so-called '11 day rule' (which was introduced by the 2006 Electoral Administration Act) and choosing to register after the election was called. Although local authorities may have provided information about this using different base dates, it is clear that more than half a million people registered to vote in the weeks leading up to May 6th. In 44 of the 600 constituencies for which we have data more than 2,000 extra potential voters were registered, with 27 of these seats being in London. In Bethnal Green and Bow, Nottingham South, and East Ham the numbers exceeded 4,000. Perhaps as many as a further 100,000 tried to register after the closing date and some 10,000 seem to have tried to vote on polling day despite not being

¹ Notional 2005 electorates for the new constituencies are compiled using ward level data for that year.

on the register. These latter figures are based on extrapolations from the data provided by the 75% of EROs who had recorded such information.

Table 1: Electorate at the 2010 general election

	<i>Electorate 2010</i>	<i>Electorate 2005</i>	<i>Change 2005-10</i>	<i>%Change 2005-10</i>
UK	45,597,461	44,245,939	+1,351,522	+3.1
GB	44,428,277	43,105,946	+1,322,331	+3.1
England	38,300,110	37,041,396	+1,258,714	+3.4
N. Ireland	1,169,184	1,139,993	+29,191	+2.6
Scotland	3,863,042	3,839,900	+23,142	+0.6
Wales	2,265,125	2,224,650	+40,475	+1.8
East Midlands	3,332,058	3,215,692	+116,366	+3.6
Eastern	4,257,453	4,142,678	+114,775	+2.8
London	5,276,910	5,049,694	+227,216	+4.5
North East	1,948,281	1,911,820	+36,461	+1.9
North West	5,255,192	5,135,150	+120,042	+2.3
South East	6,298,261	6,031,692	+266,569	+4.4
South West	4,020,915	3,839,841	+181,074	+4.7
West Midlands	4,084,007	3,992,780	+91,227	+2.3
Yorkshire & The Humber	3,827,033	3,722,049	+ 104,984	+2.8

Turnout

There was a modest increase in turnout across all parts of Great Britain, although that in Northern Ireland fell back for the second election in succession –see Table 2. Nevertheless, and despite the growth in the electorate, fewer than 30 million valid votes were cast: a long way short of the record of 33.6 million votes at the 1992 general election. Indeed the adjusted (that is, valid vote) turnout of 65.1% was just 3.7 percentage points higher than in 2005 and was the third lowest figure since universal male suffrage in 1918.

Among the English regions turnout was once again highest in the South West, despite the region registering the smallest rise, and jumped particularly sharply in London where London borough council elections were held on the same day as a general election for the first time ever.

Table 2: Turnout at the 2010 general election

	<i>Electorate 2010</i>	<i>Valid votes 2010</i>	<i>Adjusted %turnout 2010</i>	<i>%Change 2005-10</i>
UK	45,597,461	29,687,604	65.1	+3.7
GB	44,428,277	29,013,733	65.3	+4.0
England	38,300,110	25,081,268	65.5	+4.2
N. Ireland	1,169,184	673,871	57.6	-5.3
Scotland	3,863,042	2,465,780	63.8	+3.0
Wales	2,265,125	1,466,685	64.8	+2.2
East Midlands	3,332,058	2,224,279	66.8	+4.1
Eastern	4,257,453	2,878,997	67.6	+3.6
London	5,276,910	3,401,268	64.5	+6.7
North East	1,948,281	1,189,925	61.1	+3.7
North West	5,255,192	3,272,990	62.3	+5.0
South East	6,298,261	4,294,227	68.2	+3.5
South West	4,020,915	2,773,443	69.0	+2.5
West Midlands	4,084,007	2,640,572	64.7	+4.0
Yorkshire & The Humber	3,827,033	2,405,567	62.9	+3.8

The national level turnout figures are broadly the same whichever method is used in their calculation. Table 3 shows the aggregate or total vote turnout, the mean (average) turnout across constituencies, and the turnout in the median (or middle) constituency in each geographical unit.

Table 3: Turnout in 2010 using different statistical measures

<i>2005</i>	<i>Aggregate turnout</i>	<i>Mean turnout</i>	<i>Median turnout</i>
UK	65.1	65.0	65.4
GB	65.3	65.2	65.5
England	65.5	65.4	65.8
N. Ireland	57.6	57.5	57.0
Scotland	63.8	63.7	63.8
Wales	64.8	64.8	64.2

Turnout at the constituency level reflected the general pattern of a modest increase since 2005 –see Table 4. A total of 139 constituencies had turnouts in excess of 70% (37 in 2005), and just 6 turnouts below 50% (39 in 2005). The overwhelming majority of constituencies in Great Britain (600 out of 632) saw increases in turnout and, of the remainder, turnout dropped by greater than 1% in only 19 instances. Once more Northern Ireland was the exception. Leaving aside the postponed election in Thirsk and Malton, 14 of the 19 biggest falls in turnout were in Northern Ireland. Individual constituency figures for England, Wales and Northern Ireland do need to be treated with caution because turnouts for 2005 are only estimates following boundary changes. However, it appears that there were sizeable increases in turnout in some London constituencies, with 14 of them featuring among the 23 nationwide where turnout rose by 10 percentage points or more. It may also be worth pointing out that turnout rose by an average of 5 percentage

points in constituencies in England with coincident local elections, but only by 4 points where there were no such contests.

Table 4: Constituency level turnout and turnout change, 2010

<i>Highest turnout 2010</i>		<i>Lowest turnout 2010</i>		
England	Westmorland and Lonsdale	76.9	Manchester Central	44.3
Northern Ireland	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	68.9	Antrim East	50.7
Scotland	Renfrewshire East	77.3	Glasgow North East	49.1
Wales	Cardiff North	72.7	Swansea East	54.6

<i>Biggest increase in turnout 2005-10</i>		<i>Biggest fall in turnout 2005-10</i>		
England	Hackney North and Stoke Newington*	+13.5	Derby South*	-6.7
Northern Ireland	Belfast East	+0.9	Tyrone West	-11.7
Scotland	Glasgow North	+7.1	Dundee East	-0.5
Wales	Cardiff West	+7.1	Blaenau Gwent	-4.4

*Postponed elections in Staffordshire South (2005) and Thirsk and Malton (2010) excluded.

There are further interesting variations in turnout depending on the political status and marginality of the constituency –see Table 5. As is usual, turnout was lower in safe as opposed to marginal seats, although the gap seems to have narrowed compared with 2005. This is confirmed by a simple correlation analysis². In 2001 the correlation between a seat’s marginality and its level of turnout was 0.7; in 2005 it was 0.72. This year it was still significant, but at the lesser level of 0.48. Turnout did remain sharply lower in constituencies won (held) by Labour than in those won by either the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats, although these seats also showed the largest mean increase in turnout. In constituencies gained by the Conservatives mean change in turnout was only fractionally higher than in those the party held.

Table 5: Turnout by political status of constituency

% majority 2005	Mean turnout 2010	Change 2005-10
0 to 5	67.9	+3.6
5 to 10	66.9	+4.3
10 to 20	66.7	+4.1
20+	62.8	+3.9

	Mean turnout 2010	Change 2005-10
Con seats	68.3	+3.9
Lab seats	61.1	+4.9
LD seats	67.5	+3.6
Con gains	67.0	+4.0

² A correlation is a measurement of the relationship between two variables. The closer the correlation is to ‘1’ or ‘-1’, the stronger the relationship in a positive or negative direction. The closer it is to ‘0’, the weaker the relationship. A statistically significant correlation is one where the relationship between variables is unlikely to be a function of pure chance.

We are also able to examine aggregate turnout taking into account those electors who tried to vote but whose postal vote returns and/or ballot papers were rejected –see Table 6. ‘Minimal unadjusted turnout’ includes all electors whose ballot papers were scrutinised at the count. ‘Maximal unadjusted turnout’ adds those whose postal vote returns were deemed invalid and therefore not forwarded to the count. Each adjustment has the effect of fractionally increasing the % of the electorate who participated at the election, but makes little difference to the overall pattern.

Table 6: ‘Adjusted’ and ‘unadjusted’ turnout 2010

	<i>Adjusted %turnout 2010</i>	<i>‘Minimal unadjusted %turnout 2010’</i>	<i>‘Maximal unadjusted %turnout 2010’</i>
UK	65.1	65.3	65.8
GB	65.3	65.5	66.0
England	65.5	65.7	66.2
N. Ireland	57.6	58.0	58.1
Scotland	63.8	63.9	64.3
Wales	64.8	64.9	65.5

Postal voting – uptake and turnout

The proportion of electors with postal votes trebled from 4% to 12.1% between 2001 and 2005. This year it increased again to 15.3% despite the new legislative requirement for those wishing to vote by post to apply afresh and provide evidence of identity in the form of a signature and date of birth both on application and when returning their ballot paper –see Table 7. The only exception to this pattern was Northern Ireland where different rules are in force and where postal voting declined once again to now minuscule levels.

Postal voting in Scotland remains less prevalent than in England and Wales, but the number of Scots registered to vote by post rose by more than 50% compared with 2005. All the English regions saw further increases in postal voters with more than one in seven electors now registered to vote in this way in seven of the nine regions. The four regions which had had all postal ballots at the 2004 European Parliament elections continue to top the league table. In the North East, where there had also been an all-postal referendum in November 2004, more than a quarter now vote by post -an increase of greater than seven percentage points since 2005.

Table 7: Postal voting in 2010

<i>2010</i>	<i>Postal ballots issued</i>	<i>%electors with postal ballot</i>	<i>Change2001-5</i>
UK	6,996,006	15.3	+3.2
GB	6,980,005	15.7	+3.3
England	6,096,006	15.9	+3.1
N. Ireland	16,001	1.4	-1.0
Scotland	511,413	13.2	+5.1
Wales	372,586	16.4	+3.7

<i>English regions</i>	<i>%electors with postal ballot</i>	<i>Change 2005-10</i>
East Midlands*	16.2	+2.7
Eastern	14.5	+2.4
London	13.8	+2.9
North East*	26.7	+7.4
North West*	17.7	+5.0
South East	14.6	+2.3
South West	15.7	+1.9
West Midlands	12.8	+2.1
Yorkshire & The Humber*	18.0	+3.8

*All-postal voting at the 2004 European parliament elections.

The individual constituencies at the top of the North East-dominated postal vote league table similarly reflect the importance of previous all-postal vote experience in stimulating registration – see Table 8. Newcastle upon Tyne North also had the largest proportion of postal voters in 2005, although notional calculations suggest this has dropped by about five percentage points since then. In Sunderland on the other hand postal voting has nearly trebled in both number and proportion since the last general election. Those at the bottom confirm that local authorities as well as political parties play a part in encouraging (or not) postal voting. All three constituencies in Hull are once again rooted at the foot despite the city's previous all-postal voting history. However the range covered by those 20 constituencies with the lowest proportion of postal voters has risen from 3.1%-5.4% in 2005 to 5.9%-8.7% now. Postal electors accounted for 15.7% of the total in the mean constituency in Great Britain (12.4% in 2005), with a standard deviation of 4.94 around the mean.

Table 8: The extent of postal vote take-up in individual constituencies

<i>Top and bottom 20 postal vote take-up 2010 – % of electorate (G.B. only)</i>			
Top		Bottom	
Newcastle Upon Tyne North*	40.6	Airdrie & Shotts	8.7
Houghton & Sunderland South*	38.9	Glasgow East	8.7
Sunderland Central*	37.4	Barrow & Furness*	8.6
Washington & Sunderland West*	37.2	Glasgow North	8.5
South Shields*	36.2	Halton*	8.4
Jarrow*	35.3	Oxford East	8.3
Blyth Valley*	34.8	Birmingham Selly Oak	8.2
Stevenage*	34.5	Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill	8.2
Newcastle Upon Tyne Central*	34.5	Glasgow Central	8.1
Telford*	31.8	Birmingham Ladywood	7.9
Rushcliffe*	31.8	Brent Central	7.7
Wrekin, The*	31.7	Birmingham Erdington	7.7
Blaydon*	31.6	Motherwell & Wishaw	7.5
Don Valley*	31.4	Birmingham Perry Barr	7.4
Chorley*	31.0	Cambridgeshire North East	7.4
Newcastle Upon Tyne East*	29.8	Ealing North	7.1
Doncaster Central*	29.2	Hull West & Hessle*	7.1
Gateshead*	27.9	Lewisham West & Penge	6.8
Doncaster North*	27.9	Hull East*	6.7
Altrincham & Sale West*	27.9	Hull North*	5.9

*All-postal vote at one or more elections 2002-4 inclusive.

<i>Top 20 percentage point change in % of electorate with postal votes 2005-10 (G.B. only)</i>			
Houghton & Sunderland South*	23.9	Harrow East	9.5
Sunderland Central*	23.0	Paisley & Renfrewshire North	9.2
Washington & Sunderland West*	21.5	Redcar*	9.1
Wansbeck*	15.0	Penistone & Stocksbridge*	9.0
Easington*	13.1	Southport*	9.0
Blyth Valley*	12.1	Wyre & Preston North*	8.9
Doncaster Central*	12.0	Tyneside North*	8.9
Sedgefield*	11.6	Liverpool West Derby*	8.9
Durham, City of *	10.2	Worsley & Eccles South*	8.5
Inverclyde	9.8	Llanelli	8.5

*All-postal vote at one or more elections 2002-4 inclusive.

There was remarkable uniformity across Great Britain in the turnout of postal voters with over 83% returning their ballots in each nation. The figure in Northern Ireland was just a little less –see Table 9. Compared with 2005 there was a small overall increase from 2.5% to 3.8% in the proportion of postal ballots rejected before being forwarded to the count. A total of more than 200,000 individual ballots were rejected. In about half the cases this was because a signature or date of birth (or both) were mismatched; in another quarter because the elector omitted to enclose either the ballot paper or the postal vote statement (or both). Given the new rules covering the validity of postal votes this increase is perhaps not surprising and is dealt with more fully in a separate report together with an analysis of seat by seat variations in rejection. Constituencies in Wales, which had rejected an unusually high number of postal votes in 2005, fell back towards the mean, but postal voters in Northern Ireland again seemed particularly prone to fall foul of the

requirements for having a postal vote forwarded to the count. Having said that, the vast majority correctly filed their returns complete with matching signature and date of birth.

Table 9: Invalid postal vote returns 2010

<i>2010</i>	<i>% Postal ballots returned</i>	<i>Invalid returns</i>	<i>Invalid as % of returned</i>	<i>Change 2005-10</i>
UK	83.2	221,988	3.8	+1.3
GB	83.2	220,628	3.8	+1.3
England	83.2	192,103	3.8	+1.4
N. Ireland	78.1	1,360	10.9	+5.7
Scotland	83.6	15,368	3.6	+1.5
Wales	83.1	13,157	4.2	-0.4

The increase in the take up of postal votes had an inevitable impact on the proportion of total votes cast in that way. Across the United Kingdom nearly 19% of all the votes counted were postal ballots –see Table 10. In England and Wales the figure was even higher. In the North East postal votes comprised more than a third of the total. In Newcastle upon Tyne North and in all three constituencies in Sunderland, a majority of all votes were cast by post. Postal votes accounted for 19.2% of votes counted in the mean constituency in Great Britain, with a standard deviation of 6.31 around the mean.

Table 10: Postal votes as % of votes at count

	<i>postal votes as % of votes at countt</i>	<i>Change 2005-10</i>
UK	18.8	+3.8
GB	19.2	+3.8
England	19.4	+3.4
Northern Ireland	1.6	-1.4
Scotland	16.7	+6.5
Wales	20.2	+4.6
English regions		
East Midlands*	19.9	+3.2
Eastern	17.4	+3.1
London	15.9	+2.2
North East*	34.8	+9.7
North West*	22.0	+4.7
South East	17.7	+2.9
South West	18.9	+2.4
West Midlands	15.9	+2.6
Yorkshire & The Humber*	22.8	+4.2

*2004 all-postal pilot regions

Turnout among postal electors was again significantly higher than that among in-person voters, although both groups showed an increase compared with 2005 –see Table 11. It is interesting that the new regulations have had no adverse effect in Great Britain on either the level of applications for or the use of postal votes. In the North East, for example, whereas 82.5% of the very large number of postal voters returned their ballots in line with the national average, only a little over half (54.5%) of those who did not take up this facility attended in person - a proportion little changed from 2005. Indeed previous reports for the Commission suggest that postal voters are more likely to use their vote even at local elections than in-person voters are at general elections.

Table 11: Turnout among postal and in-person electors

	<i>'Ballot papers returned (postal electors)</i>		<i>'Minimal unadjusted turnout' (in-person electors)</i>	
	<i>2010</i>	<i>Change 2005-10</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Change 2005-10</i>
UK	83.2	+4.6	62.6	+3.1
GB	83.2	+4.6	62.8	+3.4
England	83.2	+4.6	63.0	+3.7
Northern Ireland	78.1	-9.3	57.8	-5.2
Scotland	83.6	+4.2	61.4	+3.0
Wales	83.1	+4.9	62.0	+1.3

A final sidelight on postal voting is cast by data on returns received on polling day itself. With about two-thirds of constituencies using Royal Mail to conduct a formal sweep of sorting offices before the close of poll, some half a million ballots (nearly 2% of all votes cast) were not received until May 6th. It is likely that a fair proportion of these will have been handed in at a polling station.

Proxy voting

It was expected that easier access to postal voting would lead to a decrease in the number of electors wishing or having the need to appoint proxies. This was indeed the case in 2005 when fewer than 100,000 proxy votes were issued compared with nearly 250,000 in 2001. This year, however, there was an increase in proxy voting in Great Britain, itself perhaps reflecting greater interest in the election as evidenced by the higher overall turnout –see Table 12. More than 500 proxy votes were issued in 22 constituencies, with Newbury and Devon South West topping the table with over 700 each. Proxy voting in Northern Ireland fell again and it is now even less common than in the rest of the UK having once been much higher. On average about a third of one per cent of electors now rely on a proxy to cast their vote.

Table 12: Proxy voting 2010*

	<i>Proxy votes cast 2010</i>	<i>as % of electorate</i>	<i>Change 2005-10</i>
UK	143,801	0.32	+0.10
GB	141,692	0.32	+0.10
England	124,125	0.32	+0.10
N. Ireland	2,109	0.18	-0.41
Scotland	11,384	0.29	+0.10
Wales	6,183	0.27	+0.08

*Data missing for 15 English constituencies

Spoilt ballots

The number of ballot papers rejected at the count continues to be but a small fraction of the total cast (0.28%), and is hardly changed compared with 2010 – see Table 13. The bulk of these are because the voter has either not marked the ballot paper or made their intention clear. In just over a quarter of cases voters have chosen more than one candidate in a single-member election. The latter instance was especially noticeable in London this year where almost all electors were also voting in multi-member council wards. An above average 0.5% of votes was disallowed with ‘voting more than once’ the single biggest reason for general election votes being rejected. Northern Ireland also more provides something of an exception. An overall greater proportion of votes are rejected, more than half for voting more than once. It is likely that this is caused by confusion among electors who normally vote in Single Transferable Vote elections where they are invited to cast a preference vote for all candidates on the ballot paper.

Table 13: Rejected ballot papers 2005

	<i>Ballot papers rejected at the count</i>	<i>% of ballots at count</i>	<i>Change 2001-5</i>
UK	81,868	0.28	-0.03
GB	77,803	0.27	-0.03
England	70,580	0.28	-0.03
N. Ireland	4,003	0.60	-0.25
Scotland	4,524	0.18	-0.02
Wales	2,699	0.18	-0.08

Reasons for rejection*

	<i>No official mark (%)</i>	<i>Voting more than once (%)</i>	<i>Voter could be identified (%)</i>	<i>Void or uncertain (%)</i>	<i>Rejected in part (%)</i>
UK	640 (0.8)	21,888 (26.7)	2,520 (3.1)	50,866 (62.1)	1,788 (2.2)
GB	638 (0.8)	19,871 (25.5)	2,407 (3.1)	48,933 (62.2)	1,788 (2.3)
England	628 (0.9)	18,261 (25.9)	2,183 (3.1)	43,915 (62.9)	1,788 (2.5)
N. Ireland	9 (0.2)	2,017 (49.6)	96 (2.8)	1,933 (47.6)	-
Scotland	1 (0.0)	805 (17.8)	128 (2.1)	3,317 (73.3)	-
Wales	2 (0.0)	805 (29.8)	113(4.7)	1,701 (63.0)	-

*Not all constituencies provided this breakdown.

Once again there is considerable variation between constituencies in both the number and proportion of ballot papers rejected, and in the reasons for rejection. In Blackburn over 1,700 ballots (nearly 4% of the total) were rejected; in Buckingham, where the Speaker stood for re-election with no major party opposition, more than 1,000 ballots were disqualified. In London a total of nearly 800 votes were ruled out for voting more than once in the two Tower Hamlets seats of Bethnal Green and Bow, and Poplar and Limehouse alone. At the other extreme, in 24 constituencies fewer than 50 votes were rejected, including 35 in Filton and Bradley Stoke and 36 in its South Gloucestershire council neighbour Kingswood. It is likely both that returning officers differ in their judgements about the admissibility of ballots, and that electors in some constituencies may be more prone to making errors than those in others.

Correlates of turnout

Turnout at general elections has long been correlated with both the socio-economic character and political marginality of a constituency. 2010 was no exception to this pattern, although marginality appears to have played a lesser role than previously. In part this may be explained by new constituency boundaries making the exact electoral arithmetic uncertain for parties and voters alike. Nonetheless, indices of deprivation such as the proportion unemployed and the proportion of single parents with dependent children in a constituency show especially strong negative correlations with turnout and all the relationships in Table 14 are statistically significant. The basic rule still holds: the more affluent the area and/or the more marginal the seat before the election, the higher the turnout is likely to be.

Table 14: Correlates of turnout 2005 and 2010*

	<i>Correlation with % turnout 2005</i>	<i>Correlation with % turnout 2010</i>
% prof/managerial workers	0.43	0.50
% owner-occupiers	0.72	0.64
% aged 18-24	-0.47	-0.41
% aged 65+	0.42	0.30
% degree	0.47	0.34
% lone parents with children	-0.80	-0.77
% unemployed	-0.76	-0.75
% non-white	-0.41	-0.29
% majority post-election	-0.51	-0.15
% majority pre-election	-0.72	-0.48

*England and Wales only for census variables

Correlates of turnout by postal voters

It was clear in analysis of the 2005 general election that there was a positive relationship between increased postal vote registration and *less* affluent and/or politically *less* marginal areas. This ran contrary to the media emphasis on the importance accorded by political parties at that election to maximising

postal votes in marginal seats, but did make sense in terms of the kinds of places where all-postal pilots had been most prevalent. The list of constituencies in Table 8 suggests this pattern has continued. One interesting by product of the spread of postal voting and the high turnout among such electors is demonstrated in Table 15. The expected relationships are still present, but they are much less strong than historically and weaker too than the correlations shown for the propensity of 'in-person' voters to turn out. In particular constituency marginality appears to be much less of a driver for those with a postal vote.

Table 15: Correlates of turnout by postal and 'in-person' voters 2010

	<i>Correlation with % turnout by postal voters</i>	<i>Correlation with % turnout by 'in- person' voters</i>
% prof/managerial workers	0.10	0.53
% owner-occupiers	0.46	0.59
% aged 18-24	-0.26	-0.37
% aged 65+	0.32	0.24
-% degree	0.00	0.38
% lone parents with children	-0.48	-0.72
% unemployed	-0.46	-0.70
% non-white	-0.37	-0.18
% majority post-election	-0.13	-0.12
% majority pre-election	-0.29	-0.47

*England and Wales only for census variables

Miscellaneous

From the constituencies for which we have information it appears that about a quarter of the total number of candidates opted not to show their home address on the ballot paper in accordance with the provisions of the EAA 2006. This practice was more prevalent in urban (especially London) than rural or suburban areas.

Twenty-three constituencies reported that they began the verification/count in working hours on the Friday morning following election day. Of the rest all except Londonderry East reported beginning verifying/counting votes within four hours of the close of poll. In the case of Londonderry the process began at 02:45, immediately succeeding that for the neighbouring Foyle constituency.