

Elections in Wales May 2016 – aspects of participation and administration

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July 2016

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Summary

- Simultaneous elections were held to choose 60 members of the National Assembly for Wales as well as four Police and Crime Commissioners.
- The number of constituency candidates at the Assembly elections was 248 -a record- compared to 176 in 2011 and 197 in 2007. Sixteen parties or groups were represented in the regional lists together with 2 individuals.
- Labour won a total of 29 out of 60 Assembly seats. The Conservatives took 11, Plaid Cymru 12; UKIP seven; and the Liberal Democrats a single seat. No other party or Independent candidate won a seat.
- In the PCC contests, there were 19 candidates across 4 police authority areas. Labour won two of the posts and Plaid Cymru two.
- Almost 2.25 million electors were eligible to vote at these elections: a decrease of more than 40,000 compared with 2011.
- The names of about 3.3% of those on the 'final' register were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and a further 1.6% between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April.
- More than 1,020,000 votes were counted in both the NAW constituency and regional level polls, making the overall turnout 45.6% - almost four percentage points higher than in 2011. Slightly fewer votes were cast at the PCC contests where the turnout was 45.2%.
- The proportion of ballot papers rejected at the count was again very small at the NAW elections – 0.54% of constituency ballots and 0.64% of list ballots. However, 5.3% of first votes were rejected at the PCC contests in Wales compared with 3.1% in 2012.
- Across Wales, 395,878 postal ballots were issued, representing 17.6% of the electorate. This is the largest proportion to date at an Assembly election, but fractionally below the 17.7% at the 2015 general election.
- More than seven in 10 of postal ballot forms issued were returned (73.9%). Of these, 3.5% (constituency) and 4.0% (regional list) were rejected because of failures relating to personal identifiers or non-inclusion of either a ballot paper or statement in the envelope. Some 5% of postal vote forms at the PCC elections were rejected – almost half for a failure to enclose the relevant ballot paper.

Introduction

All electors in Wales had the opportunity to cast four votes across two different types of election on May 5 2016. On the one hand, there was the fifth contest to elect members of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) following earlier elections in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011. On the other, there was the second round of elections (the first had taken place in November 2012) for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) in each of the four police authorities in Wales.

The electoral system for the NAW 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 Westminster 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 2012 contest.

The PCC contests use the Supplementary Vote (SV) electoral system which allows voters to record first and second choice votes. First preference votes are tallied across each police authority area and if one candidate has a majority of these s/he is elected. If no candidate receives such a majority, the top two candidates continue to a second round and all other candidates are eliminated. Any second choice votes cast for the top two by those who initially supported one of the eliminated contenders are then redistributed with the winner being the person with the largest total number of first and second preference votes.

Summary results

NAW

A record total of 248 candidates were nominated for the constituency contests: Labour, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, and Plaid Cymru fought all 40 seats; UKIP 38 and the Greens 36. In addition there were 8 Independents and six candidates from 'minor' parties. This compares with 176 candidates in 2011 and 197 in 2007. In the regional list voting, 8 parties contested all 5 regions and a further 8 parties were represented in at least one region with two individuals running as an Independents.

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 2011. As in all previous contests Labour topped the poll. The Conservatives were beaten for second place by Plaid in the regional vote, and the Liberal Democrats came fifth behind UKIP at both levels. Plaid and UKIP were the only parties unambiguously to increase their share of the vote compared with 2011.

Labour won 27 of the 40 'first past the post' seats (67.5%) despite polling less than 35% of the total vote. This was one seat less than in 2011 with Plaid Cymru gaining Rhondda: the only constituency to change hands. The Conservatives and Plaid took six seats each with the Liberal Democrats retaining Brecon and Radnorshire. Change was more dramatic at the regional level. UKIP won 7 seats (including at least one in each region) as the Conservatives lost 3 of their previous 8 seats and the Liberal Democrats all four of theirs. Labour's overall total of 29 seats was one fewer than in 2011 and meant that for the fifth time running no single party could command an overall majority in the Assembly.

Table 1**The Distribution of Votes and Seats, NAW 2016**

	Constituencies			Regional Lists			Total seats
	Votes	Votes %	Seats	Votes	Votes %	Seats	
Conservative	215,597	21.1	6	190,846	18.8	5	11
Labour	353,865	34.7	27	319,196	31.5	2	29
Lib Dem	78,165	7.7	1	65,504	6.5	0	1
Plaid Cymru	209,376	20.5	6	211,548	20.8	6	12
UKIP	127,038	12.5	0	132,138	13.0	7	7
Green	25,202	2.5	0	30,211	3.0	0	0
Others	10,139	1.0	0	65,300	6.4	0	0
Total	1,019,382	100.0	40	1,014,743	100.0	20	60

Table 2**Changes in the Distribution of Votes and Seats, NAW 2011- 2016**

	Constituencies		Regional Lists		Total Seats
	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	Share of Votes %	Seats Won	
Conservative	-3.9	-	-3.7	-3	-3
Labour	-7.6	-1	-5.4	-	-1
Lib Dem	-2.9	-	-1.5	-4	-4
Plaid Cymru	+1.2	+1	+2.9	-	+1
UKIP	+12.5	-	+8.4	+7	+7
Green	+2.3	-	-0.4	0	-
Others	-1.7	-	-0.3	0	-

PCC

There were 19 candidates in the four police authority areas in Wales compared with 15 in 2012. The Conservatives, Labour and Plaid Cymru fielded candidates across the board, but the Liberal Democrats and UKIP had just two each. In addition there were three Independents. Labour retained its Commissioner post in South Wales and gained Gwent from an Independent who did not stand again. Plaid (which had not contested the PCC elections last time) gained Dyfed-Powys from the Conservative incumbent and North Wales from the Independent incumbent.

NAW elections in Wales

Electorate and turnout

The eligible electorate for both the NAW and PCC elections was some 2.247 million. This was about 42,000 less than in 2011 and fractionally lower too than the electorate in 2007. With the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and media campaigns to encourage people to register, there was considerable interest in changes in the months and weeks leading up to May 2016. Electoral Registration Officers were asked a range of questions about the situation in their own authorities, but unfortunately fewer than two-thirds of them provided complete information at the requested NAW constituency level. The next paragraph is based on those cases.

It appears that the names of about 3.3% of those on the 'final' register were added between December 2015 and 13 March 2016, and that a further 1.6% were added between 13 March and the deadline of 16 April. Another 1.6% of the total electorate then applied for registration after the deadline. The application figures in the two time periods were rather higher –about 7.5% of the total electorate, but a quarter of those applications duplicated an individual already on the register at the same address. Record keeping for the number of unregistered electors who tried to vote on polling day is particularly poor, but in most constituencies numbers seem to be in single figures.

In calculating turnout we use the term 'valid vote' turnout' to refer to calculations based simply on the number of valid votes cast; 'ballot box turnout' to refer to calculations taking into account valid votes plus those which were considered but rejected at the count; and 'total turnout' to refer to calculations which take into account valid votes, those rejected at the count *and* those rejected at the postal ballot verification stage.

The number of votes counted at the ballot box at the separate constituency and regional contests varied by less than 5,000 out of a total of more than 1.01 million in each case. The overall aggregate ‘ballot box’ turnout was 45.6% at the constituency level and 45.4% at the regional – see table 3. This is almost 4 percentage points higher than in 2011 and only fractionally less than the ‘valid vote’ at the inaugural NAW elections in 1999. At the 2015 general election in Wales the turnout using the same measure was 65.8%.

Table 3

Different turnout measures at Welsh Assembly elections 2011-2016

	2016			2011		
	Total turnout %	Ballot box turnout %	Valid vote turnout %	Total turnout %	Ballot box turnout %	Valid vote turnout %
Constituencies	46.1	45.6	45.4	42.4	41.8	41.5
Regional Lists	46.0	45.4	45.2	42.3	41.7	41.4

Valid vote turnout in Welsh Assembly Elections 1999-2016

(turnout at regional contests in brackets)

1999 (%)	2003 (%)	2007 (%)	2011 (%)	2016 (%)
46.4 (46.1)	38.2 (38.1)	43.5 (43.4)	41.5 (41.4)	45.4 (45.2)

There is considerable variation in turnout between constituencies, ranging from 57.0% (Cardiff North) to 34.8% (Alyn and Deeside). Ten constituencies saw more than half of their registered electorate participate in the 2016 election; in seven, less than 40% did so. Across the regions in Wales ‘valid vote’ turnout, as reported in Table 4, was highest in Mid and West Wales (51.4%) and lowest in South Wales East and South Wales West – the two regions dominated by constituencies in the Welsh Valleys. However, turnout was higher in all regions compared to the 2011 election with the greatest increase in the South Wales Central and East regions (up by more than 5 percentage points).

Table 4

Valid vote turnout by region, Welsh Assembly elections 2007-2016
(Figures are for constituency elections)

	2016	2011	2007
	%	%	%
Mid and West Wales	51.4	48.6	50.9
North Wales	43.6	41.2	42.7
South Wales Central	46.8	41.2	42.4
South Wales East	41.9	38.5	41.5
South Wales West	43.2	37.9	40.3
Wales	45.4	41.5	43.5

Ballots rejected at the count

Table 5 reports the numbers of ballots rejected at the count for the 2016, 2011 and 2007 NAW elections. The incidence of rejected ballots remains very low. Indeed both the numerical and percentage totals for 2016 are the lowest since our records began. This time there were marginally more rejected ballots (0.1% of the total) at the regional than constituency level. In not a single constituency (compared with 8 in 2011) were more than 1% of the ballots cast rejected. The highest proportions were in Aberconwy (0.93%) and Arfon (0.92%); the lowest in Ceredigion (0.33%) and Vale of Clwyd (0.30%).

Table 5

Rejected Ballots at count 2007-2016

	Constituencies		Regional Lists	
	Number	% of all	Number	% of all
2016	5,509	0.54	6,491	0.64
2011	7,837	0.82	7,205	0.75
2007	5,899	0.60	n/a	n/a*

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

In Table 6 the reasons for the rejection of ballots between 2007 and 2016 are summarised. As in 2007 and 2011, a paper being unmarked or there being uncertainty as to the voter's intentions is by far the commonest reason for

rejection. It is interesting that a higher proportion of electors at both constituency and regional contests this time voted for ‘too many candidates’ on the same ballot slip. However, in each case this was fewer than 2,100 individual electors from more than 1million votes cast.

Table 6
Reasons for Ballots Being Rejected 2007-2016

	2007		2011		2016	
	Const (%)	Reg (%)	Const (%)	Reg (%)	Const ¹ (%)	Reg (%)
Unmarked or void for uncertainty	71.2	n/a*	80.1	72.2	63.8	67.6
Voting for too many candidates	26.6	n/a	18.7	27.3	29.2	31.6
Writing or mark identifying voter	2.2	n/a	1.1	0.5	1.6	0.7
Want of official mark	0	n/a	0.02	0.01	2.5	0

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

Postal Voting

Almost 400,000 postal ballots were issued representing 17.6% of the electorate – see Table 7. This compares to 17.0% in 2011, 12.2% in 2007 and 6.9% in 2003. This is the largest proportion to date at an Assembly election, but fractionally below the 17.7% at the 2015 general election. The proportion of electors having postal votes ranged from 11.7% in Cardiff South & Penarth and 13.3% in Dwyfor Meirionnydd to 23.9% in Llanelli. Among the regions, the variance was between 16.6% in North Wales and 18.9% in South Wales West.

Table 7
Postal electors and NAW votes 2016

Constituency

Number of postal ballot papers issued 395,878 as % of electorate 17.6 (17.0 in 2011)

¹ 2016 Constituency figure does not sum to 100%, Arfon did not provide disaggregated reasons for rejection.

Number returned	292,623	as % of issued	73.9 (71.1 in 2011)
Number included 'in count'	282,512	as % of votes at count	27.6 (27.7 in 2011)
Rejected or not included in count	10,111	as % of those returned	3.5 (4.7 in 2011)

Region

Number of postal ballot papers issued	395,878	as % of electorate	17.6 (17.0 in 2011)
Number returned	292,065	as % of issued	73.8 (71.1 in 2011)
Number included 'in count'	280,445	as % of votes at count	27.5 (27.7 in 2011)
Rejected or not included in count	11,620	as % of those returned	4.0 (4.8 in 2011)

Postal ballots returned totalled 292,623 or 73.9% of those issued –higher than in 2011 (71.1%) but lower than in 2007 (78.9%). It is clear though that the proportion of postal voters who return their ballot papers continues to be much larger than the turnout among 'in person' voters. In 2016 40.1% of those obliged to vote at a polling station did so; in 2011 the figure had been just 35.8%. The constituency with the highest turnout of postal votes was again Aberconwy (79.5%) and the lowest was Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (61.3%). Postal votes accounted for 27.6% of all ballots included in the count – about the same as in 2011 despite the overall rise in participation. This varied from 20.5% in Dwyfor Meirionnydd to just over 35% in both Llanelli and Neath. A total of 1,210 covering envelopes were received after the close of the poll and were, therefore, excluded from further consideration.

All postal votes are subject to verification before being forwarded to the count. Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, postal voters must first meet the statutory requirements for the documentation they return by supplying personal identifiers in the form of their date of birth and signature both when they apply for a postal vote and when they return a ballot paper. Votes submitted by those whose details are deemed to match are then added at the count to those of electors who have voted in person.

The number of postal votes included in the constituency count was 282,512 and 280,445 at the regional count. This means that 10,111 or 3.5% of returned postal votes were rejected and not included in the constituency contests and that 11,620 or 4.0% of returned postal votes were similarly treated in the regional

contests. This is a decline of 1.2 and 0.8 percentage points respectively compared to the proportion rejected in 2011 which itself was about 1 percentage point lower in each case than in 2007. The figures suggest that postal electors in Wales are becoming ever more familiar with the rules of engagement.

A summary of reasons for rejecting returned postal ballots is reported in Table 8. The most common single reason for rejection was that either the statement or ballot paper was not returned within the covering envelope (37.1%). 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 (41.5% overall). Only about one in five postal votes returned was rejected due to missing personal identifiers. However, as we have noted before, there were striking variations between constituencies in the reasons for rejections. In some cases all rejections were ascribed to ‘mismatching’; in others, up to 75% to the lack of a signature and/or date of birth. Rejection due to the statement or ballot paper not being returned accounted for three quarters of cases in some places; for none at all elsewhere. Why there should be such large differences in reasons for rejecting returned postal ballots between constituencies is unclear but is 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.

Table 8

**Reasons for rejecting returned postal ballots, Welsh Assembly elections
2011 and 2016 (rounded)**

	% 2016²	% 2011
Want of a signature	7	4
Want of a date of birth	8	8
Want of both signature and date of birth	7	4
Mismatched signature	16	12

² As above re: Arfon

Mismatched date of birth	20	18
Both signature and date of birth mismatched	6	4
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Statement or ballot paper not returned	37	50

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 3,287 voters (0.8% of all postal electors) across Wales were granted such a waiver; an average of 82 per constituency. The largest number of waivers was 217 in Bridgend; the smallest eleven in Montgomeryshire. The comparable figures for 2011 were 3,076 waivers – or an average of 77 per constituency.

Proxy Voters

Proxies were appointed in 3,011 cases (0.13% of the electorate) compared to 3,378 in 2011 and fewer than 3,000 in 2007. Of these, 98 were emergency proxies. The number of proxies averaged 75 per constituency but ranged from 24 in both Cardiff South & Penarth and Newport East to 196 in Vale of Glamorgan.

Polling Stations

Some 2,545 polling stations were used in the 39 constituencies for which we have information –an average of 65 per constituency. More than 100 were used in Carmarthen East & Dinefwr, Llanelli, and Vale of Glamorgan; fewer than 40 in Aberconwy, Bridgend, Vale of Clwyd, and Wrexham.

PCC elections in Wales

The franchise for the PCC elections was the same as that for the NAW contests and therefore much of the relevant data on electorate size and change, and on

the issuing of postal votes overlaps. However, it is worth drawing attention to a number of factors where combination appears to have influenced elector behaviour.

It is well known that once a decision has been made to participate in an election event, most people will complete as many ballot papers as they are given. This time was no exception and we should not be surprised that only 9,000 fewer first votes were cast at the PCC elections than at the NAW constituency level to produce a 'ballot box' turnout of 45.2%. What is striking though is the difference with the inaugural PCC contest in 2012 when just 15.4% of electors in Wales cast a ballot.

On the other hand, a much higher proportion of those who did vote were found to have done so invalidly in terms of their PCC ballot paper. More than 54,000 first PCC votes were rejected – 5.3% of all those at the ballot box or ten times more than for the NAW elections. In one half of all cases the ballot paper was completely unmarked; in the other it was uncertain who was being supported (including casting a multiple vote). In 2012, 3.1% of PCC votes were rejected at the count.

There was a similar, if less dramatic pattern among postal voters. 73.9% of them returned a covering envelope, but the contents were rejected in 5% of cases compared with 3.5% for the NAW constituency vote. Moreover, 45% of these occurrences were for a failure to enclose a ballot paper. At the NAW elections the comparable figure was 19%.

Despite the increase in participation engendered by combination, it seems that a proportion of electors are still reluctant to engage with either the idea of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners and/or the supplementary vote electoral system.

Further details and discussion on the 2016 PCC elections and the impact of their combination with other contests can be found in the accompanying report on elections in England in May 2016.