

The 2011 Referendum on the  
Parliamentary Voting System:  
aspects of participation and  
administration

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## **Summary**

- The UK electorate at the 2011 referendum was nearly 45.7 million –the largest ever. The registers contained almost 90,000 more names than at the 2010 general election exactly one year earlier.
- More than 200,000 people registered to vote in the weeks leading up to May 5<sup>th</sup>; many taking advantage of the so-called ‘11 day rule’ (which was introduced by the 2006 Electoral Administration Act).
- Nearly 19.3 million votes were cast, making the overall turnout across the UK 42.2%. This is over 20 percentage points lower than at the only other UK-wide referendum in 1975.
- There were coincident elections for the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and coincident local elections in the large majority of English local authorities. Turnout at the referendum was higher than the UK average in both Northern Ireland and Scotland, but not in Wales. Among the English regions the highest turnout was in the South West, as it had been at the 2010 general election; the lowest was in London where there were no local government elections.
- The proportion of ballots that are rejected at the official count continues to be small, but at six in every thousand votes cast it was double that recorded at the 2010 general election. The vast majority of those rejected were deemed ‘unmarked’ or ‘void for uncertainty’.
- More than 7 million postal votes were issued -15.8% of the entire electorate. This represented an increase compared with the 2010 general election in every nation of the UK, and in every region of England.
- In eight English counting areas more than 30% of the electorate had a postal vote; in 14 English and 11 Scottish areas fewer than 10% did so.
- More than 70% of those with a postal ballot returned it. By way of contrast, fewer than 4 in 10 of those electors required to vote ‘in person’ did so. In both Scotland and Northern Ireland the turnout of both types of voter was higher than the UK average.
- The number of postal votes at the count in Great Britain was more than one in four of the total. In the North East region of England almost a half of all votes were cast by post.
- The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was 5.9%. This is some two percentage points higher than at the 2010 general election. Rejection following a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was more common than rejection for incomplete information, but in a third or more of cases voters returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both.

- About one half of one percent of electors with a postal vote were granted a waiver to use their date of birth as their sole identifier. Such waivers were twice as common in Scotland as in England.
- Nearly 80,000 electors (0.16% of the total) appointed proxies. This was half the level of the 2010 general election.
- In those areas which had no coincident local elections turnout appears to have been lower than might otherwise have been expected. This was particularly the case in London. On the other hand, having a combined referendum/local election was associated with a higher level of rejection of both ballot papers and postal vote documentation.

## Introduction

The UK-wide Referendum held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May was the first such event for over 35 years. Only once before, in 1975, had the entire electorate been offered the opportunity to make its views known in this way. On that occasion 64% of those eligible responded to the question 'Do you think that the United Kingdom should stay in the European Community (The Common Market)?' with twice as many voting 'Yes' as 'No'. This time the turnout was lower (42%), but the result was similarly decisive. Some 32.1% said 'Yes' to the question 'At present, the UK uses the 'first past the post' system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the 'alternative vote' system be used instead?', but 67.9% said 'No'.

## Electorate

The franchise for the referendum was the same as for a general election with nearly 45.7 million individuals being entitled to vote. This represented an increase of almost 90,000 compared with the 2010 general election. There were more people registered in each of the countries of the UK –see Table 1. The largest proportional increase was in Northern Ireland following the further bedding in of new procedures for individual registration and voter identification. It remains to be seen what impact the introduction from 2014 of individual rather than household registration in the rest of the UK will have on elector numbers.

**Table 1: Electorate at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	<i>Electorate 2011 referendum</i>	<i>Electorate 2010 general election</i>	<i>Change 2010-11</i>
UK	45,684,501	45,597,461	+87,040
GB	44,485,535	44,428,277	+57,258
England	38,323,528	38,300,110	+23,418
N. Ireland	1,198,966	1,169,184	+29,782
Scotland	3,893,268	3,863,042	+30,226
Wales	2,268,739	2,265,125	+3,614

Some 200,000 electors, mainly in England, 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 after the referendum was called. As at last year's general election this seemed more prevalent in urban areas, especially in London. Returning Officers also reported that over 40,000 people tried to register after the deadline and that some 5,000 appeared at polling stations wishing to vote without being registered. The latter two figures should be seen as approximate as not all EROs kept appropriate records.

## Turnout

Turnout at the referendum can be measured in a number of ways. Taking into account the total number of votes cast, the turnout was 42.22%. A more traditional measure of turnout, valid votes cast as a proportion of the eligible electorate, gives a rate across the UK of 41.95%. Turnout was higher in Scotland and Northern Ireland where concurrent devolution elections probably boosted participation in the referendum –see Table 2. The referendum also coincided with National Assembly elections in Wales, but turnout at those contests has always been less than for their equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland and voters may additionally have felt a degree of fatigue having experienced a referendum on the powers of the Assembly as recently as March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the referendum turnout closely matched that for the Parliament/Assembly elections. This suggests, as we know from past evidence, that once electors have made the decision to vote they tend to participate in all the elections on offer. The large majority of electors in England also had the opportunity to vote in local government elections on May 5<sup>th</sup> and we will consider the impact of these on turnout later in this report. Among the English regions turnout was highest in the South West, as it had been at the 2010 general election, and lowest in London where there were no local elections.

**Table 2: Turnout at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	<i>Electorate 2011</i>	<i>Votes cast 2011</i>	<i>%turnout 2011</i>
UK	45,684,501	19,285,751	42.2
GB	44,485,535	18,616,895	41.8
England	38,323,528	15,694,414	41.0
N. Ireland	1,198,966	668,856	55.8
Scotland	3,893,268	1,975,558	50.7
Wales	2,268,739	946,923	41.7
East Midlands	3,348,469	1,432,237	42.8
Eastern	4,263,006	1,839,362	43.1
London	5,258,802	1,862,468	35.4
North East	1,968,137	762,303	38.7
North West	5,239,323	2,048,723	39.1
South East	6,288,366	2,788,180	44.3
South West	4,028,829	1,797,245	44.6

West Midlands	4,093,521	1,633,464	39.9
Yorkshire & The Humber	3,835,075	1,530,432	39.9

There was greater variation in turnout at counting area level. In 63 areas (44 of them in Scotland) more than half the electorate voted; in 18 areas (10 of them in London) less than a third did so. The counting areas with the highest and lowest valid vote turnouts in England, Scotland and Wales are noted in Table 3. It is interesting to note that the areas with the highest and lowest turnout in Scotland, and that with the lowest turnout in Wales, cover the same or similar territory to the Westminster parliamentary constituencies occupying the same place in the league table at the 2010 general election.

**Table 3: Counting area level ‘valid vote’ turnout at the 2011 PVS referendum**

<i>Highest turnout 2011</i>		<i>Lowest turnout 2011</i>		
England	Winchester	53.9	Newham	27.2
Scotland	Eastwood	63.0	Glasgow Provan	34.9
Wales	Brecon and Radnorshire	52.9	Swansea East	31.2

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 4. ‘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 4: ‘Adjusted’ and ‘unadjusted’ turnout at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	<i>Adjusted %turnout 2011</i>	<i>‘Minimal unadjusted %turnout 2011’</i>	<i>‘Maximal unadjusted %turnout 2011’</i>
UK	42.0	42.2	42.9
GB	41.6	41.8	42.5
England	40.7	41.0	41.6
N. Ireland	55.2	55.8	56.0
Scotland	50.4	50.7	51.5
Wales	41.5	41.7	42.6

## Rejected ballots

The number of ballot papers rejected at the count was but a small fraction of the total cast (0.62%) –see Table 5. However it was more than twice as high as at the recent general election (0.28%) and comparable to the level at the 2009 European Parliament contests (0.7%). The vast majority of ballots were rejected because the voter had either not marked the ballot paper or made their intention clear. This is perhaps not surprising. A referendum was a unique or, at best, an unusual event for most of those participating and many

will have been uncertain quite what to do. However without the ability to examine individual ballot slips we can never know the exact reason for rejection.

As at the general election Blackburn topped the table for rejected ballots (5.8% of those at the count), followed at a distance by Luton (3.6%) and Oldham (3.2%). At the other extreme the rejection rate in Fareham was just 0.08% and in Northumberland it was 0.09%. It is likely both that returning officers differ in their judgements about the admissibility of ballots, and that electors in some counting areas may be more prone to making errors than those in others.

**Table 5: Rejected ballot papers at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	<i>Ballot papers rejected at the count</i>	<i>% of ballots at count</i>		
UK	120,021	0.62		
GB	112,959	0.61		
England	95,322	0.61		
N. Ireland	7,062	1.06		
Scotland	12,370	0.63		
Wales	5,267	0.56		

  

	<i>No official mark (%)</i>	<i>Voting more than once (%)</i>	<i>Voter could be identified (%)</i>	<i>Unmarked or uncertain (%)</i>
UK	242 (0.2)	7,855 (6.5)	2,853 (2.4)	109,071 (90.9)
GB	242 (0.2)	7,218 (6.4)	2,829 (2.5)	102,670 (90.9)
England	210 (0.2)	6304 (6.6)	2,608 (2.7)	86,200 (90.4)
N. Ireland	0 ( 0.0)	637 (9.0)	24 (1.3)	6,401 (90.6)
Scotland	30 (0.2)	541 (4.4)	162(1.3)	11,637 (94.1)
Wales	2 (0.0)	373 (7.1)	59(1.1)	4,833 (91.8)

## **Postal voting – uptake and turnout**

The proportion of electors with postal votes continues to rise. Nearly 7.2 million were issued for the referendum or 15.8% of the total electorate –see Table 6. This compares with just under 7 million (or 15.3% of the electorate) at the time of the 2010 general election. Postal voting remains very much the exception in Northern Ireland, where different rules are in force, and it continues to be less prevalent in Scotland than in England and Wales. All the English regions saw further increases in postal voters. The four regions which had had all postal ballots at the 2004 European Parliament elections continue to top the league table. There, and in Wales, at least one in six electors are registered to vote by post.

In terms of individual counting areas, Sunderland had the largest proportion of postal electors and (excluding Northern Ireland) Kingston upon Hull the least –

see Table 7. In eight areas of England more than 30% of electors were registered to vote by post –Sunderland; South Tyneside; Stevenage; Newcastle upon Tyne; Telford and Wrekin; Rushcliffe; Gateshead; and Chorley. In 14 areas in England and 11 in Scotland (including seven of the eight Glasgow constituencies) fewer than 10% of electors were on the postal voting list.

**Table 6: Postal voting at the 2011 PVS referendum**

<i>2011</i>	<i>Postal ballots issued</i>	<i>%electors with postal ballot</i>
UK	7,197,654	15.8
GB	7,174,839	16.1
England	6,239,793	16.3
N. Ireland	22,815	1.9
Scotland	548,023	14.1
Wales	387,023	17.1

<i>English regions</i>	<i>%electors with postal ballot</i>
East Midlands*	16.6
Eastern	14.8
London	14.2
North East*	27.1
North West*	18.2
South East	15.1
South West	16.0
West Midlands	13.1
Yorkshire & The Humber*	18.1

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

**Table 7: Counting area level issue of postal votes at the 2011 PVS referendum**

<i>Highest % of postal votes 2011</i>		<i>Lowest % of postal votes 2011</i>		
England	Sunderland	39.6	Kingston upon Hull	6.4
Scotland	Aberdeen S and N Kincardine	20.1	Glasgow Kelvin	8.3
Wales	Neath	22.5	Dwyfor Meirionnydd	11.6

As noted in previous elections, turnout among postal electors was again significantly higher than that among in-person voters –see Table 8. Across the UK more than seven in ten returned their postal ballot papers (even if some were eventually ruled invalid), with the figure being somewhat higher in both Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England and Wales, turnout among postal voters was almost twice as high as that among those obliged to visit a polling station. This large discrepancy in turnout matches that found at other ‘second order’ elections and confirms that postal voters are more likely to use their vote whatever the type of contest than in-person voters. At the 2010 general

election, for example, the turnout among these electors was less than 63% compared with over 83% among postal voters.

**Table 8: Turnout among postal and in-person electors at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	<i>Postal ballot papers returned</i>	<i>'Minimal unadjusted turnout' (in-person electors)</i>	
	2011	2011	<i>Difference</i>
UK	71.9	37.5	34.4
GB	71.8	36.9	34.9
England	71.4	35.8	35.6
Northern Ireland	80.5	55.5	25.0
Scotland	76.6	47.3	29.3
Wales	71.4	36.7	34.7

The increase in the take up of postal votes, and the discrepancy between postal and in-person turnouts, had an inevitable impact on the proportion of total votes cast in that way. Across the United Kingdom a quarter of all the votes counted were postal ballots –see Table 9. In England and Wales the figure was even higher. In the North East postal votes comprised almost half of the total, and in both the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber they approached one in three. In six counting areas (Gateshead, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Stevenage, Sunderland, and Telford and Wrekin), a majority of all votes were cast by post. In Sunderland the figure exceeded 68%.

**Table 9: Postal votes as % of votes at count at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	<i>postal votes as % of votes at count</i>
UK	25.2
GB	26.1
England	26.8
Northern Ireland	2.4
Scotland	19.8
Wales	27.1
<b>English regions</b>	
East Midlands*	26.3
Eastern	23.7
London	24.6
North East*	46.9
North West*	31.1
South East	23.7
South West	24.8
West Midlands	22.1
Yorkshire & The Humber*	30.7

\*2004 all-postal pilot regions

A final sidelight on postal voting is cast by data on returns received on polling day itself. More than 400,000 postal ballots (nearly 3% of all votes cast in those counting areas for which we have data) were not received until election day itself. It is likely that a large proportion of these will have been handed in at a polling station.

### Postal voting – invalid returns

Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, all those electors opting to vote by post are required to provide two pieces of personal information both when they apply for a postal ballot and when they return it. This record of their signature and date of birth is then used to verify their ballot paper and so provide additional security against personation or other electoral fraud.

A number of electors who try to vote by post are found to have completed the documentation incorrectly and their ballot papers are rejected before the count. Judgements about rejection are made following a verification procedure which aims to match the information provided by electors at the application and voting stages. At the 2011 PVS referendum all returning officers across Great Britain claimed to have verified 100% (or very nearly) of all postal ballot returns. In many of those cases where the proportion verified was close to but less than 100%, the evidence suggests that covering envelopes returned with no postal vote statements enclosed were simply set aside before the formal verification process.

A total of more than 300,000 individual postal ballots were rejected or otherwise excluded from the count. This amounted to 5.9% of all those returned. The proportion rejected varied from 5.7% in England to 12.8% in Northern Ireland –see Table 10. In each nation the rate of rejection was somewhat higher than at the 2010 general election when fewer postal votes were issued, but a greater number returned. The rate of rejection in Northern Ireland was up to twice as high as anywhere else in the UK on both occasions.

**Table 10: Invalid postal vote returns at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	<i>Invalid as % of returned 2011</i>	<i>Invalid as % of returned 2010 g.e.</i>	<i>Difference 2010-11</i>
UK	5.9	3.8	+2.1
GB	5.9	3.8	+2.1
England	5.7	3.8	+1.9
N. Ireland	12.8	10.9	+1.9
Scotland	6.6	3.6	+3.0
Wales	7.3	4.2	+3.1

In order to obtain more information on the reasons for postal vote rejection than the statutory forms allow and to try to overcome inconsistencies within and between local authorities in the recording of answers to questions B15-17

within Form K (general and local elections)<sup>1</sup> – ‘Number of postal voting statements NOT subject to verification rejected -not completed’; ‘Number of postal voting statements rejected following verification -not completed’; and ‘Number of postal voting statements rejected following verification -personal identifier match’, each returning officer was asked to compile and submit additional data on the outcomes of their verification process.

Table 11 makes clear that rejection following a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was more common than rejection for incomplete or missing information. The latter accounts for between one in four and one in five rejections; the former for between half (Wales) and a little over a third (England). In a further third or more of cases voters returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both. Having said that, the vast majority correctly filed their returns complete with matching signature and date of birth.

Although the pattern is not wholly dissimilar in England, Scotland and Wales, these data should be seen as indicative rather than definitive. For example, there were often sharp differences between counting areas in the distribution of the reasons for rejection. Not all authorities were able to provide the breakdowns requested, and some reported to us that the election software used did not allow for a break down of rejections into these categories. Indeed in some cases, where for example all of a large number of rejections are listed under a single category, the figures given for the various columns look implausible.

**Table 11. Reasons for rejection of postal votes at verification by % of total rejected at 2011 PVS referendum (rounded)**

	<b>GB</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Wales</b>
PV statement rejected (No signature)	10	10	13	4
PV statement rejected (No DoB)	4	4	3	7
PV statement rejected (Both)	10	10	10	4
<b>Proportion rejected (incomplete information)</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>
PV statement mismatched signature	19	20	16	11
PV statement mismatched DoB	13	13	12	17
PV statement mismatched both	7	7	4	4
<b>Proportion rejected (mismatching)</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Prop rejected (ballot paper or statement missing)</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>

There were also instances of the number of postal ballots sent forward to the count being significantly less than the number returned minus the number reported as being rejected. Electoral Administrators tell us that this was a consequence of the joint issue of postal voting documentation and the lack of a specific recording category for those who successfully voted in one electoral event, but not the other. For example, if an elector In England returned their

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<sup>1</sup> These are the statements as to the issuing and receipt of postal ballot papers which Returning Officers are responsible for completing after an election.

postal vote documentation but included only a local election ballot paper, some administrators will have recorded the return of covering envelopes and postal voting statements but not that the referendum vote itself was missing. The overall figures for invalid postal vote returns in Table 10, though not the distribution of reasons for rejection in Table 11, take this factor into account.

## 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. Table 12 shows that the proportion of postal electors granted such a waiver varied from 1.05% in Scotland to 0.43% in England. These summary figures are very similar in both proportion and pattern to those recorded for the 2010 general election and the 2009 European Parliament and English local elections. However, they do disguise considerable variations between counting areas.

**Table 12: Postal electors granted 'waivers' at the 2011 PVS referendum**

	As proportion of postal electors	Average per constituency
Great Britain	0.50	82
England	0.43	83
Scotland	1.05	79
Wales	0.76	74

In all eight counting areas in Glasgow waivers exceeded 4% of the postal electorate, and in another six –three in Scotland, two in England and one in Wales- they were between 2% and 3.2% of the total. The greatest proportion of waivers in England (2.9%) was in the Arun district council counting area that also topped this list at the 2010 general as well as the 2009 European and local elections. At the other extreme, six counting areas explicitly reported to us that no waivers at all had been granted.

A review of the overall list suggests, perhaps unsurprisingly, that waivers *may* be more common in areas with a substantial elderly and/or deprived population. It also seem likely, witness the Glasgow example, that the degree to which local authorities draw attention to this facility itself has an impact on take up rates.

## Proxy voting

Except in Northern Ireland, the number and proportion of proxies appointed was about half that at the 2010 general election. In Great Britain 0.16% of the electorate had a proxy to vote on their behalf compared with 0.32% in 2010 – see Table 13. This figure is similar to that at recent local and European Parliament elections and probably reflects a belief that it was 'less important' to ensure that a vote was cast at this contest. In Northern Ireland, by contrast, the total number of proxies appointed was double that reported by the Elections Office for Northern Ireland in 2010.

A total of 568 emergency proxy votes were issued. In just four counting areas (three in Scotland) did the number of such proxies exceed a dozen. These were Cowdenbeath 62; West Lindsey 39; Midlothian North and Musselburgh 24; and Stirling 24.

**Table 13: Proxy voting at the 2011 PVS referendum\***

	<i>Proxy votes issued 2011</i>	<i>as % of electorate</i>
UK	78,758	0.17
GB	74,309	0.16
England	63,612	0.16
N. Ireland	4,449	0.37
Scotland	7,206	0.19
Wales	3,491	0.16

\*Data missing for 4 counting areas

### **Impact of combined PVS referendum and local elections**

In a report on the 2009 European Parliament and English local elections, we noted that EP turnout (and the number of rejected ballot papers) was higher in those places where the local and Euro contests were combined than in places without local elections. It is difficult to make such a clear comparison on this occasion. First, the PVS referendum was a unique event whereas voter behaviour at the 2009 EP contests could be compared with that five years previously in 2004. Second, outside London, just 13 local authority areas across England had no coincident local elections<sup>2</sup>. Third, there is no fixed point of comparison as some authorities last had local elections in 2008 and others had them in 2009. What follows must therefore be seen as merely indicative.

The absence of local elections in London had led many to speculate that turnout for the referendum there might be very low indeed. The actual valid vote figure of 35.3% exceeded pessimistic expectations, but was still more than nine percentage points below that for the 2008 Mayor and Assembly contests and nearly five points below that for the 2006 London borough elections<sup>3</sup>. In the metropolitan boroughs, by contrast, where there were local elections, valid vote turnout for the referendum was 37.9% -more than three percentage points above the comparable figure at both the 2006 and 2008 local elections there.

For referendum-only authorities in 'shire' England we have compiled a table showing the turnout this May compared with that for the most recent local

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<sup>2</sup> These were the unitary councils of Cornwall, Durham, Isle of Wight, Northumberland, Shropshire, and Wiltshire; and those seven district councils which have elections by halves in even numbered years – Adur, Cheltenham, Fareham, Gosport, Hastings, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Oxford.

<sup>3</sup> We make no comparisons with contests in 2010 owing to the influence of the coincident general election on turnout.

elections –see Table 14. The picture is mixed, although in contrast to the pattern in London some authorities do show quite a sharp increase in turnout compared with the 2008 local elections in particular. A crude average is that turnout is some two percentage points above that four years ago. We also examined the figures for those 71 district councils which had local elections in 2008 and combined contests this year. In those cases their aggregate 2011 turnout of 42.5% was some six percentage points above that in 2008.

**Table 14. 2011 PVS referendum turnout compared with most recent local elections – authorities without ‘combined’ contests.**

<i>Authority</i>	<i>PVS referendum turnout 2011</i>	<i>Change on recent local election (year)</i>
Adur	39.8	+7.5 (2008)
Cheltenham	41.3	+5.5 (2008)
Fareham	45.3	+5.1 (2008)
Gosport	37.6	+1.1 (2008)
Hastings	36.7	+0.3 (2008)
Nuneaton and Bedworth	36.1	-3.9 (2008)
Oxford	39.0	+6.4 (2008)
Cornwall	40.1	-1.1 (2009)
Durham	34.9	-1.5 (2008)
Isle of Wight	40.1	- (2009)
Northumberland	40.8	-0.4 (2008)
Shropshire	42.1	-1.9 (2009)
Wiltshire	45.5	+2.6 (2009)

In general it appears that overall turnout was higher this year than at the 2008 local elections. Turnout in those few authorities outside London without local elections was up on average, but by a lesser margin. In London turnout was markedly down compared with 2008. We would argue that, as at the European Parliament elections in 2004 and 2009, the stimulus of ward level as opposed to national, media driven campaigning (together with the perception of local elections as having a more direct impact on voters’ lives) is important in boosting ‘second-order’ election turnout if only by a few percentage points.

The presence or absence of combined elections also has a clear impact on the number of rejected ballots and/or postal vote papers. In London just 0.24% of referendum ballots were rejected at the count; in the metropolitan boroughs the figure was 1.02%. In London 4.8% of postal vote returns were rejected before going forward to the count; in the metropolitan boroughs the figure was 6.6%. Similarly, 0.16% of referendum ballots were rejected at the count in those 13 authorities with no local elections; the proportion for the rest of shire England was 0.53%. Among postal voters, 5.6% of their returns were rejected before the count where there were local elections; 3.1% where there were not. This matches anecdotal evidence from Electoral Administrators who reported to us instances of postal ballot envelopes being returned but with documentation for one or other of the electoral events missing. In many cases this is likely to be because electors consciously chose to vote in only one of the contests.