

Local Elections in Wales 2012

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Summary

- Local elections were held for 1,244 seats in 21 authorities in Wales. Elections in Anglesey were postponed until May 2013.
- Some 3,300 candidates contested the local elections, yielding a candidate/seat ratio of 2.7 overall. This is higher than in 2008 despite one council fewer having elections.
- The proportion of uncontested seats remains high compared with both England and Scotland. 99 seats (8.1% of the total) were uncontested. In 2008 the proportion of contested seats was also 92% of the total; at the previous election in 2004 it was 88% and in 1999 it was just 78%.
- Some 2.12 million out of a total of 2.26 Welsh electors had a contested election in their ward.
- More than 10,000 electors (0.5% of the total) registered to vote in the weeks leading up to the election under the so-called '11 day rule'.
- Nearly 818,000 votes were cast at the ballot box, making the overall turnout in contested seats 38.6%. This was some four percentage points below that in 2008. However, it remains considerably higher than the local election turnout in England which was 31% this year and 35% in 2008.
- Only a small fraction of Welsh voters (0.6%) had their ballots rejected at the count.
- Over one third of a million postal votes were issued -17.5% of all those with a contested election in their ward.
- In four council areas more than a fifth of the electorate had a postal vote; in three, fewer than 14% registered for one.
- More than two in three (68.2%) of those with a postal ballot returned it. In contrast only a third of those electors required to vote 'in person' did so (33.0%).
- The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was 4.4%.
- Rejection following a mismatch of signature and/or date of birth was much more common than rejection for incomplete information.
- In more than a quarter of cases of rejection voters returned their postal voting envelopes but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both.
- Nearly one percent of electors with a postal vote were granted a waiver to use their date of birth as their sole identifier.
- Some 3,100 local electors (0.15% of the total electorate) appointed proxies to act on their behalf.

Introduction

Elections for 21 local councils in Wales took place on May 3 2012. A total of 3,305 candidates competed for 1,224 seats in 841 divisions. Elections for Anglesey council were postponed until May 2013 on the direction of the Local Government Minister in the Welsh Assembly Government. Following the election Labour was the only political party with an outright majority on any council in Wales. It controlled ten authorities, with three having a majority of Independent councillors and the remaining nine being 'hung councils' with no single party in a majority. Compared to 2008 the Conservatives lost two councils and Labour gained eight

The results

Table 1 shows the overall result of the election. The Labour party polled the most votes with Independent candidates, supported by more than one in five voters, the next most popular choice. Plaid Cymru received support from nearly one in six voters, followed by the Conservatives (12.7% of the vote) and the Liberal Democrats (8.0%). The array of smaller parties won just 3.3% of the vote overall. In terms of seats, Labour won 576, 47.1% of the total, enjoying the 'winner's bonus' customary under the 'first past the post' voting system. Nearly one in four councillors elected to the new councils in 2012 stood as an Independent candidate. Some 27 candidates from 'other' parties were successful.

Table 1: Summary results 2012

PARTY	%Vote share	Seats	%Seats
Conservative	12.7	105	8.6
Green	1.2	0	0
Independent	23.5	286	23.4
Labour	35.6	576	47.1
Liberal Democrats	8.0	72	5.9
Plaid Cymru	15.7	158	12.9
Other	3.3	27	2.2

Note: In single member divisions the calculation of each party's vote is straightforward but this is not the case in divisions where more than one seat is being decided. To calculate party vote in these cases we use votes cast for the highest placed candidate from each party. Where Independents stand we cluster these candidates into groups according to the number of seats at stake.

The proportion of seats uncontested in Wales continues to be much higher than in either England or Scotland¹. Table 2 shows that it was the same this year as in 2008 (8.1%), although this figure is half that at the 1999 contests. In one ward - Bryn-crug/ Llanfihangel in Gwynedd - no candidates at all came forward. However, the number of overall candidates was greater than four

¹ See the reports on the local elections in England and Scotland 2012.

years ago despite the absence of one council. There was an average of 2.7 candidates contesting each vacancy, with competition tending to be more vigorous in urban than rural areas.

Table 2: Uncontested seats in Wales, 1999-2012

2012		2008		2004		1999	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
99	8.1	103	8.1	152	12.0	201	15.8

Electoral administration

Turnout

The electorate in the 21 councils with local elections was 2.26 million. Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, some 10,321 names (0.46% of the total) were added to the register under the so-called ‘11-day rule’. A further nearly 2,000 people tried either to register after the deadline or to vote on polling day despite not being registered. Votes were cast at more than 2,200 polling stations as well as by post.

Across Wales nearly 818,000 local votes were cast at the ballot box, making the overall aggregate turnout in contested seats 38.6%. Taking into account those who tried to vote but had their postal vote returns rejected, the level of participation rises to 39.2%. This compares with 42.6% and 43.1% respectively at the same point of the electoral cycle in 2008.

Note that where the local authority was unable to provide exact figures on ballot papers issued, our data may be less reliable. In such cases they are calculated using an algorithm based on the number of votes cast for each party and cannot take fully into account the number of voters in divisions where more than one vacancy was being contested who either did not use their full quota of votes or supported more than one party².

Table 3 shows both unadjusted and adjusted turnout for each local authority. The term ‘adjusted turnout’ refers to calculations based simply on the number of valid votes cast; ‘minimal unadjusted turnout’ takes into account those whose vote was rejected at the count; and ‘maximal unadjusted turnout’ takes account of *both* those whose votes were rejected at the count *and* those rejected at the postal ballot verification stage.

In no authority did more than half the eligible electorate vote, and in only six did more than four in ten electors vote or try to vote. In the remaining 15 cases turnout varied from 34.5% in Newport to 39.7% in the Vale of Glamorgan. With Anglesey missing, Ceredigion and Gwynedd took first and second places in the ‘league’ table as they had done in 2008. There are of course greater variations in turnout at ward level. It exceeded 60% in 21 wards (including

² See L. Ware, G. Borisyuk, C. Rallings and M. Thrasher, A New Algorithm for Estimating Turnout, *Electoral Studies*, 25,1 2006.

seven in Gwynedd and five in Ceredigion) and, at the other extreme, was less than 25% in 19 wards including four in Ceredigion and three in both Bridgend and Wrexham.

Table 3. Electoral turnout in 2012

	<i>Max unadjusted %</i>	<i>Min unadjusted %</i>	<i>Adjusted %</i>
Anglesey	n/a	n/a	n/a
Blaenau Gwent	38.0	37.7	37.6
Bridgend	35.0	34.4	34.1
Caerphilly	36.5	36.0	35.8
Cardiff	38.4	38.0	37.9
Carmarthenshire	45.7	44.5	44.3
Ceredigion	47.2	46.8	46.4
Conwy	38.4	38.0	37.7
Denbighshire	39.6	39.1	38.8
Flintshire	37.3	36.9	36.7
Gwynedd	48.6	48.3	48.0
Merthyr Tydfil	37.9	37.3	37.1
Monmouthshire	38.6	38.1	37.8
Neath & Port Talbot	40.1	39.4	39.2
Newport	34.5	33.9	33.7
Pembrokeshire	46.2	45.8	45.6
Powys	47.0	46.7	46.3
Rhondda/Cynon/Taff	36.6	36.1	35.8
Swansea	37.0	36.5	36.3
Torfaen	37.7	37.2	37.0
Vale Of Glamorgan	39.7	39.3	38.9
Wrexham	34.7	34.2	34.0
Overall	39.2	38.6	38.4

Rejected ballots

The overall number of votes rejected at the count was just 5,031 –an average of 240 per local authority. This amounts to 0.62% of all votes cast and is similar to that for the 2008 local elections (0.6%), the 2007 National Assembly elections (0.6%) and lower than in 2004 (0.8%) when voters had also to cope with the very different system for electing members of the European Parliament. Of this number nearly three-quarters were rejected as being ‘unmarked’ or ‘wholly void for uncertainty’. The highest proportion of rejected ballot ballots was in Ceredigion (0.98%); the lowest in Cardiff (0.30%). The number of vacancies to be filled in a ward makes no statistically significant difference to the proportion of ballot papers rejected.

Postal voting

Wales, as other areas of Great Britain, has seen a sizeable increase in the number of electors applying for and being granted a postal vote, with the proportion more than doubling between the 2001 and 2005 general elections. It has continued to rise, albeit more slowly –see Table 4.

Table 4. Postal voters as percentage of electorate in Wales 2001-2012

2001 general election	5.0
2003 NAW election	6.9
2004 local election	10.6
2005 general election	12.7
2007 NAW election	12.5
2008 local election	14.4
2010 general election	16.4
2011 NAW election	17.0
2012 local election	17.5

At the 2012 local elections one in six electors (369,460 or 17.5%) in wards with contests had a postal vote compared with 14.4% in 2008 and 10.6% in 2004 –see Table 5.

Table 5. Postal electors and local votes Wales 2012

Number of postal ballot papers issued	369,460	as % of electorate	17.5
Number returned	251,892	as % of issued	68.2
Number included 'in count'	240,801	as % of votes at count	29.4
Rejected or otherwise not included in count	11,091	as % of those returned	4.4

Table 6 shows the figures for 2012 by local authority. The local authority with the highest proportion of postal electors was Neath and Port Talbot (22.4%), followed by Carmarthenshire (22.0%), Torfaen (21.1%), and Rhondda/Cynon/Taff (20.0%). The lowest proportions were in Gwynedd (12.1%), Monmouthshire (13.1%) and Ceredigion (13.6%). In 2008 fewer than 10% of electors in these authorities (together with Merthyr Tydfil) registered for a postal vote. It is interesting that postal voting appears, on average, to be less common in rural than urban councils. However, the relationship is by no means linear and it is likely that the activities of local electoral administrators and/or political parties are mainly responsible for the varying levels found.

Table 6: Postal votes issued 2012

	<i>Postal votes</i>	<i>Electorate</i>	<i>%</i>
Anglesey	n/a	n/a	n/a
Blaenau Gwent	9,826	53,574	18.3
Bridgend	18,787	96,805	19.4
Caerphilly	19,335	121,590	15.9
Cardiff	46,303	254,607	18.2
Carmarthenshire	30,860	140,258	22.0
Ceredigion	7,714	56,663	13.6
Conwy	12,724	84,371	15.1
Denbighshire	12,907	68,951	18.7
Flintshire	16,376	102,264	16.0
Gwynedd	7,737	63,212	12.2
Merthyr Tydfil	6,311	43,164	14.6
Monmouthshire	8,079	61,723	13.1
Neath & Port Talbot	22,702	101,278	22.4
Newport	17,199	105,167	16.4
Pembrokeshire	12,222	72,133	16.9

Powys	10,222	70,505	14.5
Rhondda/Cynon/Taff	35,280	176,109	20.0
Swansea	32,569	184,471	17.7
Torfaen	14,604	69,117	21.1
Vale Of Glamorgan	13,434	94,044	14.3
Wrexham	14,269	96,601	14.8
Total	369,460	2,116,607	17.5

Table 7 shows the number of postal votes returned prior to the election. Overall, unadjusted turnout amongst postal voters was 68.2%, more than three points lower than in 2004 (71.4%). There was just one authority (Gwynedd) where more than three quarters of those with a postal vote returned it before the deadline. The lowest turnouts on this measure were in Bridgend (64.9%) and Cardiff (65.6%).

Table 7: Postal voter turnout 2012

	Postal votes	Returned	%
Anglesey	n/a	n/a	n/a
Blaenau Gwent	9,826	7,081	72.1
Bridgend	18,787	12,191	64.9
Caerphilly	19,335	12,961	67.0
Cardiff	46,303	30,374	65.6
Carmarthenshire	30,860	21,105	68.4
Ceredigion	7,714	5,482	71.1
Conwy	12,724	8,970	70.5
Denbighshire	12,907	9,064	70.2
Flintshire	16,376	10,865	66.3
Gwynedd	7,737	5,898	76.2
Merthyr Tydfil	6,311	4,550	72.1
Monmouthshire	8,079	5,775	71.5
Neath & Port Talbot	22,702	15,808	69.6
Newport	17,199	11,764	68.4
Pembrokeshire	12,222	8,387	68.6
Powys	10,222	7,273	71.2
Rhondda/Cynon/Taff	35,280	23,867	67.7
Swansea	32,569	22,195	68.1
Torfaen	14,604	9,807	67.2
Vale Of Glamorgan	13,434	8,832	65.7
Wrexham	14,269	9,643	67.6
Total	369,460	251,892	68.2

The proportion of postal voters who return their ballot papers has always exceeded the turnout among ‘in person’ voters. To an extent this can be explained by the fact of applying in the first place indicating a level of interest in and engagement with political events. However, especially in the case of second order elections (that is, all elections other than UK general elections), the convenience and flexibility of postal voting are also likely to boost participation.

It is possible to compare the unadjusted turnout amongst postal voters with that for electors who opted instead to vote at a polling station –see Table 8. Amongst postal voters turnout was 68.2% overall, but for polling station voters it was 33.0%. Put another way, postal voters are more than twice as likely to vote as those electors whose vote is cast at a polling station. The pattern is also apparent in all recent elections in Wales. This phenomenon also means that postal votes form a disproportionate number of those at the count. In 2012 more than one in 4 of votes counted (29.4%) were cast by post. In Neath and Port Talbot postal votes made up 38.0% of the total and nowhere did the proportion fall below 19%.

Table 8. % turnout among postal voters and non-postal voters in Wales 2007-12

2012 locals		2011 NAW		2008 locals		2007 NAW	
Postal	Non	Postal	Non	Postal	Non	Postal	Non
68.2	33.0	71.1	35.8	78.2	40.7	78.2	39.3

Rejected postal votes

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. The votes of those whose details cannot be matched are rejected. The proportion of postal votes rejected or otherwise not included in the count was, at 4.4%, less than that at any recent electoral event in Wales except the 2010 general election –see Table 9. There was also a relatively small variation between authorities in the proportion so rejected with only Carmarthenshire (7.6%) and Blaenau Gwent (2.2%) having a rejection rate of more than plus or minus 2 percentage points from the mean –see Table 10.

Table 9. % Ballot papers returned by post but rejected before count 2001-12

2001 general election	4.9
2003 NAW election	5.8
2004 local election	5.0
2005 general election	4.6
2007 NAW election	6.2
2008 local election	4.8
2010 general election	4.2
2011 NAW election	4.7
2012 local election	4.4

Table 10. Rejected postal votes 2008

	N=	%
Anglesey	n/a	n/a
Blaenau Gwent	157	2.2
Bridgend	587	4.8
Caerphilly	627	4.8
Cardiff	1114	3.7
Carmarthenshire	1595	7.6
Ceredigion	216	3.9
Conwy	376	4.2
Denbighshire	337	3.7
Flintshire	438	4.0
Gwynedd	165	2.8
Merthyr Tydfil	253	5.6
Monmouthshire	326	5.6
Neath & Port Talbot	632	4.0
Newport	600	5.1
Pembrokeshire	259	3.1
Powys	225	3.1
Rhondda/Cynon/Taff	887	3.7
Swansea	1063	4.8
Torfaen	339	3.5
Vale Of Glamorgan	387	4.4
Wrexham	508	5.3
Total	11,091	4.4

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, 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 much more common than rejection for incomplete or missing information. In more than a quarter of cases of rejection electors returned their postal voting envelopes, but failed to include either the ballot paper itself or the verification statement or both. This proportion is, however, very much lower than at the combined NAW election and parliamentary voting system referendum in 2011 when it accounted for fully a half of all postal vote rejections. It may have been that some voters deliberately decided not to vote at both electoral events that year.

Table 11. Reasons for rejection of postal votes at verification by % of total rejected at 2012 local elections in Wales

PV statement rejected (No signature)	9
PV statement rejected (No DoB)	6
PV statement rejected (Both)	5
Proportion rejected (incomplete information)	20

PV statement mismatched signature	20
PV statement mismatched DoB	23
PV statement mismatched both	9
Proportion rejected (mismatching)	52
Prop rejected (ballot paper or statement missing)	28

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. Across Wales 3,326 postal electors were granted such a waiver -0.9% of the whole postal electorate. The range varied from 3.0% of postal electors in Merthyr Tydfil being granted a waiver to just 0.3% of those in Monmouthshire.

Proxy votes

The liberalization of postal voting also appears to have had an impact on the number of electors appointing proxies (Table 12). Some 3,103 electors (0.15% of the total) appointed a proxy to vote on their behalf, a figure in line with all recent contests in Wales except the 2010 general election. The number of proxies averaged 148 per local authority, but ranged from 28 in Blaenau Gwent to 330 in Pembrokeshire. Just 28 emergency proxies were issued across the whole of Wales.

Table 12. Proxy voters as percentage of electorate in Wales 2001-12

2001 general election	0.45
2003 NAW election	n/a
2004 local election	0.19
2005 general election	0.18
2007 NAW election	0.12
2008 local election	0.11
2010 general election	0.27
2011 NAW election	0.15
2012 local election	0.15