



Make Votes Count

2008 London Mayoral and Assembly Elections

Results Briefing and Analysis

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CONTENTS:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	(p3)
FAST FACTS	(p3)
LONDON MAYORAL ELECTIONS	(p4)
1) Higher Turnout, Fewer Spoilt Ballots 2) Londoners Votes Counted	
LONDON ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY	(p6)
1) Constituency Assembly results show voters cared about the Assembly 2) How the FPTP constituency section has operated	
LONDON ASSEMBLY LONDON-WIDE	(p8)
1) Big reduction in rejected ballot papers 2) More voters choosing to vote in PR than FPTP ballot 3) London-wide Members' seat allocation and proportionality 4) Gender representation on the Assembly 5) MVC's response to the election of a BNP Assembly Member	
CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LONDON ELECTIONS	(p14)
AFTERWORD: a simple formula for understanding voting systems	(p15)

Londoners' Votes Count www.londonersvotescount.org.uk

Londoners' Votes Count was set up by Make Votes Count - electoral experts when it comes to preferential and proportional voting systems, and encouraging people to make the most of their vote. As well as having helped with voter education efforts prior to the London elections, the website provided more detailed information about the voting systems used, and makes the connections between these elections and the current electoral reform debate around the Alternative Vote for the Commons.

Make Votes Count campaigns for electoral systems which encourage parties to compete for votes in all constituencies, and gives voters a stronger stake in our political system, no matter where they live. People need to feel that their vote counts and that they are being listened.

Make Votes Count has brought together all the organisations campaigning for electoral reform and also has over eleven thousand individual supporters.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Londoners understood that their votes mattered

These Mayoral and Assembly elections have been good for voters, good for the parties and good for London democracy.

The high turnout figures in London, at 45%, show what happens when you get a competitive election and voting systems that give voters increased choice and the power to affect the result no matter where in the city they live. Londoners have understood that every vote actually can matter and have responded accordingly. This picture favourably contrasts with the local elections across the rest of the country, where turnout is significantly lower, at 35%, and far fewer voters would have felt they could have made a difference.

It may be the third set of London elections, but this is the first time that political parties, the media and civil society organisations have really got stuck in to explaining how the different systems work and how people can make the most of their votes. What we are seeing is the benefits of this education and attention.

The London voting systems encourage campaigning and ‘get-out-the-vote’ activity by parties in their heartland areas – those places and voters often marginalised during other elections. It appears these voters have responded to this increased attention and the rare opportunity they have to matter, and have had a significant impact on the result.

FAST FACTS:

- Turnout was 8.3% higher than when these elections were conducted in 2004.
- Almost half of Londoners who voted cast one of their preferences for the winning mayoral candidate.
- 86% of Londoners who voted, did so for a party that gained seat(s) on the London Assembly. Nearly 9 in 10 voters are now represented by at least one London Assembly Member from a party they voted for.
- The number of rejected votes – and especially wrongly filled in or spoilt ballot papers – was much lower than in 2004. 4.2% lower in the case of the assembly ballots. Voters were not confused by the different ballot papers or voting systems used. Spoilage rates (excluding papers left blank) for the respective ballots were: mayoral 1.14%; assembly constituency 0.32%; and assembly list 0.38%.

LONDON MAYORAL ELECTIONS:

1) Higher Turnout, Fewer Spoilt Ballots

Turnout - 45.33% (UP 8.38% from 2004)

Valid 1st choice votes = UP 1.29% (ie. that many fewer rejected ballots).

There were 2,415,958 valid votes cast (98.3%). A further 41,032 votes (1.67%) were rejected for one reason or another, of which 13,034 votes were left intentionally blank. Thus only 1.14% of people's votes were actively spoilt or wrongly filled out in the mayoral election.

2) Londoners Votes Counted

For the Mayor:

47.57% of Londoners who voted did so for Boris Johnson, the winning candidate.

(42.48% 1st choice + 5.09% 2nd choice votes)

89.44% of Londoners who voted had one of their votes count in the final round.

(47.57% for Boris and 41.87% for Ken [36.35% 1st choice + 5.49% 2nd choice votes])

In 2004 14.2% of valid first-preference votes were not valid for second preference. This election the number of valid 1st choice votes not transferring decreased markedly, to just 9.03%.

3) The Cautionary Tale of Second Preferences

After analysing the technical data for the 2nd preferences in the mayoral ballot, the most interesting things to note are:

(i) Over 4 in 5 people who voted (81.57%) chose to cast a 2nd preference vote.

(ii) Only 0.17% of 2nd choice votes were officially spoilt / rejected for reasons other than being left blank.

However, there are still serious questions about exactly how many people's second choice votes were actually valid and successfully transferred. According to the London Elects site:

Boris gained 257,792 2nd choice votes, but only 124,977 of them transferred to him in the second round - just under half.

Ken gained 303,198 2nd choice votes, but only 135,089 of them transferred to him in the second round - only 44.5%.

As the London Elects site states: "on papers where the 1st and 2nd choice votes are for the top two candidates, the 2nd choice votes are not counted." There are two plausible and complementary explanations for why these 260066 people (10.5% of all who voted) didn't have their 2nd choice vote count:

- a) the "we like them bothers" - people who either voted Boris 1 Ken 2, or Ken 1 Boris 2.
- b) the "*party faithful*" - those that 'double-voted' and marked their second choice the same as their first choice (so Boris Boris, or Ken Ken) in the misguided hope that that would somehow benefit their candidate more.

There are further downsides of the Supplementary Vote system (especially compared to the less restrictive Alternative Vote).

Voters had to guess which two mayoral candidates would be in the run-off if they wanted their second preference to actually effect the result. But this raises some concerns:

(a) did folk realize their second preferences would otherwise be wasted? This assumes that voters had all the information and understood the mayoral election very differently from the assembly one.

(b) suppose a Green supporter, say, thought it just possible the Lib Dem would be one of those fighting it out (and much preferred him to the other two), that very possibility made it imperative to record the second preference for him - and thus lose it. This type of forced calculation is a problem that the SV system throws up.

A system which has the potential to disenfranchise those many who cannot or do not guess how others will vote is problematic. And the issues may be even starker next time if it is not in practice a two-horse race.

See the **Afterword** for more on the SV versus AV discussion.

LONDON ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY:

1) Constituency Assembly results show voters cared about the Assembly

Turnout = UP 8.31%

Valid votes cast = UP 4.22% (ie. that many fewer rejected ballots).

Turnout was 45.28%, a mere 0.05% less than the Mayoral result. So there were under 3000 people who didn't bother to enclose the Assembly ballot papers with the Mayoral one when they posted their vote back / put it into the ballot box. Given the minimal media coverage given to the Assembly election compared to the Mayoral race, it is impressive that almost all voters continued filling in their ballot papers and didn't just vote for Mayor

2) How the FPTP constituency section has operated

- Number of London Assembly First-Past-the-Post constituencies considered competitive / marginal going into the election: **4**
(Enfield & Haringey, Brent & Harrow, Lambeth & Southwark, South West)
- Number of FPTP constituencies with actual close results in 2008: **2**
(Enfield & Haringey, Brent & Harrow)
- Number of FPTP constituencies which changed hands in 2008: **1**
(Brent & Harrow – Labour gain)
- Number of parties represented in FPTP constituencies: **2**
(Conservatives and Labour)
- Number of parties ever represented in FPTP constituencies: **2**
(Conservatives and Labour)
- Number of FPTP constituencies where winner gained over 50% of the vote: **2**
(West Central, Bexley & Bromley)
- Number of FPTP constituencies where more than 60% of people voted for a party who didn't win: **6**
(Brent & Harrow, City & East, Enfield & Haringey, Greenwich & Lewisham, Lambeth & Southwark, North East)
- Number of FPTP constituencies where winner gained less than 1/3 of the vote: **1**
(Enfield & Haringey)

In the FPTP constituencies it is interesting to note that:

Turnout – highest in: *Bexley & Bromley, Croydon & Sutton, West Central*

Turnout – lowest in: *City & East, Lambeth & Southwark, Greenwich & Lewisham.*

Turnout – highest increases in: *West Central, Croydon & Sutton, Enfield & Haringey.*

Turnout – lowest increases in: *Brent, South West, City & East.*

Rejected Votes – least in: *Bexley & Bromley, Greenwich & Lewisham, South West.*

Rejected Votes – most in: *West Central, Brent & Harrow, Enfield & Haringey.*

Rejected Votes – most decrease in: *City & East, Lambeth & Southwark, North East.*

Rejected Votes – least decrease in: *Bexley & Bromley, South West, Croydon.*

Plus, notable Far Right votes in Constituency section: 10.9% in City & East (BNP + National Front); 5.7% in Greenwich & Lewisham; 5.6% in Bexley & Bromley; 4.5% in Ealing & Hillingdon.

LONDON ASSEMBLY LONDON-WIDE:

1) Big reduction in rejected ballot papers

Increased voter education efforts, coupled with the decision to put the Assembly votes on different ballot papers, have had their desired effect. The number of rejected ballot papers for the Assembly elections was down 4.2%. In fact, under 0.4% of ballot papers were either intentionally spoiled or incorrectly filled in. An impressively low figure. A further 1.5% (approx) of voters chose not to mark their ballots at all in the Assembly elections.

2) More voters choosing to vote in PR than FPTP ballot

There were 6318 voters who cast a ballot in the Londonwide ballot and not in the constituency section. This equals 0.25% of total voters. Now might this be a sign of people choosing to cast a vote against the BNP but not caring about who represents their local area in the Assembly? Anecdotal evidence suggests there may have been some voters who did this, but there is no way to actually prove it from the figures. It could even be clued up BNP supporters who were solely focused on electing BNP Assembly Members on the list. Either way, the numbers weren't quite significant enough to have made any real difference to the results. However, this might be a promising strategy for anti-racist campaigners to pursue in four years time when attempting to get rid of the sitting BNP Member.

London Assembly – Constituency:

Turnout = 45.28% (UP 8.31%)
Good votes casts = 2,406,289
Rejected votes = 1.95% (DOWN 4.22%) – 47,799 papers
Blank votes = 39,894
Spoilt ballots [not blank] = 7905 ballots / 0.32%

London Assembly – Londonwide Members:

Turnout = 45.28% (UP 8.31%)
Good votes cast = 2,412,607 (6318 votes more than in constituency section)
Rejected votes = 1.7% / 41,489 papers
Blank votes = 32,251 (7733 less blank votes than in constituency section)
Spoilt ballots [not blank] = 9238 ballots / 0.38% (1333 more spoilt ballots)

NB There seems there may be a possible tiny discrepancy on the London Elects website. The total for ballots cast in the Assembly constituency section is 2454088. This is what is listed on the site, as well as what the figures for that section add up to. Yet the total ballots cast in the Assembly Londonwide section adds up to 2454096. This is a difference of 8 ballot papers. It may just be that eight people never returned the constituency section along with the rest of their ballot papers.

3) Londonwide Members' seat allocation and proportionality

We've done some number-crunching as it does not yet appear on the London Elects website. The aim is to show the way the seats for the London Assembly London-wide Assembly Members were allocated, which is done via the d'Hondt method of PR. The calculation is very straightforward: total Londonwide votes divided by numbers of seats won + 1. The party with the highest number (quota) gets the first list seat. That formula is repeated for each round until all eleven Londonwide Assembly Members have been allocated. For the full workings see this file:

<http://www.makemyvotecount.org.uk/blog/archives/Londonwide%20Assembly%20Members%20-%20seat%20allocation.pdf>

London-wide Assembly Members - seat allocation and proportionality

Party	Votes	Votes%	Constituency seats won	Over 5% Threshold	Quota Seat 1 (votes / seats + 1)	Quota Seat 2	Quota Seat 3	Quota Seat 4	Quota Seat 5	Quota Seat 6	Quota Seat 7	Quota Seat 8	Quota Seat 9	Quota Seat 10	Quota Seat 11	List Seats Won	Net Change from 2004	Total Seats Won	Net Change from 2004	% Votes Won (London-wide)	% Seats Won
Conservative Party	835535	34.05%	8	Yes	92837	92837	92837	92837	92837	92837	92837	83554	83554	75958	75958	3	3	11	2	34.05%	44%
Liberal Democrats	275272	11.22%	0	Yes	275272	137636	137636	91757	91757	91757	91757	91757	68818	68818	68818	3	-2	3	-2	11.22%	12%
Green Party	203465	8.29%	0	Yes	203465	203465	101733	101733	101733	67822	67822	67822	67822	67822	67822	2	0	2	0	8.29%	8%
The Labour Party	665443	27.12%	6	Yes	95063	95063	95063	95063	95063	95063	83180	83180	83180	83180	73938	2	0	8	1	27.12%	32%
British National Party	130714	5.33%	0	Yes	130714	130714	130714	130714	65357	65357	65357	65357	65357	65357	65357	1	1	1	1	5.33%	4%
UK Independence Party	46617	1.90%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	-2	0	-2	1.90%	0%
Left List	22583	0.92%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	**	0		0.92%	0%
Independent(Rathy Alagaratnam)	3974	0.16%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	**	0		0.16%	0%
English Democrats	25569	1.04%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	**	0		1.04%	0%
Respect (George Galloway)	59721	2.43%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	0		2.43%	0%
Abolish the Congestion Charge	63596	2.59%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	**	0		2.59%	0%
The Christian Choice	70294	2.86%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	**	0		2.86%	0%
One London (Damian Hockney)	3430	0.14%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	**	0		0.14%	0%
Unity for Peace & Socialism	6394	0.26%	0	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	**	0		0.26%	0%
Winner						LibDem	Green	LibDem	BNP	Green	Labour	Con	LibDem	Con	Labour	Con	11	25			

Table created by Make Votes Count www.makemyvotecount.org.uk, using official results from London Elects website

The seats were allocated in the following order:

LibDem, Green, LibDem, BNP, Green, Labour, Conservative, LibDem, Conservative, Labour, Conservative.

Interestingly, once again, the London Assembly has produced results that reflect the votes cast by Londoners with a reasonably high degree of accuracy. The Conservatives have slightly more of a 'winner's bonus' than last time, but not by much.

	% Votes Won (London-wide)	% Seats Won
Conservative	34.05%	44%
Labour	27.12%	32%
LibDem	11.22%	12%
Green	8.29%	8%
BNP	5.33%	4%

9 parties / candidates (totalling 12.3% of the vote) failed to get above the 5% threshold needed to gain representation. Plus 1.7% of votes were rejected.

Therefore 86% of Londoners who voted, did so for a party that gained seat(s) on the London Assembly. Nearly 9 in 10 voters are now represented by at least one London Assembly Member from a party they voted for. That is impressive.

4) Gender representation on the Assembly

The 2004 elections saw 10 women elected out of the 25 Assembly Members. This time we were already starting out at a disadvantage, gender balance-wise, as the two female Conservative Assembly Members were not standing again.

In 2008, the following women have been elected onto the Assembly:

Victoria Borwick (Conservative - Londonwide AM)

Joanne McCartney (Labour - Constituency AM)

Val Shawcross (Labour - Constituency AM)

Jennette Arnold (Labour - Constituency AM)

Nicky Gavron (Labour - Londonwide AM)

Dee Doocey (Liberal Democrat - Londonwide AM)

Caroline Pidgeon (Liberal Democrat - Londonwide AM)

Jenny Jones (Green Party - Londonwide AM)

Thus the magic number for 2008 is eight.

8 women out of 25. So only 1/3 of the incoming London Assembly are women - a fall from 2004. Not great. In the year in which we see the celebration of significant anniversaries for women winning the right to vote, these statistics highlight just how far gender representation in politics has yet to go. See www.womenandthevote.org for more details.

5) MVC's response to the election of a BNP Assembly Member

The make-up of the Assembly reflects how all of London voted. And the hard truth in this election is that 5.3% of voters citywide voted for the BNP, much to the dismay and anxiety of many other Londoners.

If people vote in sufficient numbers for a party, under proportional representation their voice will be heard. This applies to small parties with democratic values and something to contribute, such as the Greens, but also to extreme parties. And the BNP has gained above the 5% threshold needed at these elections to earn an Assembly seat.

No system gives parties seats; it is the action of voters that does. Voting for extremist parties is often a sign not so much of massive popular support for their values as an indicator that voters want to make a protest against the political system. One of the reasons that the BNP may have done well in the outer fringes of London is that for too long voters in those areas have felt that mainstream political parties weren't listening to them or putting policies in place that would benefit them. This has created the political space for the BNP to come in and exploit the disaffection.

However, the way the London Assembly elections work has also given anti-racist campaigners the opportunity to organise, campaign and get out the vote in their own areas, in an effort to push up turnout and raise the threshold needed for the BNP to gain seats. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the message that votes in the London Assembly London-wide Members ballot in effect counted twice – once for the party they support, and once against the BNP – motivated numbers of people who otherwise may not have voted to make the trip to their polling station.

Under First-Past-the-Post can a party can win seats by exploiting local grievances in a small area rather than trying for the broader appeal that the BNP has had to seek in London. also let extreme parties in. At these set of local elections, the BNP won three seats in Stoke-on-Trent and two each in Amber Valley, Rotherham and Nuneaton & Bedworth. It also took one seat in Thurrock, Three Rivers, Pendle and Calderdale. It also successfully defended seats in Epping and Burnley. This takes the number of BNP councillors to 55, up from 45 before these elections. [source: www.hopenothate.org.uk]

There is a vital difference between representation and control. While obnoxious parties can get represented under PR, it is virtually impossible for them to gain control. It is only in FPTP that there is the possibility of having one's representation monopolised by an extreme party. The BNP has all the borough council seats in a ward in Burnley (Hapton-with-Park) without ever enjoying 40% support and in a ward in Stoke-on-Trent (Abbey Green) on just over 30% of the vote. Residents there have no where to turn if they do not like that party. In many

of the cases where the BNP has gained a seat, they have done so very narrowly, with the mainstream party vote split and therefore ineffective in defeating extremists.

It should also be noted that getting represented is often a step to the political defeat of extreme parties. As the inadequacy of BNP politicians and policies is exposed - and once the threat has been seen off - the electorate are more wary of parties that offer easy answers in future.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LONDON ELECTIONS:

The London elections fit into a wider pattern of successful preferential and proportional elections held in the UK. The Government's own Review of Voting Systems (published in January 2008) found that:

- *“One of the main benefits of PR is that voters have a greater degree of choice in elections and a greater chance of their vote counting in terms of who gets elected.” (para 6.169)*
- *“We do not find, on balance, any evidence to suggest that voters find one voting system easier or more confusing than another voting system.” (para 6.170)*
- *“Proportional systems were found, on international comparison, to be associated with higher voter turnout than First Past the Post and other majoritarian systems.” (para 7.97)*

The evidence from 1 May's London Mayoral and Assembly elections would seem to concur with these findings:

Almost half of Londoners who voted cast one of their preferences for the winning mayoral candidate.

86% of Londoners who voted, did so for a party that gained seat(s) on the London Assembly. Nearly 9 in 10 voters are now represented by at least one London Assembly Member from a party they voted for.

The number of rejected votes – and especially wrongly filled in or spoilt ballot papers – was much lower than in 2004. Voters were not confused by the different ballot papers or voting systems used. Spoilage rates for all the ballots was under 2%, and significantly lower if excluding papers on which no vote was cast at all.

Turnout was 10% higher than the local elections held in other parts of the country on the same day. While the very competitive and high profile mayoral race has much to do with the increased turnout, both compared to 2004 and to the local elections, the impact of the voting systems may also be a factor.

AFTERWORD:

A simple formula for understanding voting systems

SV does not equal AV does not equal proportional representation

The mayoral elections are conducted under the Supplementary Vote. This is a truncated version of the Alternative Vote system and operates in a different way. Voters can only express 2 preferences. And, where no-one wins over 50% of first preferences, you eliminate all but the top 2 candidates and then only look at and add on 2nd preferences for those 2 candidates. This limits voters' choice and forces them into making tactical decisions on their 2nd preference, compared to the fuller version of Alternative Vote. Under AV voters rank numerically as many candidates as they choose and the elimination / transfer of preferences starts with the bottom candidate and works up.

Neither SV nor AV are proportional. They are used when electing one candidate only. There is no way of achieving proportionality when you only have one candidate elected. For the London Assembly there are 11 London-wide assembly members elected proportionally to votes cast across the city. The make-up of the assembly will reflect how all of London voted. People can affect the overall result no matter where in London they live.

The Alternative Vote has been mooted by Dept of Justice Ministers as part of a package of measures designed to enhance voter engagement and participation in elections for the Commons. For more on this see the 'Commons Reform Debate' section of the Londoners' Votes Count website.
www.londonersvotescount.org.uk

For further information:

Detailed briefings on the voting system and the voting reform campaign are available on the Make Votes Count campaign website and blog

www.makemyvotecount.org.uk / www.londonersvotescount.org.uk

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