

Elections 2008

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EC election reports

- 1 May 2008 elections marked the eighth round of scheduled elections since 2001
- Published reports on 2008 local government in England and Wales and GLA elections in July
- Not statutorily required to report on the administration of the elections but have a power to do so
- Reports focus on the administration of the election, particularly changes brought about by the Electoral Administration Act 2006
- Emphasis in London on e-counting

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Key findings

- Overall elections ran smoothly
- No changes to election rules
- EAA changes bedding down in England and Wales - no problems in London
- Few allegations of electoral fraud
- Numbers voting by post continue to grow
- Majority of ROs checking 100% AVIs
- Overall, electors are satisfied with voting process

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Key issues

- Concerns for general election:
 - tightness of electoral timetable
 - higher number of late registration applications
 - higher number of postal votes (printing, processing, checking PVIs)
 - handling pvs on cross local authority boundaries
- Significant negative impact on ability to register if 'snap' general election

Absent voting

Postal voters

- Highest percentage of postal votes issued since the introduction of postal voting on demand in 2000
- 15.3% England; 14.7% Wales; 11.7% London
- Postal voters still more likely to vote – 71% England and Wales, 72% London
- Majority of ROs checked 100% of PVSs, and reported few significant issues

Postal voting - rejection

- Highest no. of postal votes rejected in London: 4.8%, compared with 4.5% in Wales 3% and England
- Majority of PVSs rejected due to mismatch signature, mismatched DoB or both mismatched – rather than missing
- Voters more likely not to sign their postal vote statement than omit their DoB

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2008 elections – the public's perspective

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Overall impressions

- Vote safety and secrecy valued above confidence and choice
- Levels of satisfaction with the voting process high among those who voted

Polling station voting - users

- Polling station voting was rated considerably more convenient than postal voting in Wales
- Convenience in polling station and postal voting broadly similar in England
- Polling station voting also considered safer from fraud or abuse, and better for secrecy of the ballot

Postal voting - users

- Overall satisfaction with voting process
- 91% thought it was easy to understand how to complete and return their postal vote
- Over half said it encouraged them to vote
- 51% said it was very/fairly safe from fraud/abuse
- Over 65s were the age group most likely to vote by post

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Electoral fraud

- Londoners were the least likely to rate electoral fraud in general as a problem
- Around a quarter of people in England and Wales were very/fairly concerned about electoral fraud or abuse in the May elections
- More people in England and Wales rated the security and secrecy of their vote as being crucially important than voting being convenient

Usability of London ballot papers

- Significantly lower levels of rejection
- Around 90% of people found it very/fairly easy to fill in their ballot papers
- 21% found it confusing that the elections used more than one voting system, 56% did not find it confusing
- 40% agreed with the statement 'I would only give a second preference vote to a candidate who has a good chance of winning the election,' while 26% disagreed

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Key recommendations for Government

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Government should

- Ensure a six-month period between legislation and date of scheduled elections
- Standardise electoral timetable to 25 working days for all elections (except GLA)
- Ensure independent candidates have equal access to the register
- Mandate checking 100% of PVSs
- Greater clarity on waiver rules, and provision for refreshing identifiers
- Mandatory standards for AVI storage, maintenance and exchange

Key recommendations for electoral administrators

Administrators should

- Continue to ensure candidates and agents are fully briefed
- Check 100% of PVSs
- Consider action to take with electors whose signatures/dob do not match
- Continue to provide effective training for all polling station staff

London – electronic counting recommendations

E-counting in future?

- No further use without:
 - national policy and legislation
 - cost /benefit analysis comparison with manual count
 - ensure transparency of verification process
- Ensure testing and sufficient time for planning/implementation
- Involve electoral administrators in developing good practice and guidance
- Integrity and public and political confidence must be primary goal

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