



Elections: Turnout

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Section Social and General Statistics

This note looks at turnout in UK elections. The extent to which voters turnout to vote at elections in the United Kingdom varies considerably between different types of election. This note provides a range of statistics on turnout at both national and local elections as well as for the devolved administrations. It also provides international comparisons and turnout at European Parliamentary elections.

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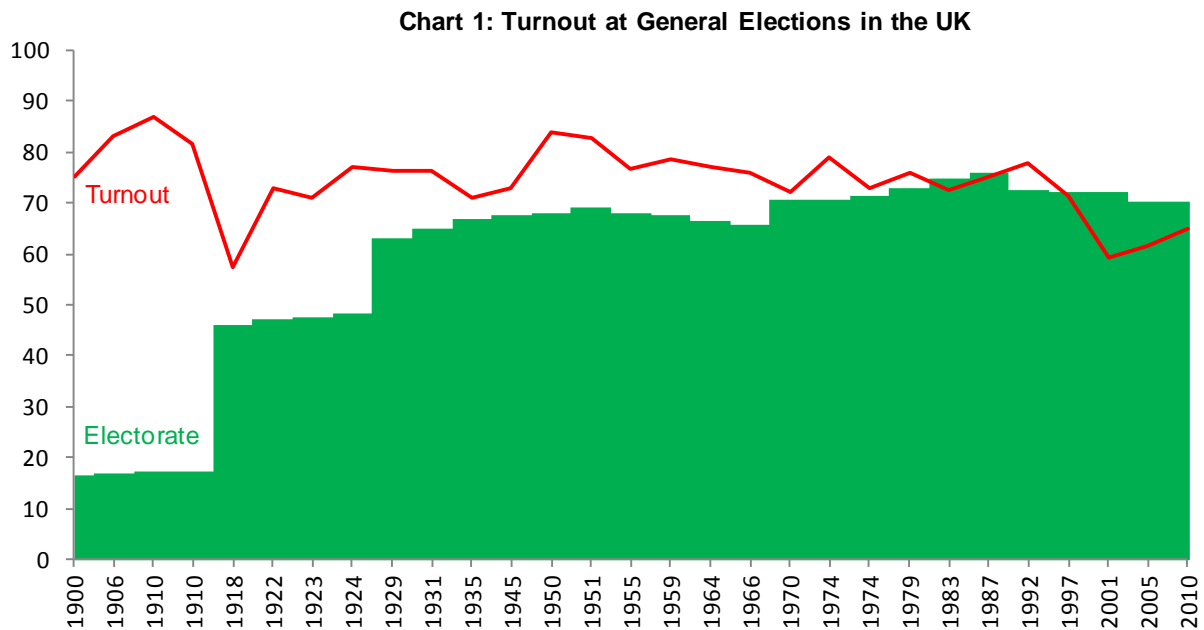
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1 Measuring turnout

Throughout this note turnout is defined where possible as the total number of valid votes as a proportion of the total electorate. Some election studies include spoilt and other invalid ballot papers when measuring turnout; this may account for any differences between the figures in this note and those published elsewhere. Comparative data on turnout can also be affected by the extent to which the eligible population registers to vote: the proportion of the population of voting age that casts a vote is less than the proportion of those on the electoral register.

2 General Elections

Turnout at the most recent General Election in 2010 was 65.1%, an increase on the previous election but still the third lowest since 1945. The chart below shows the electorate (the proportion of people eligible to vote) and turnout as a proportion of those who chose to vote at UK General Elections since 1900



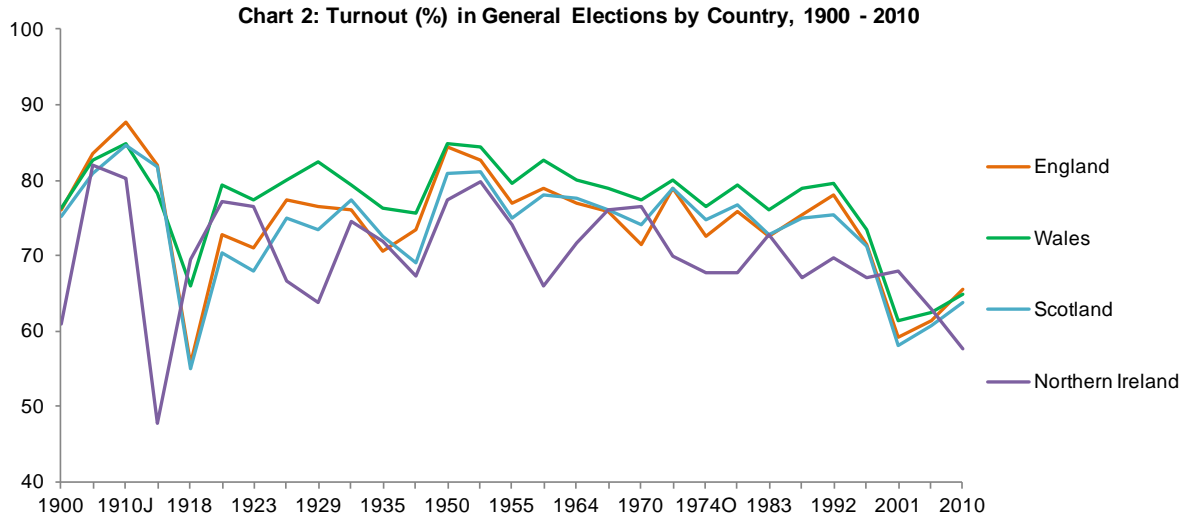
Turnout tends to be low when the margin of victory of a General Election is high, suggesting that people are more inclined to vote if the result is uncertain.

Turnout at the 2001 election was 59.4%, this was the first time that turnout had fallen below 70% since 1918. Turnout in 1918 was depressed in the wake of the First World War, whereas the 2001 election followed the Labour landslide victory of 1997. Turnout at subsequent General Elections has recovered from this low, but has remained under 70%.

The highest recorded turnout for a General Election since 1900 was 86.8% in January 1910, when the franchise was limited to men aged over 21 who paid rates or owned.

2.1 Turnout by country

The chart overleaf shows how turnout has varied between countries in the UK since 1900:



Note: Prior to 1922 data for Northern Ireland includes the whole of Ireland

At the 2010 election, turnout was highest in England. Until 2001, Wales generally had the highest turnout at General Elections. Northern Ireland has usually had lower turnout than the other countries although it reported the highest turnout in 2005.

The full dataset for turnout by country can be found in appendix table A1 of this note.

2.2 Turnout by constituency

Turnout at general elections can vary considerably between constituencies. The highest and lowest constituency turnouts in the 2010 general election were as follows:

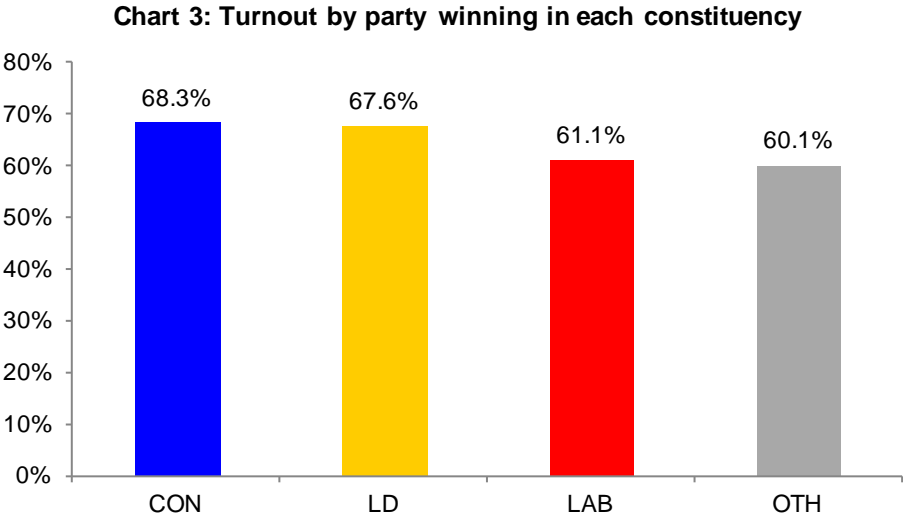
Table 1: Highest and lowest constituency turnouts

		Turnout
1	East Renfrew shire	77.3%
2	Westmorland and Lonsdale	76.9%
3	Richmond Park	76.2%
4	Winchester	75.8%
5	Central Devon	75.7%
6	North East Somerset	75.4%
7	St Albans	75.4%
8	Kenilworth and Southam	75.2%
9	Thornbury and Yate	75.2%
10	East Dunbartonshire	75.2%
	UK average	65.1%
641	Glasgow Central	50.9%
642	East Antrim	50.7%
643	Kingston upon Hull East	50.6%
644	Manchester, Gorton	50.5%
645	Thirsk and Malton	49.9%
646	Blackley and Broughton	49.2%
647	Glasgow North East	49.1%
648	Birmingham, Ladywood	48.7%
649	Leeds Central	46.0%
650	Manchester Central	44.3%

Source: HC Library, General Election 2010

The highest turnout in the UK was 77% in East Renfrewshire, the lowest turnouts are mostly in urban areas. In six constituencies turnout was below 50%, the lowest turnout also included Thirsk and Malton where the poll was postponed.¹

Turnout across constituencies which elected a Conservative MP was 7.2% points higher than in areas with a Labour MP:



2.3 Turnout by age

There are no official figures for voting by age, but a long-running academic study, the *British Election Study*, provides reasonably consistent survey-based data for General Elections since 1964:

Table 2: Estimated percentage turnout by age at General Elections: 1964-2010

	1964	1966	1970	F1974	O1974	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
18-24	76.4	60.5	64.9	70.2	62.5	62.5	63.9	66.6	67.3	54.1	40.4	38.2	51.8
25-34	70.7	70.8	66.5	77.2	69.0	72.4	67.6	74.0	77.3	62.2	45.0	47.7	57.3
35-44	79.5	80.0	72.8	78.7	73.9	76.3	76.2	74.9	78.3	70.2	55.7	61.6	64.4
45-54	79.1	79.8	74.9	73.1	76.6	81.2	77.6	79.9	81.8	76.4	63.2	65.5	67.5
55-64	78.4	78.0	74.1	82.2	76.6	81.4	77.2	78.9	78.1	79.9	64.0	72.6	69.8
65+	76.7	75.9	77.2	79.2	76.0	77.7	73.1	76.0	79.2	77.7	70.1	74.3	74.7
All	77.1	75.8	72.0	78.8	72.8	76.0	72.7	75.3	77.7	71.4	59.4	61.3	65.0

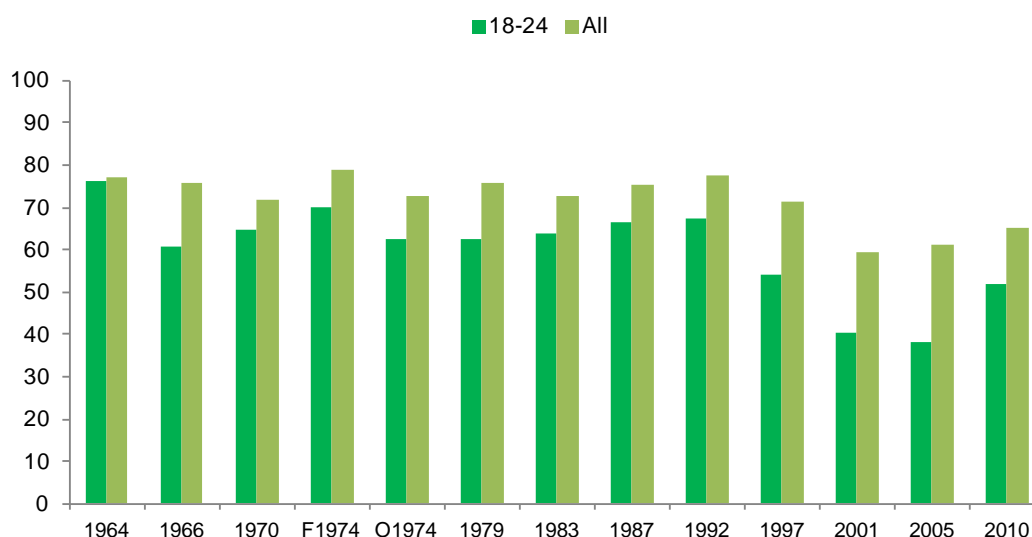
Sources: British Election Study (re-analysis of datasets)
 HC Library Research Paper 03/59

Note: Data for 1964 and 1966 refers to people aged 21-24 as the voting age was 21 not 18

The decline in young people’s engagement in politics has been a common theme of late. As seen above, voter turnout has been low among young people relative to older age groups, but in the context of falling overall turnout at General Elections, the decline has been sharpest amongst voters aged 18-24:

¹ Turnout figures for each constituency are available in the *General Election 2010* House of Commons Library research paper, RP10/36.

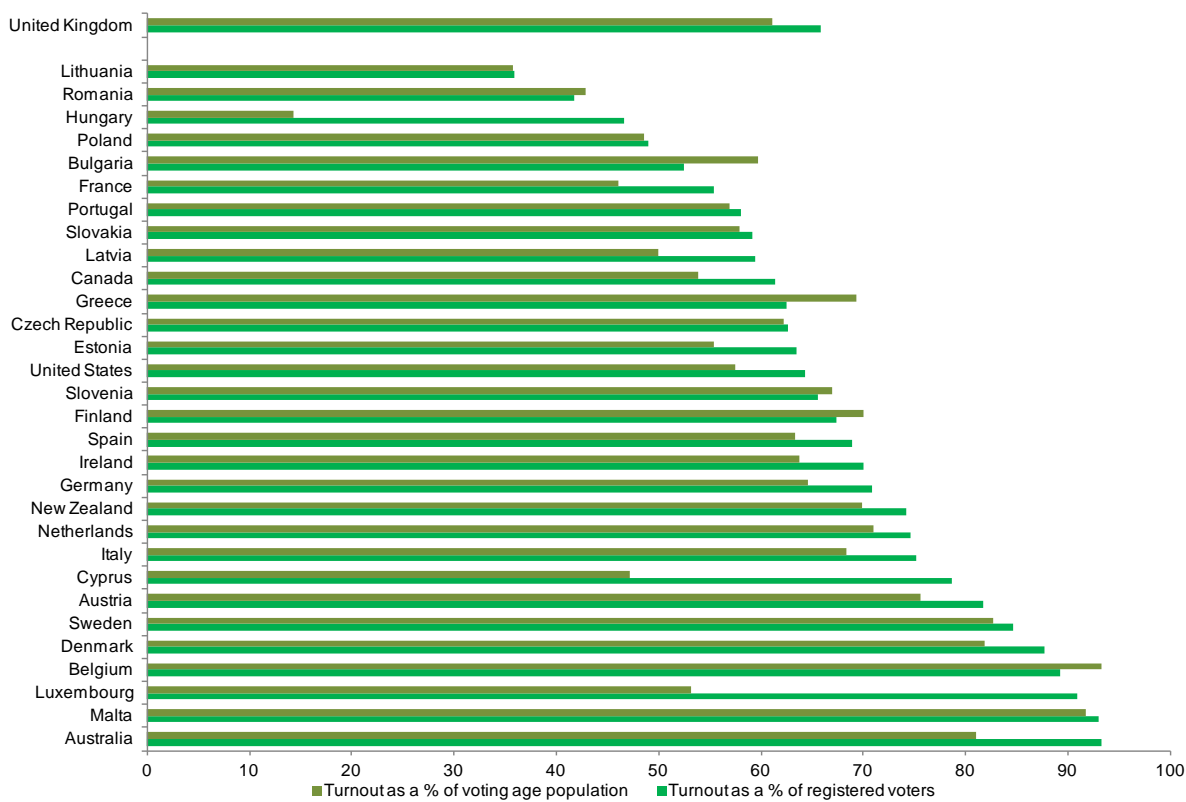
Chart 4: Turnout by age at General Elections



3 International Comparisons

Turnout can be measured using two measures - as a proportion of the population who are of voting age and as a proportion of the population registered as an elector. The chart below shows both at the most recent national parliamentary elections in the EU27 and selected other countries:²

Chart 5: International comparisons of turnout



² Data for the United States relates to the 2008 presidential election

When measuring turnout as a proportion of registered voters, fifteen countries had a higher turnout than the UK. However, caution is needed when making international comparisons as, in some countries such as Australia, voting is compulsory, and at the 2010 election, there was a turnout of 93%. Yet, when turnout is measured as a proportion of those of voting age it fell to 81%.

In some countries such as the United States, a much lower proportion of the voting age population is registered to vote compared to most EU countries, including the UK. In some cases, turnout was higher as a share of the voting age population than as a share of registered voters. Although this may appear impossible, it's likely to reflect difficulties maintaining an accurate electoral register given migration between districts, deaths etc.

A full data series on international turnout can be found in the appendix of this note.

4 European Parliament elections

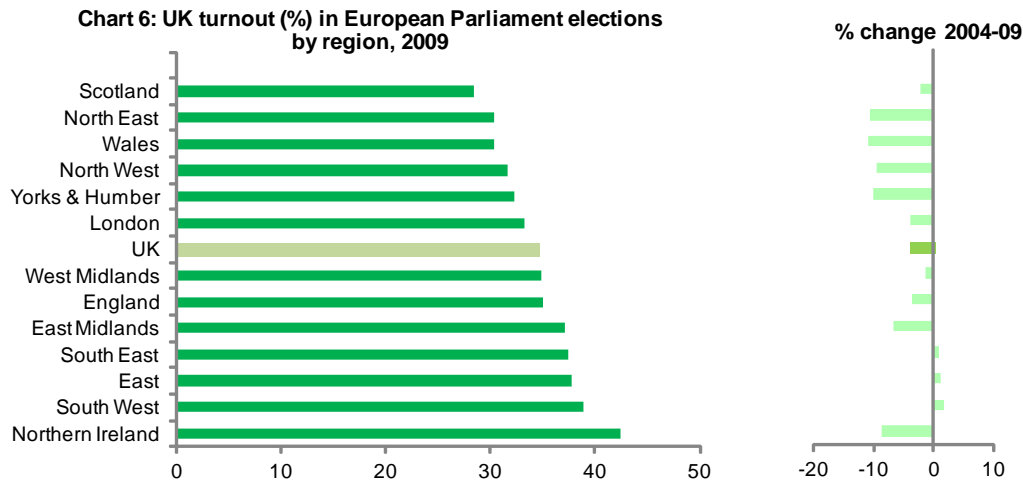
Turnout at European Elections in the UK has been relatively low since 1979. Turnout in Northern Ireland where a system of Single Transferable Vote has operated in all European elections, has been significantly higher than the rest of the UK:

Table 4: Turnout at European elections, 1979-2009
% of registered voters

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
1979	31.8	34.4	33.6	55.6	32.7
1984	31.6	39.7	33.1	64.4	32.9
1989	35.8	41.1	40.8	48.3	36.8
1994	35.5	43.1	38.2	48.7	36.5
1999	22.7	28.1	24.7	57.0	24.0
2004	38.8	41.4	30.6	51.2	38.5
2009	35.1	30.4	28.5	42.4	34.5

Sources: Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1832 - 2012
 HC Library, European Parliament elections 2009

The highest reported turnout at a European Parliament election in the UK was 38.5% in 2004; this followed a record low 24.0% turnout in 1999. Turnout again fell in 2009, but it was above the 1999 level. When comparing 2009 with 2004, turnout rose in only 3 regions – East, South East and South West.



4.1 Turnout across the EU

Turnout in the UK at European Parliament elections has been consistently low when compared with other EU countries. In the most recent European Parliament elections, turnout in the UK was higher than that of six other member states including Slovakia where fewer than one-in-five electors voted:

Table 5: Turnout for European Parliament elections

Proportion of registered voters

	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
Luxemburg	88.9	88.8	87.4	88.6	87.3	91.4	90.8
Belgium	91.4	92.1	90.7	90.7	91.1	90.8	90.4
Malta						82.4	78.8
Italy	85.7	82.5	81.1	73.6	69.8	71.7	65.1
Denmark	47.8	52.4	46.2	52.9	50.5	47.9	59.5
Cyprus						72.5	59.4
Ireland	63.6	47.6	68.3	44.0	50.2	58.6	58.6
Latvia						41.3	53.7
Greece		80.6	80.0	73.2	70.3	63.2	52.6
Austria					49.4	42.4	46.0
Sweden					38.8	37.9	45.5
Spain			54.7	59.1	63.1	45.1	44.9
Estonia						26.8	43.9
Germany	65.7	56.8	62.3	60.0	45.2	43.0	43.3
France	60.7	56.7	48.8	52.7	46.8	42.8	40.6
Finland					30.1	39.4	40.3
Bulgaria							39.0
Portugal			51.1	35.5	39.9	38.6	36.8
Netherlands	58.1	50.9	47.5	35.7	30.0	39.3	36.8
Hungary						38.5	36.3
UK	32.4	32.6	36.4	36.4	24.0	38.5	34.7
Slovenia						28.4	28.3
Czech Republic						28.3	28.2
Romania							27.7
Poland						20.9	24.5
Lithuania						48.4	21.0
Slovakia						17.0	19.6
EU average	62.0	59.0	58.4	56.7	49.5	45.5	43.0

Source: European Parliament, Turnout at European Parliament elections

Note: Shaded area indicates that the country was not part of the EU in the year of the particular election

As the table above shows, turnout has declined in most EU countries since 1979, overall, the lowest turnout reported was 43% in 2009.

5 Devolved Administrations

Elections for the devolved administrations first took place in 1998.

5.1 Wales

Elections to the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) were first held in May 1999. Elections to the NAW are conducted using the Additional Member System. Under this system, voters have two votes; one to elect a constituency member and one for a party on a regional list:

Table 6: Turnout in the National Assembly for Wales elections

	Regional list	Constituencies
1999	46.3%	46.4%
2003	38.1%	38.2%
2007	43.4%	43.5%
2011	41.4%	41.5%

Sources: Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1832 - 2012
 HC Library, UK election statistics: 1918-2012

Turnout in both the regional list and constituency vote was highest in 1999, turnout in 2011 for both of them was around 41%, a decrease compared to 2007 but higher than 2003.

5.2 Scottish Parliament

Elections to the Scottish Parliament were also held for the first time in May 1999 and are conducted using the Additional Member system:

Table 7: Turnout in the Scottish Parliament elections

	Regional list	Constituencies
1999	58.7%	58.8%
2003	49.4%	49.4%
2007	52.4%	51.7%
2011	50.4%	50.4%

Sources: Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1832 - 2012
 HC Library, UK election statistics: 1918-2012

Like the NAW elections the highest reported turnout for Scottish Parliament elections was in the inaugural 1999 election, although turnout has generally been at around the 50% mark in all subsequent elections.

5.3 Northern Ireland Assembly

Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly were first held in 1998. Members are elected using the Single Transferable vote:

Table 7: Turnout in the Northern Ireland Assembly elections

1998	70.0
2003	64.0
2007	62.9
2011	55.7

Source: British Electoral Facts 1832 - 2012

Turnout at the Northern Ireland Assembly elections has typically been higher than the devolved elections in Scotland and Wales. In 1998, turnout was 70.0%, however, this fell to 54% by the latest election in 2011.

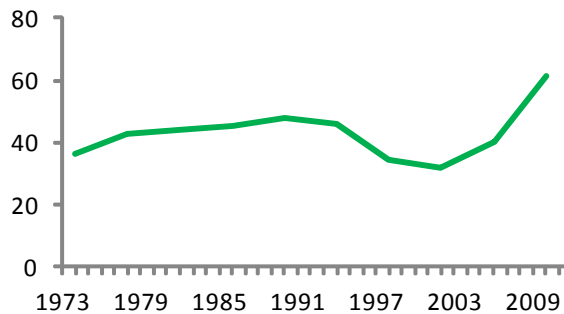
6 Turnout at local elections

The tables and charts below show turnout at local elections in the UK since 1973. There are a number of problems associated with assessing turnout at local elections not least multi-member wards and non-contestation. Local authorities may also be inconsistent in their treatment of attainers. Turnout may have been higher than reported in the 1970's, as the electoral register was not kept fully up to date as it was expensive and time consuming to do so.

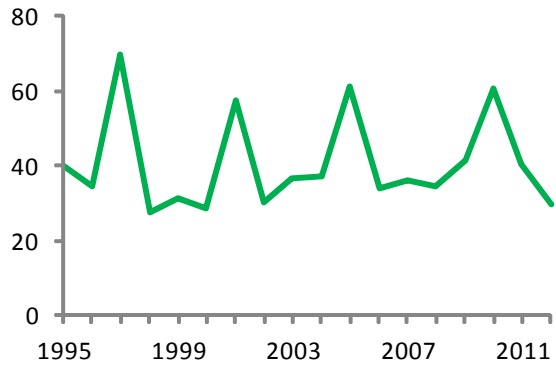
Despite some problems in the data, it is clear to see that turnout for elections in London boroughs is generally higher than those in Metropolitan districts. Also, when an election coincides with a General Election, turnout is significantly higher:

Chart 7: Turnout at local elections as a percentage of total electorate in England

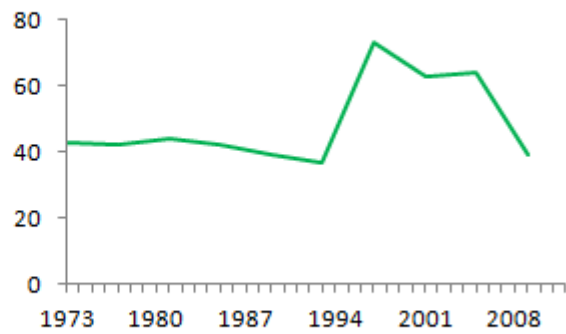
	<u>London boroughs</u>
1974	36.3
1978	42.9
1982	43.9
1986	45.5
1990	48.1
1994	46.0
1998	34.6
2002	31.6
2006	39.9
2010	61.4



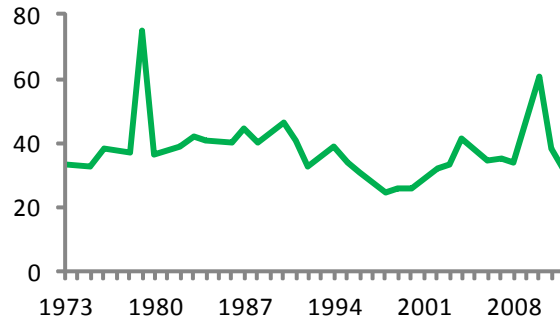
	Unitaries
1995	40
1996	35
1997	70
1998	28
1999	32
2000	29
2001	58
2002	30
2003	37
2004	37
2005	61
2006	34
2007	36
2008	35
2009	42
2010	61
2011	40
2012	30



	English counties
1973	43
1977	42
1981	44
1985	42
1989	39
1993	37
1997	73
2001	63
2005	64
2009	39



	Metropolitan districts
1973	33
1975	33
1976	38
1978	37
1979	75
1980	36
1982	39
1983	42
1984	41
1986	40
1987	45
1988	40
1990	46
1991	41
1992	33
1994	39
1995	34
1996	31
1998	25
1999	26
2000	26
2002	32
2003	33
2004	41
2006	35
2007	35
2008	34
2010	61
2011	38
2012	31



Non - metro districts	
1973	39
1976	44
1978	42
1979	77
1980	39
1982	42
1983	46
1984	40
1986	42
1987	48
1988	42
1990	49
1991	48
1992	38
1994	43
1995	41
1996	37
1998	31
1999	36
2000	32
2002	35
2003	36
2004	41
2006	37
2007	38
2008	36
2010	66
2011	44
2012	31

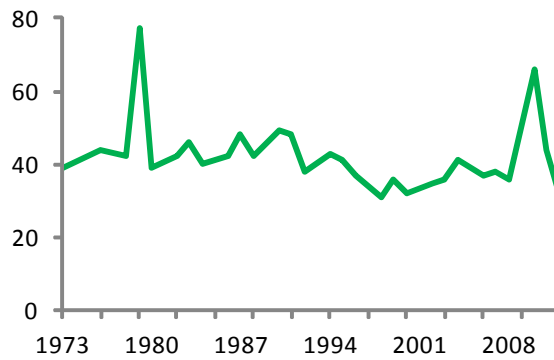
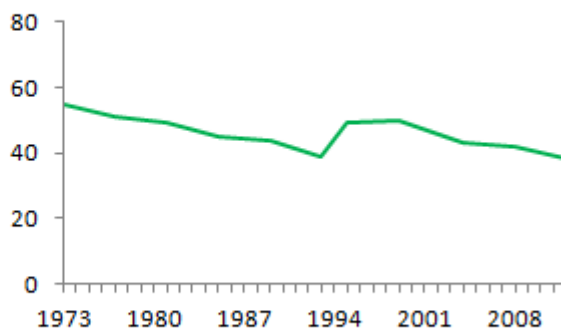


Chart 8: Turnout at local elections in regions as a percentage of total electorate

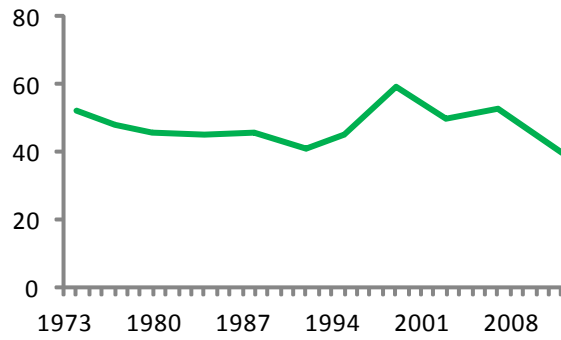
Welsh Unitaries	
1973	55
1977	51
1981	49
1985	45
1989	44
1993	39
1995	49
1999	50
2004	43
2008	42
2012	38



Note: Counties until 1995

Scottish unitaries

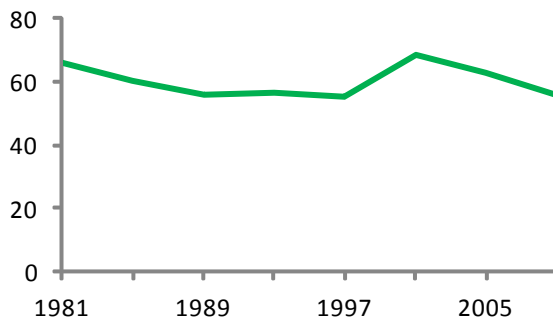
1974	52
1977	48
1980	46
1984	45
1988	46
1992	41
1995	45
1999	59
2003	50
2007	53
2012	40



Note: Districts until 1995

Northern Ireland districts

1981	66
1985	60
1989	56
1993	57
1997	55
2001	69
2005	63
2011	56



Appendix

Table A1: Turnout (%) in General Elections by country, 1900 - 2010

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
1900	76.0	76.4	75.3	60.9	75.1
1906	83.6	82.6	80.9	82.1	83.2
1910 (Jan)	87.7	84.9	84.7	80.3	86.8
1910 (Dec)	82.1	78.3	81.8	47.8	81.6
1918 ¹	55.7	65.9	55.1	69.5	57.2
1922 ²	72.8	79.4	70.4	77.2	73.0
1923	71.1	77.3	67.9	76.5	71.1
1924	77.4	80.0	75.1	66.7	77.0
1929 ³	76.6	82.4	73.5	63.8	76.3
1931	76.1	79.3	77.4	74.5	76.4
1935	70.7	76.4	72.6	72.0	71.1
1945	73.4	75.7	69.0	67.4	72.8
1950	84.4	84.8	80.9	77.4	83.9
1951	82.7	84.4	81.2	79.9	82.6
1955	76.9	79.6	75.1	74.1	76.8
1959	78.9	82.6	78.1	65.9	78.7
1964	77.0	80.1	77.6	71.7	77.1
1966	75.9	79.0	76.0	76.1	75.8
1970 ⁴	71.4	77.4	74.1	76.6	72.0
1974 (Feb)	79.0	80.0	79.0	69.9	78.8
1974 (Oct)	72.6	76.6	74.8	67.7	72.8
1979	75.9	79.4	76.8	67.7	76.0
1983	72.5	76.1	72.7	72.9	72.7
1987	75.4	78.9	75.1	67.0	75.3
1992	78.0	79.7	75.5	69.8	77.7
1997	71.4	73.5	71.3	67.1	71.4
2001	59.1	61.4	58.1	68.0	59.4
2005	61.3	62.6	60.8	62.9	61.4
2010	65.5	64.8	63.8	57.6	65.1

Sources: Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1832 - 2012
 HC Library, General Election 2010

Notes: ¹Those who served in the war were enfranchised at 19 years of age. Women were enfranchised at 30 years of age

²Prior to 1922 data for Northern Ireland includes the whole of Ireland

³Extension of the franchise to women aged 21

⁴Extension of franchise to all people aged 18

Table A2: International comparisons of turnout

		Voter turnout as a % of registered voters	Registered voters as a % of population	Voting age population as a %
Australia	1998	95.0	64.8	74.9
	2001	94.9	65.9	74.2
	2004	94.3	65.8	75.3
	2007	94.8	66.8	76.8
	2010	93.2	65.5	75.3
Austria	1995	86.0	71.3	78.0
	1999	80.4	71.6	79.2
	2002	84.3	72.5	78.9
	2006	78.5	74.6	79.9
	2008	81.7	74.4	80.4
Belgium	1995	91.1	71.2	78.0
	1999	90.6	72.0	78.4
	2003	91.6	73.7	78.6
	2007	91.1	74.3	78.7
	2010	89.2	74.5	71.3
Bulgaria	1997	58.9	87.5	77.0
	2001	66.6	87.2	80.6
	2005	55.8	90.2	80.6
	2009	60.6	99.0	82.8
	2013	52.5	95.0	83.6
Canada	2000	61.2	68.1	76.2
	2004	60.9	69.8	76.9
	2006	64.9	69.5	77.3
	2008	59.5	70.5	78.3
	2011	61.4	70.4	80.4
Cyprus	1991	94.3	59.7	71.6
	1996	90.1	54.7	65.0
	2001	91.8	60.2	71.2
	2006	89.0	63.9	73.1
	2011	78.7	47.4	79.1
Czech Republic	1996	76.3	77.3	76.0
	1998	74.0	78.9	76.1
	2002	57.9	80.5	79.0
	2006	64.5	81.4	80.6
	2010	62.6	82.5	83.0

Table A2: International comparisons of turnout (continued)

		Voter turnout as a % of registered voters	Registered voters as a % of population	Voting age population as a %
Denmark	1998	85.9	76.4	79.0
	2001	87.1	74.7	77.2
	2005	84.5	74.0	76.9
	2007	86.6	73.6	76.6
	2011	87.7	73.8	79.1
Estonia	1995	68.9	53.2	75.0
	1999	57.4	60.6	75.7
	2003	58.2	60.7	73.5
	2007	61.9	68.2	79.0
	2011	63.5	71.2	81.6
Finland	1995	68.6	79.9	77.0
	1999	65.3	80.2	80.2
	2003	66.7	81.4	77.6
	2007	65.0	82.1	78.2
	2011	67.4	83.4	80.2
France	1993	68.9	67.6	76.0
	1997	68.0	66.9	76.0
	2002	60.3	61.8	78.8
	2007	60.0	55.3	76.4
	2012	55.4	65.9	79.2
Germany	1994	79.0	74.3	81.0
	1998	82.2	73.9	80.7
	2002	79.1	74.0	79.7
	2005	77.7	75.1	81.0
	2009	70.8	76.0	83.2
Greece	2000	75.0	90.6	76.3
	2004	76.6	92.7	81.0
	2007	74.1	92.7	86.3
	2009	70.9	92.5	82.8
	2012	62.5	92.4	83.2
Hungary	1994	55.1	76.7	77.0
	1998	57.0	79.7	77.0
	2002	73.5	58.4	77.8
	2006	64.4	50.2	78.7
	2010	46.7	24.9	81.3

Table A2: International comparisons of turnout (continued)

		Voter turnout as a % of registered voters	Registered voters as a % of population	Voting age population as a %
Ireland	1992	68.5	72.0	67.0
	1997	65.9	72.0	70.4
	2002	62.6	78.2	73.0
	2007	67.0	73.5	71.5
	2011	70.1	68.6	75.3
Italy	1996	82.9	85.3	81.0
	2001	81.4	85.6	82.1
	2006	83.6	80.9	82.4
	2008	80.5	81.0	82.5
	2013	75.2	76.3	84.0
Japan	2000	60.6	79.1	81.2
	2003	59.8	80.4	81.4
	2005	67.5	80.9	81.9
	2009	69.3	81.8	81.7
	2012	59.3	81.6	81.1
Latvia	1998	71.9	55.2	76.4
	2002	71.2	58.6	75.7
	2006	61.0	65.5	79.6
	2010	64.7	67.3	83.0
	2011	59.5	70.0	83.4
Liechtenstein	1997	86.9	46.1	74.5
	2001	86.7	50.8	77.6
	2005	86.5	50.8	76.3
	2009	84.6	53.2	79.7
	2013	79.8	52.4	79.4
Lithuania	1996	52.9	69.9	74.0
	2000	58.2	72.1	83.1
	2012	35.9	81.7	82.1
	2004	40.2	68.9	78.5
	2008	32.4	72.4	79.6
Luxembourg	1989	87.4	57.9	79.0
	1994	88.3	54.1	79.0
	1999	86.5	51.4	78.2
	2004	91.7	47.9	77.7
	2009	90.9	45.5	77.8

Table A2: International comparisons of turnout (continued)

		Voter turnout as a % of registered voters	Registered voters as a % of population	Voting age population as a %
Malta	1996	97.2	73.6	73.0
	1998	95.4	74.1	73.7
	2003	95.7	75.0	75.2
	2008	93.3	78.5	82.4
	2013	93.0	81.3	82.4
Netherlands	2002	79.1	75.3	77.5
	2003	80.0	72.7	75.1
	2006	80.4	74.4	77.1
	2010	75.4	74.6	79.1
	2012	74.6	75.8	79.6
New Zealand	1999	84.8	65.5	73.0
	2002	77.0	69.1	73.4
	2005	80.3	70.6	71.5
	2008	79.5	71.7	73.2
	2011	74.2	71.6	76.1
Poland	1997	47.9	73.3	72.0
	2001	46.2	76.0	73.7
	2005	40.6	78.2	77.7
	2007	53.9	79.5	79.0
	2011	48.9	81.5	82.1
Portugal	1999	61.0	89.0	78.4
	2002	62.8	88.2	80.8
	2005	64.3	85.0	78.9
	2009	59.7	88.9	80.2
	2011	58.0	81.2	82.7
Romania	1996	76.0	76.1	74.0
	2000	65.3	79.4	83.4
	2004	58.5	82.5	77.6
	2008	39.2	83.7	81.1
	2012	41.8	84.3	82.3
Slovakia	1998	84.2	76.3	81.5
	2002	70.1	77.3	75.6
	2006	54.7	78.5	76.1
	2010	58.8	79.7	80.4
	2012	59.1	80.1	81.9
Slovenia	1996	73.7	79.2	77.0
	2000	70.4	79.8	77.6
	2004	60.6	81.3	80.7
	2008	63.1	84.5	82.0
	2011	65.6	85.5	83.7

Table A2: International comparisons of turnout (continued)

		Voter turnout as a % of registered voters	Registered voters as a % of population	Voting age population as a %
Spain	1996	78.1	81.5	79.0
	2000	68.7	86.2	80.3
	2004	75.7	81.6	81.0
	2008	76.0	74.8	81.3
	2011	68.9	76.1	82.9
Sweden	1994	86.8	74.0	78.0
	1998	81.4	75.2	78.8
	2002	80.1	75.7	77.7
	2006	82.0	75.9	77.2
	2010	84.6	78.5	80.4
United Kingdom	1992	77.8	74.6	77.0
	1997	71.5	74.8	77.0
	2001	59.4	74.7	77.1
	2005	61.4	73.4	77.2
	2010	65.8	73.1	78.8
United States	2004	68.7	60.5	73.4
	2008	64.4	62.7	70.2
	2012	n/a	n/a	77.0

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA