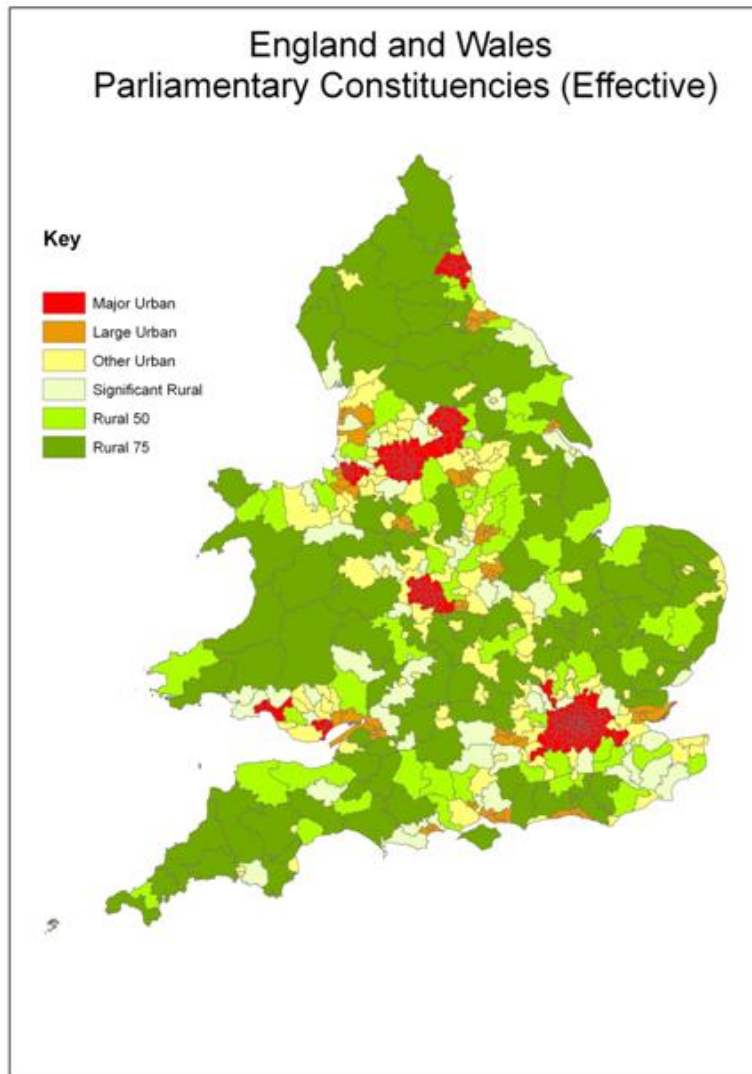


Election 2010: The Rural and Urban Dimension

Issue No 1

The Distribution of Seats, Turnout and 'Battleground' Seats

Map 1 The Classified Parliamentary Constituencies



(a) Seats

There are four PCs fewer in England and Wales for the coming election compared with 2005 (Table 1). Key features regarding the geographical re-distribution of seats are:

- a reduction of 9 seats amongst the Major and Large Urban areas PCs,
- an increase of 16 seats in Other Urban PCs,
- an increase of 3 Rural 50 seats, and
- an increase of 8 Rural 75 seats in England but a reduction in the number of such seats in Wales.

Table 1 The Distribution of Parliamentary Constituencies by Geographical Type, 2005 -2010

PC Type	England & Wales		England		Wales	
	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005
Major Urban	176	185	169	177	7	8
Large Urban	70	77	68	75	2	2
Other Urban	127	111	116	103	11	8
Significant Rural	54	53	47	49	7	4
Rural 50	58	55	52	52	6	3
Rural 75	88	88	81	73	7	15
Total	573	569	533	529	40	40

(b) Votes¹

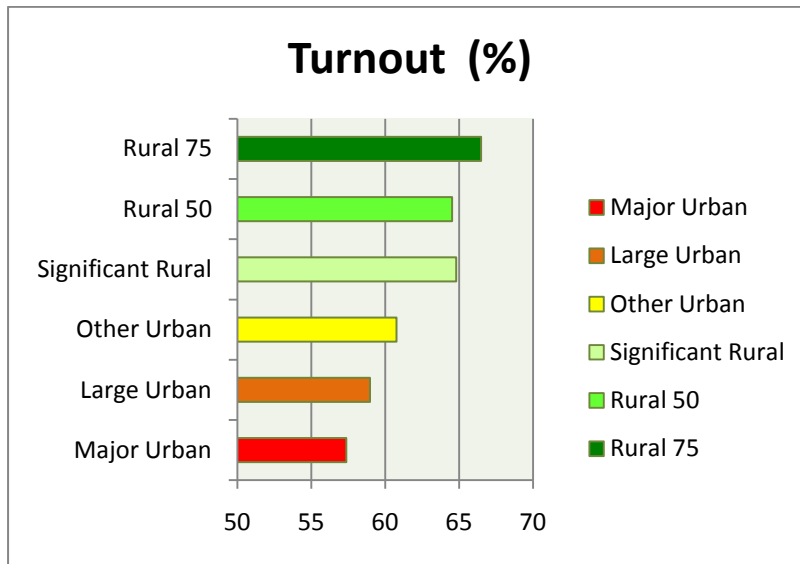
(i) Turnout

Participation in the 2005 General Election was, on average, over 7 percentage points higher in Rural 50 and Rural 75 PCs compared with Major and Large Urban PCs. There was a 5 percentage point difference between Urban and Significant Rural PCs (Chart 1). Other significant points are:

- turnout was highest in West Dorset CC (Rural 75) where 76.3 percent of the electorate voted,
- 10 of the 'top twenty' turnouts were in Rural 75 PCs and three were in the R50 PCs,
- turnout was lowest in the Liverpool Riverside BC (Major Urban) where 42.4 percent of the electorate voted,
- notable exceptions to the low turnout in Major Urban PCs were Richmond Park BC (73 percent) and Twickenham BC (72 percent).

¹ The data used here are from the excellent www.electoral.calculus.co.uk. Data for the 2005 election have been allocated to 2010 constituencies. South Staffordshire County Constituency which had a post GE election is not included here.

Chart 1: Election Turnout by Constituency Type



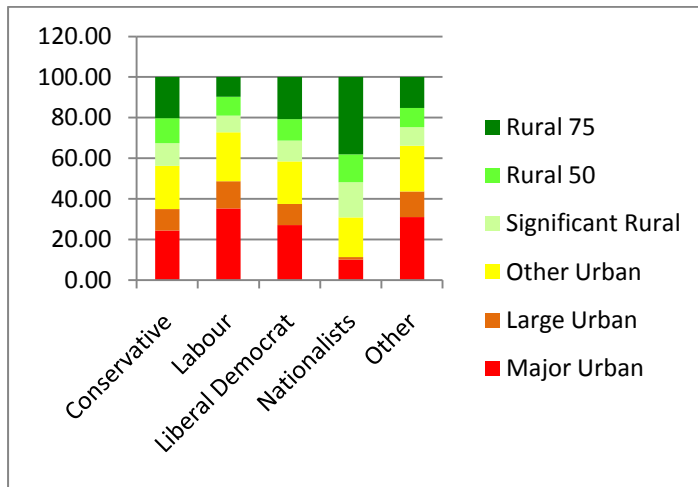
(ii) Votes Cast

The percentage of votes cast for the parties by type of constituency is given in Chart 2. The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were more representative of the different types of constituencies found across the country in the 2005 election than the Labour Party or the Nationalists.

The Conservatives drew 35% of their vote and the Liberal Democrats 37% of their vote from the Major and Large Urban Areas compared with Labour which drew just under half (49%) of their vote from the big cities.

On the other hand, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats drew 33% and 31% respectively of their vote from the most rural parts of the country (though they were very differently distributed regionally), whilst Labour drew only 19% of its vote from the most rural areas. In the most numerous ‘battleground’ seats (see below) the percentage of votes cast for each party was very even – around 20%.

Chart 2 Votes Cast for Parties by Constituency Type

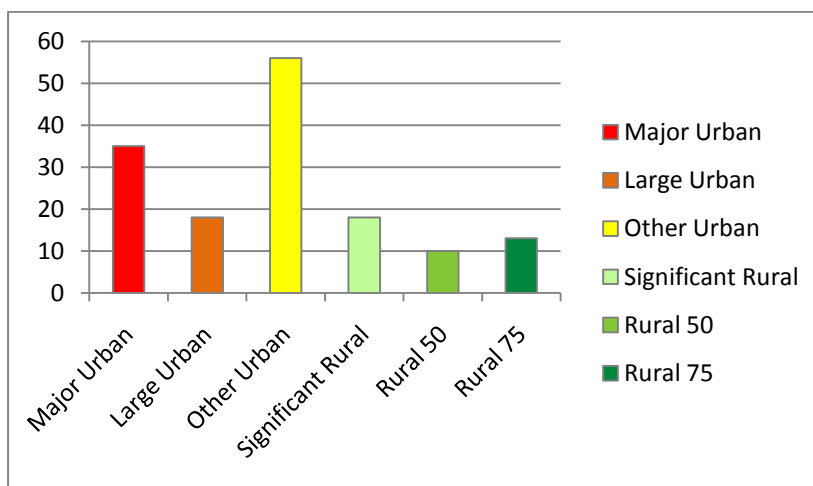


(c) The ‘Battleground’ Seats

The Times newspaper has identified 150 PCs in England and Wales as ‘battleground’ seats i.e. seats within which the election will be won or lost (The Times, Friday March 5).

Battleground seats range from Gillingham and Rainham where a swing of under 1.0% would bring about a change from Lab to Con and Chorley where the swing required to achieve a similar result is 8.5%. They are found across all area types in the Urban_Rural Classification. Although much comment has been focused on the need for Conservatives to capture seats in the big urban areas, most ‘battleground’ seats are of the ‘Other Urban’ type i.e. mostly ‘free-standing’ towns and cities and a mix of urban and rural (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Battleground Seats By Constituency Type



There is, however, a clear regional and sub-regional dimension to the different types of 'battleground' constituencies (Map 2). Most 'battleground' seats in the South East and Midlands are of the 'Other Urban' type consisting of a mix of medium sized, free-standing towns and towns with rural hinterlands, whilst the most rural 'battleground' seats are located mostly in the South West (currently Liberal Democrat), Wales (Lab or Lib) and the North West (Lab or Lib).

Map 2 The Battleground Seats Classified

