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Mayoral referendums and elections:
Uninterested electors and unknowing voters

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The office of directly elected mayor was introduced into the UK by the Labour government elected in 1997. The implementation process began with a referendum in London in 1998 followed two years later by the first mayoral election, won by Ken Livingstone standing as an Independent. The principle was then extended to other areas subject to approval by local referendum. Despite the rather limited take up throughout Labour's years in office the policy was one that the new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition also embraced. Indeed, the Localism Act (2011) strengthened central government's role and gave powers to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to specify that named local authorities must hold a referendum vote on the directly elected mayor. This resulted in a further 10 mayoral referendums being held in May 2012.

Despite this cross-party support nationally the principle of elected mayors is generally disliked by most local politicians (see Copus 2004, chapter 9) and judged by their actions, the electorate also who appear largely uninterested in the idea. Low turnout is the predominant characteristic of both mayoral referendums and mayoral elections in the minority of local authorities that have adopted the reform. In effect, low referendum turnout means that a crucial decision determining the style of future local government in an area is being determined by relatively few voters and in some cases by rather narrow margins. Furthermore, low turnout in mayoral elections necessarily impacts upon the ability of the holder of that office to claim widespread local support.

Most worrying, perhaps, is that there are aspects of the Supplementary Vote (SV) used to select mayors that suggest a significant fraction of voters are unknowing about how the method determines the winner. A YouGov poll taken just over a week before the 2012 London mayoral election (the fourth such contest in the capital) found that only 47% knew and understood the 2-vote system, another 18% knew about the method but not how it worked while 25% admitted that they did not know anything about SV¹. A Populus poll with fieldwork conducted 27-29 April, 2012 found that 23% and 22% would give their second preference vote to the Liberal Democrat and Green candidates, neither of whom had any reasonable chance of contesting the second round of vote counting. This apparent ignorance about how SV operates in practice is of particular concern because in November 2012 the method will be used to select the new Police and Crime Commissioners.

This paper extends an earlier analysis (Rallings, Thrasher and Cowling, 2002) and takes account of a further decade of experience with mayoral referendums and elections. In that paper, after noting that only 11 of 29 mayoral referendums held from 2011-2002 were successful, we commented on the general opposition to the principle among local politicians and either the ambivalence or division amongst local MPs as important factors in favouring the status quo over change. In respect of the twelve mayoral elections that had been held we noted that the fact of low turnout was, "hardly an auspicious start to an institution that is intended to strengthen accountability and enhance local democracy" (Rallings et al. 2002, p88). Given that the number of mayoral referendums has now climbed to 51 and there have been 44 mayoral elections it is time to consider whether we should review our earlier conclusions.

¹ http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/7ubav0e14e/YG-Archives-EveningStandard-MayoralElection-230412v2.pdf accessed August 23rd, 2012.

The opening section provides a brief summary of the Supplementary Vote and is followed by a description of how the system was adopted for mayoral elections, particularly its apparent advantages over competing systems, especially the Alternative Vote. The third section analyses mayoral referendums where the pattern of electoral indifference coupled with rejection of the mayoral principle continues. In the fourth section we address the results of mayoral elections over a twelve year period in terms of voter turnout, candidate competition and voting patterns. In particular we observe from the aggregate data the relatively small proportion of second votes that are transferred and the consequences of that for the overall size of vote (and mandate) awarded to elected mayors.

We conclude that all of the characteristics used to describe Britain's experience with mayoral referendums and elections at the turn of the century – low turnout, weak electoral mandates and evidence of voter confusion about the operation of SV – continue and that this has important negative consequences for the scheduled elections for Police and Crime Commissioners.

The Supplementary Vote

SV is similar to the two-ballot system but instead of holding two separate elections, SV uses one election but places two columns alongside the list of candidates arranged in alphabetical order of surname². In the first column electors mark a cross against their preferred candidate. A candidate that wins an absolute majority (50% plus 1) of these votes is elected. If that threshold is not passed and to save the inconvenience of a second election, SV requests electors also place a cross in the second column. When no candidate wins an absolute majority of first votes all candidates are eliminated from the contest except the two candidates placed first and second after the count of first votes. During the second round of counting the ballots cast for all eliminated candidates are examined and *only* second votes that indicate support for one of the two remaining candidates are transferred. The victor is simply the candidate who receives the larger combined number of first and second votes.

Determining a winner while avoiding the need for a second election comes at a price, however. Unless there are only three candidates standing it is highly likely that many second votes will be ineffective in terms of determining the winner. Voters determined to maximise the power of their second vote must anticipate that there is not going to be an absolute winner and then *guess correctly* which two candidates from the list of all candidates will continue through to the second-round. Next, they must make a strategic decision about their preference ordering of the likely two, either selecting the most preferred or the least worse. Two conditions that have been present in many mayoral elections complicate this procedure. First, as the number of candidates increases so also does the degree of difficulty of predicting which two will

² Although alphabetic bias is not examined in this paper we have established its effect in local elections in Britain (Rallings et al. 2009; Webber et al. 2012 forthcoming) and there is no reason to assume that mayoral elections are immune to its effects.

compete for second votes. Second, and probably more importantly, in low information elections such as these are voters are unlikely to expend much effort in identifying the competitive structure.

Supplementary Vote and Elected Mayors

The idea that directly elected mayors might reinvigorate local democratic government gained currency following a paper, 'Executive mayors for Britain?' (Clarke et al. 1996) before being taken up as official policy by the Labour party as it addressed the governance of London issue. Labour's 1997 general election manifesto offered directly elected mayors for London and other cities should they decide to hold a referendum.

The new Labour government published, *New Leadership for London* (DETR, 1997) which identified a number of options for electing the mayor – first past the post, the second ballot system and the alternative vote – but made no mention of Supplementary Vote by name. By March of the following year, however, the white paper, "A Mayor and Assembly for London" (DETR 1998) stated:

'We propose to use a *simplified* version of AV, the Supplementary Vote System (SV), for electing the Mayor. It is *simple and easy* to use and can produce a clear winner...The SV system has similarities with the second ballot system, but does not require two rounds of voting. It is a simplified form of AV, but is quicker to operate and count...[voters] are not required to make two choices if they do not wish to do so' (Deputy PM 1998, p32; our emphasis)

During a Commons' speech, Dale Campbell-Savours, MP for Workington, claimed that he had invented SV in 'my home in Keswick and worked on it for more than 12 months in my office in London' (Hansard, vol. 309, col. 511; but see Reilly 1997 who suggests the method had been developed earlier). It was subsequently adopted by a narrow majority by the Plant committee as an alternative method for electing MPs (Plant 1993, 38) but never considered in the context of elected mayors. Later, Dunleavy, Margetts O' Duffy and Weir (1997) concluded that their surveys had shown that people understood SV better than its principal rival, the Alternative Vote (AV). Their report to the Government Office for London, published in January 1998, recommended "the Supplementary Vote would be the most appropriate system for the London mayor elections" (Dunleavy and Margetts 1998, 19) and was superior to AV:

'The supplementary vote (SV) is a variant of AV [Alternative Vote] which is designed to be simpler to operate [and] more transparent for voters...the SV method preserves 'X' voting, but adapts it in a minimal way. Voters can mark preferences with an X in two columns next to the candidate and party names... With their first preference people can express support for any party or candidate they find most appealing, contributing to their 'headline' total, even

if that candidate has little effective chance of winning. Then with their second preference voters can seek to influence the final result of the election, deciding between the most likely candidates to stay in the second round.’ (Dunleavy and Margetts, 1998, pp13-14)

The balance of the argument, it appeared from these documents, favoured SV over AV. Note, that it was assumed that while the first vote might contribute towards the candidates general popularity the second vote was perceived to have a strategic (not merely symbolic) value.

It is worth summarising the arguments that supported the case for adoption of the Supplementary Vote.

- 1) SV would entail, ‘least change with respect to the old FPTP system’ (Plant 1991, 20). SV was viewed as a happy compromise between TRS and FPTP: just one visit to the polling station required and an immediate result.
- 2) SV was an easily understood system. This was endorsed by the empirical evidence cited above. The relative ease of use of SV and AV was sometimes reduced to a distinction between ‘x-voting’ and ‘number-voting’ (Dunleavy and Margetts 1998, 13-14).
- 3) SV would stimulate voters to express a second choice, while they would not do this under AV (Plant 1993, 57).
- 4) The administration of the counting procedure was simpler under SV than AV (Dunleavy and Margetts 1998, 14). Under SV, after counting the first preferences, only the ballots having a preference for ‘losing’ candidates have to be counted again.
- 5) ‘In the opinion of many, SV has the additional advantage over AV that it avoids the counting of ‘weak’ preferences, because only first and second choices would be registered by voters, and only the candidates who came first or second on the first count would be included on the second count, should one be needed. Thus, it does not allow a third-placed candidate to come through the middle’ (Plant 1993, 20).
- 6) There was an assumption that SV would ensure that most mayors would be elected on the basis of an overall majority of positive votes (more than 50% of both first and second preferences): ‘A few exceptions may occur where a candidate wins by gaining votes on second preferences, yet does not do so in sufficient numbers to exceed the total first preference votes of lower placed candidates. *Such cases seem likely to be comparatively rare*’ (Plant 1993, 21, our emphasis).
- 7) SV would produce larger visible (i.e. more ‘explicit’) majorities, whereas AV would produce only small visible majorities (Dunleavy and Margetts 1998, 15-18).³
- 8) SV would discourage non-viable candidates from standing and thus help to produce more coherent parties than AV. In the context of the performance of non-partisan candidates in mayoral elections this may seem a strange argument, but it was clear that large numbers of candidates were not anticipated (Dunleavy and Margetts 1998, 16).

³ However, the reason SV might produce ‘larger majorities’ than AV is because under SV all losing candidates are eliminated simultaneously and their votes are, where appropriate, redistributed to the two remaining candidates. Under AV this process goes ‘step by step’ (eliminating only one candidate on the first step) and, more crucially, accepts that it is of no use continuing redistributing votes from losing candidates once one candidate has reached the threshold of an absolute majority. By continuing the count AV would produce equally ‘visible’ majorities.]

It was widely understood at the time of implementation that SV would not always produce a majority winner. After being challenged on this point Nick Raynsford responded:

“It is certainly possible that, under SV, the winning candidate will not secure 50 per cent of the votes cast, because only the second preference votes of the defeated candidates--those not in the first two places--will be reallocated, and some of those votes may not be for candidates in the top two places. However, that does not in any way negate the value of the supplementary vote system. That system ensures that--as in France--only two candidates who have secured *substantial support in the first preference vote* can proceed to the second stage, so that only strong candidates with real backing are in the final run-off, and those are the two whose total votes, with the second preferences added, ultimately determine the outcome” (Hansard, 20 Jan 1999 : vol. 323, col. 962, our emphasis).

In sum, SV was seen as superior to its near rival, AV; it was a system close to first-past-the-post; it would utilise ‘x’ rather than ordinal voting; it involved a straightforward counting procedure; it presented little danger of weak preferences determining the winner and no danger of a third-placed candidate overtaking the two front-runners; it would, most of the time, produce a more visible majority winner than AV but not a significantly different end result; and it would tend to discourage non-viable candidates, thus strengthening the coherence of political parties.

Mayoral Referendums

Since May 1998 there have been 51 referendums⁴ to determine whether or not a local authority should adopt the office of directly elected mayor (Table A1 provides a summary). Most referendums have been held in urban areas; seven of the 32 London boroughs have participated, 14 of the 36 metropolitan boroughs and 10 of the 55 unitary councils. By contrast just 18 of 201 English shire districts have held a referendum and only one local authority (Ceredigion) in Wales.

Because there was always a clear aim to maximise public interest it has been common practice to hold them at the same time as other types of election. A large fraction, 41%, have been held in May to coincide with local elections but the remaining thirty cases have been spread throughout the year with October (nine cases) and perhaps surprisingly January (seven occasions) proving popular months for referendums. Following the London referendum in 1998 there was a three year gap until another 17

⁴ These data exclude two referendums, one in Stoke on Trent the other in Doncaster, that asked voters whether they wanted to scrap the office of mayor after each authority had previously endorsed the principle. The referendum in Stoke led to the mayor’s office being abolished but it was retained in Doncaster.

were held in 2001 and a further 13 a year later. Since 2002 referendum votes were rather sporadic until 2012 when a further eleven were conducted.

The largest electorate offered a mayoral referendum is London with 5.0 million while the smallest was Berwick (incidentally the second authority to put the question to voters) with just 21,676 electors. Three local authorities holding mayoral referendums had electorates below 50,000 with a further 16 councils falling below 100,000 electors. The mean electorate rose significantly following ten referendums held in May 2012 and currently stands at 261,468 electors.

In 16 cases (31%) voters approved the mayoral proposal, although one of these, Stoke on Trent, subsequently abandoned the reform after a further referendum held in October 2008. The winning point margin in referendums that resulted in a Yes vote is 23.9 (std dev 18.6) and 22.0 (s.d. 14.2) when No has resulted. The most emphatic Yes vote came in Middlesbrough where 84.3% voted in favour, followed by London and Hackney with winning margins of above 70%. In six referendums that rejected the mayor the No vote rose above 70% and most emphatically in West Devon with 77.4% against.

Figure 1 here

One consistent feature of mayoral referendums is that many of the 13.3 million electors offered a choice have abstained; combating apathy has been a feature of referendum campaigning (Temple 2005). Despite the best efforts of local parties and local media organisations mean turnout remains just 30% overall (31% in No and 29% in Yes outcomes) but turnout is clearly affected by the decision to conduct the referendum on the same day as other elections (Figure 1). Three referendums have been held coincident with a general election and turnout averages 62.1% in these. A further 16 referendums were held at the same time as local council elections and in these the average turnout is 29.4% (this turnout is lower than the general average and reflects the fact that most referendums are conducted in high population density urban areas). By contrast, in the remaining 32 cases when a referendum-only vote occurs turnout falls to an average that is two percentage points lower (27.3%).

A major influence on turnout is the method of voting – when voting is entirely by post (15 cases) the average turnout is 31.3% but when the conventional mix of postal and in-person voting is used the turnout falls to 21.7%. Turnout does not appear to be adversely affected by seasonal factors. In referendums held in January, for example, it averages 30% but it might be that when the general level of turnout is already very low that timing becomes irrelevant.

Further indications that voters do not engage with mayoral referendums may be found when examining levels of rejected ballots. In 2012 in the two cities without local elections (Bristol and Nottingham) the proportion of referendum ballot papers rejected at the count was 0.34 and 0.36 respectively. In the other eight cases, the aggregate referendum rejection rate was higher, 2.1%; it varied from 0.8% in Newcastle to 3.5% in Bradford. In the Bristol and Nottingham cases the proportion rejected as being unmarked or wholly void for uncertainty was 66% and 63%; elsewhere it was 69% in Newcastle, but otherwise never less than 83% (peaking at 95% in Leeds). By contrast,

at the *local* elections in those metropolitan boroughs with a coincident referendum the overall rejection rate at the count was 0.6%. In Bradford it was 0.8%; in Newcastle 0.3%.

Such differences are also encountered in respect of postal votes. The average rate of rejection of postal votes in 2012 was 7.6% where the referendum was combined with local elections and 6.4% where it was not. Among individual authorities it varied from 3.4% in Newcastle to 10.5% in Birmingham. At the local elections in the eight cities the postal vote rejection rate was 5.5% with all except Manchester showing a *lower* rate of rejection than at the referendum. A failure to return the ballot paper and/or postal vote statement accounted for 8.2% of all postal vote rejections in 'non-combined' areas and for 32.7% of them in 'combined' areas. The proportion so rejected ranged from 2.8% in Bristol to 59.5% in Wakefield.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion from the 2012 evidence that a small proportion of those who voted both in person and by post deliberately decided to ignore the mayoral referendum while nevertheless participating in the concurrent local election.

Generally low turnout means, of course, that outcomes are effectively determined by a rather small proportion of the eligible electorate. In the 16 successful referendums the total Yes vote comprised an average of just 17.5% of the electorate; in Lewisham's October 2011 vote, the Yes vote comprised 9.4% of the electorate. Conversely, in defeated referendums a mean of 19.2% of electors determined that the elected mayor should be rejected; in Sunderland where only 10% of the electorate voted in the referendum held one week earlier than the Lewisham contest, just 5.7% of the electorate determined the outcome.

Figure 2 here

A combination of sometimes rather small electorates, low turnout and close finishes means that the difference between adoption or rejection of an elected mayor has been decided by fine margins in some instances. Figure 2 shows the percentage majority by referendum outcome expressed in terms of the overall electorate. Generally, referendums have been decided by fine margins in terms of the wider electorate both because most votes have been close and turnout has been low. A large number, 23, have seen winning margins of less than 5% of the eligible electors with a further 16 below one in ten of electors. Half of the referendums resulting in a Yes vote have passed with majorities that equate to less than one in twenty electors.

One of the most celebrated mayoral elections was in Hartlepool where the 2002 election was won by Stuart Drummond (since twice re-elected) standing as 'H' Angus the Monkey' (Drummond's alter ego as the local football club's on-pitch mascot). Media attention was heightened by the fact that Peter Mandelson, then Labour MP for Hartlepool and a major architect of New Labour gave his full support for directly elected mayors. But the mayoral election only happened following a very narrow result in the preceding referendum; the winning margin for the Yes camp in October 2001 was just 373 votes. Similarly, a slim margin of 496 votes separated Yes from No in Watford. In both Hartlepool and Watford the winning majority was less than one percent of the eligible electorate. Sixteen referendums have been decided by

fewer than 4,000 votes. Yet, there does not appear to be a correlation between turnout and the closeness of the eventual outcome; in the 32 referendum-only votes the correlation between percentage turnout and percentage difference between Yes and No votes is .23

It is difficult to conclude that mayoral referendums have proved to be low information, low salience and low turnout episodes where, with a few exceptions, the outcome has been shaped by the choice of a relatively small proportion of electors. This was the pattern that was established in the initial referendums and it is a pattern that continues to the present.

Mayoral elections

Since May 2000 there have been 44 mayoral elections held across 17 local authorities (Table A2 summarises results). Mayors are normally elected for a four-year term but occasionally the initial period is different to allow mayoral elections to become synchronised with local elections. In two cases (North Tyneside and Bedford) unscheduled by-elections were caused by the resignation and death respectively of the incumbent. There is a growing literature on the experience of mayoral government (Game 2003; Copus 2004; Randle 2004; Stoker 2004; Fenwick and Elcock 2005; Elcock and Fenwick 2007; Greasley and Stoker 2008) but much less has been written about the operation of SV.

From the beginning mayoral elections have been as much about personality as party (Rallings and Thrasher, 2000; Startin 2001). This partly explains why despite the decline of 'Independents' in local government generally in mayoral elections such candidates are apparently thriving. Table 1 shows that Labour has won the most contests just ahead of Independents but these two are a long way ahead of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The English Democrats won in Doncaster in 2009 and Respect came second in Newham in 2006. Labour has a relatively large number of second places, reflecting the concentration of urban areas but the Conservative candidates have often featured in the runner-up position.

Table 1 here

The architects of SV believed that mayoral elections would not attract a relatively large number of candidates but in reality most contests have seen a large and varied choice. Over three hundred candidates have competed with a mean of 6.9 (in other types of local election the mean is about 3 candidates), and range 4-14.

It is not simply the three main parties that have contested but also the minor and fringe parties and, of course, Independents. Both Conservative and Labour have fought every contest while the Liberal Democrats have challenged in all but five. For the minor parties the number of candidates fielded is Greens (27), BNP (14), and UKIP (9). Among the smaller fringe parties the Christian People's Alliance leads the

way with six, followed by Socialist Alliance with five and both the English Democrats and National Front each contesting four mayoral elections.

A major feature of these elections has been their attraction for Independents; eleven Independents contested the 2005 election in Torbay. Both the proliferation of Independents and their support has real consequences for the strategic situation when SV requires voters to guess correctly which two candidates will survive and which ones will be eliminated. In 33 mayoral elections at least one Independent stood. In more than half of these cases another Independent joined the ballot and in just under a third (10 cases) a third Independent competed for votes. On the 17 occasions when at least two Independents have stood voters have sometimes shown a strong preference between the leading Independent and the closest rival for the non-party vote. For example, Ray Mallon's lead over the other Independent on the 2002 ballot in Middlesbrough was 62.1 percentage points while Livingstone's lead in 2000 over his rival Independent was 38.4 points. But in other cases the gap between Independents has been far smaller. In Hartlepool the 2002 mayoral battle was largely fought between two Independents whose combined vote was over half the votes cast but the winner's lead was less than three percentage points. Independents won 59% of the total vote in the 2005 Torbay election with the leading candidate three points ahead of the next Independent. Predicting the outcome of mayoral elections is inevitably made more complicated when a large number of such candidates stand and when some receive sizeable support. It appears that Police and Crime Commissioner elections will also prove attractive to Independent candidates.

Following the inaugural mayoral election in every subsequent election the incumbent has sought re-election. Among these 22 cases the incumbent has been re-elected on 17 occasions with only five defeated – Ken Livingstone in London, Linda Arkley and John Harrison both in North Tyneside, Mike Wolfe in Stoke on Trent and Nick Bye in Torbay.

Women candidates, comprising just over 30% of the total across other types of local election, are less likely to stand in mayoral elections (and only two have been elected). While 249 men have stood, just 56 women (18%) have done so. Among the 87 Independents that have stood only 15 are women (17%). Nine mayoral elections have featured only male candidates.

It is unsurprising that in what remain low information elections with multiple candidates that there is a wide distribution of voting patterns resulting in very few of the winning candidates receiving an absolute majority of votes cast. Unless one candidate wins an absolute majority of first votes then second votes are counted. But in such circumstances voters (that is, those actually aware of the counting procedure and wishing to make a strategic choice) will have to guess beforehand which two candidates from the list will advance to the second round. Table 3 shows that the effect of this characteristic of SV is that very few mayors have been elected with an absolute majority – 10 were elected following the first count and a further six following the second count. Of the remaining contests in 18 cases the winning mayor's combined first and second votes ranged between 40% to under 50% of the total votes cast (i.e. total first votes) while for eight elected mayors the final share was less than 40% of the total.

Indications that many voters in mayoral elections are not supporting either of the two front runners can be shown in two ways. First, by calculating the share of first votes cast for the top two candidates and second, by calculating the percentage of eligible second votes transferred to these candidates at the second count stage.

Figure 3 shows a rank ordering of the combined share of first votes obtained by the two candidates that subsequently progressed to the second count. The mean combined share is 62.8% with a large range 37.7 – 84.3% and a standard deviation of 12.0. On average, therefore, approximately two in three mayoral votes are being cast for the two front-runners. The most visible two-horse race is the 2012 London mayoral contest between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone with their 2008 battle ranked in third place. However, the previous two London elections feature around the average figure (marked in red). Other local authorities that have conducted multiple mayoral elections also feature towards the top end of the rank order. In North Tyneside (blue) it is perhaps unsurprising that the two leading candidates should be so clearly defined after the first count since these elections have attracted a relatively small list of candidates (between four and six) in all four elections. Other contests to have featured a high proportion of first votes to the two first round leaders have been Mansfield (Labour and Independent; green)) and Watford (Liberal Democrat versus Labour then Liberal Democrat versus Conservative; orange) but in all five cases the number of candidates has not exceeded six.

By contrast, mayoral elections at the opposite end of the scale have often featured much longer ballots. Torbay's 2005 election saw 14 candidates contest with the top two winning a combined 38% of the first votes. Four other elections have produced a combined first vote share of less than half the votes for the two leading candidates. In these cases either the total number of candidates has been high or Independents have featured prominently or both conditions have been present.

Figure 3 here

Another way of considering the pattern of voting is to examine the re-distribution of second votes: In those 34 elections that have proceeded to the second round what fraction of second votes has gone to the two candidates still eligible to receive them? Interpretation of these data is not without its problems however since inferring individual choice from aggregate data is problematic. Those ballots that record a first and second vote for the same candidate may either be expressing a strong preference (this party and no other) or may be the actions of a voter that simply fails to understand how SV works. Similarly, those ballots that do support different candidates but where neither candidate has any chance of winning may be expressing a genuinely-held opinion rather than a lack of understanding about the rules. Without individual-level data (and even then one might remain sceptical about the 'evidence') it is difficult to arrive at firm conclusions from the aggregate data.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting the proportion of second votes that are eventually transferred to run-off candidates (Figure 4). Of course, calculation of the total eligible must ignore any second votes from ballots that gave a first vote for one or other of the

two front runners – these are withdrawn from the calculation and only ballots that gave first votes to subsequently eliminated candidates can be taken into account. Using this method the mean percentage of second votes cast that helped to determine the eventual winner is just 38.6%; on average fewer than four in ten second votes that were cast were transferred at the second count. The two values at the lower end (16.4% and 21.3%) both belong to Torbay while North Tyneside’s 2005 four-candidate election is something of an outlier at the upper end where 68.3% of second votes transferred.

Two equally plausible conclusions are possible; either that a sizeable majority of voters do not care that their second vote is not contributing to the outcome or are simply unaware of the SV process at the second count stage.

Figure 4 here

We have no precise way of knowing which of those conditions most applies but Figure 5 shows the effect of controlling for the number of candidates on the ballot. Mayoral elections were separated into two categories. Those contests with up to six candidates were placed in one category with the remaining cases into a second category. There is about an average ten percentage point difference in the proportion of eligible votes that are transferred which strongly suggests that the longer the ballot paper the less likely voters supporting candidates that are destined to be eliminated from the second count will cast a second vote for one of the two strongest candidates.

Figure 5 here

It was noted earlier the higher level of rejected ballots at mayoral referendums compared with local elections held in the same place on the same day. Similar differences occur when mayoral and local elections are held simultaneously (Table 3). For this purpose turnout is calculated using both valid and rejected ballots. Comparison shows that in every case the percentage participating in the mayoral election is lower than that participating at the local council election despite the high-profile enjoyed by mayors. The figures also show that more votes are rejected for the mayoral than the local election. Admittedly, the differences are not great but it is difficult not to conclude that some fraction of the electorate is either averse to mayoral voting or is confused about how to vote.

Table 3 here

One of the most consistent arguments against AV is that it can sometimes lead to the most popular candidate being overtaken following the re-distribution of lower-order preferences. A similar weakness exists within the SV system (although, by definition, no candidate can emerge from third place or lower to win the election). There have been five occasions (11% of all outcomes) when a candidate placed second after the first count has advanced to win following the transfer of supplementary votes. Two of the five examples occurred in Mansfield where on both occasions the Independent, Tony Egginton, overtook the Labour candidate. In 2002 it was largely the second votes on Conservative ballots that overturned a Labour lead of 623 votes and transformed it into an Independent majority of 588 votes. On the second occasion in

2011 the Independent was assisted by second votes on ballots cast for both the Conservative and UKIP candidates but here the final margin of victory was just 67 votes. In Stoke on Trent it was again an Independent that benefitted from transfers, relegating the Labour candidate (a sitting MP) into second place. An Independent also features in the fourth example, but here the positions were reversed when the English Democrats won the Doncaster mayoral election in 2009. The only time that the second-placed candidate following the first count has gone on to win when the two leading candidates have been from the main parties has been in North Tyneside in 2005 when John Harrison for Labour reversed a deficit of 1,414 votes and thanks largely to transfers from the Liberal Democrats went on to win with a majority of 1,002 votes. In North Tyneside, as noted earlier, around two-thirds of eligible second votes were transferred at this particular election but in the four other cases the transfer percentage ranges between 24-47%.

One of the claims for SV that it strengthens the winner's majority is further undermined when the relative distribution of second votes to the two leading candidates is examined. At the 2012 London mayoral election, for example, Boris Johnson's lead over Ken Livingstone narrowed between the first and second counting stages because Livingstone received 19,475 more second votes than did Johnson although on this occasion this did not alter the finishing position. Among the 34 elections where second votes have been transferred in 21 of these the first round leader has seen his/her lead extended further but in the remaining 13 examples the lead has narrowed.

Conclusions

There has been and continues to be cross-party support for directly elected mayors, at least at the national level. Despite this support (or perhaps because of it) the response by local politicians has largely been negative while electors have largely failed to respond to invitations to participate in mayoral referendums. Those relatively few that have turned out to vote have rejected the proposal. One area that first supported the principle subsequently rejected it.

Similar referendums were deemed unnecessary to decide upon the implementation of new Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC), which will replace the existing police authorities across England and Wales (except London). Instead, the inaugural elections for these posts will take place on November 15, 2012. Thereafter, PCC elections will be held every four years to synchronise with the May county council elections. It is likely that, in addition to candidates from the main parties, the elections will attract representatives from some of the smaller parties as well as a raft of Independents. In short, most of the ballots will be long and given that these are police authority areas that bear no resemblance to existing parliamentary constituencies/local authority areas it will prove extremely difficult for most voters in most areas to guess beforehand whether one candidate will win after the first count and who among the list of all candidates are likely to be the two-front runners.

Those features that have come to characterise mayoral elections may recur with respect to their PCC equivalents. Mayoral elections have attracted a large number of candidates, many standing as Independents of whom a large number have been elected. Personality politics has been to the fore. From the electors' point of view the opportunity to vote has been largely spurned while among those voting a relatively large proportion has voted for candidates outside the three-party mainstream. Detailed examination of the aggregate voting data demonstrates that, generally speaking, few voters cast a second vote that is transferred. There are several areas of speculation about why this might be happening but the disaggregated data available from the London elections provides some indication of the variability in behaviour (van der Kolk et al. 2006). A proportion of voters is fiercely partisan and will not support a competitor, either voting twice for the same party or leaving the second vote column blank. Some voters, while probably knowledgeable about SV instead prefer to vote 'symbolically' with their second vote, using it to support a candidate that has no chance of being in the runoff election. A further section of voters correctly guess the two front runners and select both – suggesting perhaps either indifference towards the actual outcome or hedging their bets in case one of the two fancied riders fails at the first hurdle. A final area of speculation, albeit this one also supported by some polling evidence, is that a fraction of voters do not understand the voting system even after several attempts at using it.

Whatever the reasons for such a low rate of transfers to the two leading candidates the outcome has been that where no candidate succeeds in winning an absolute majority of first votes the subsequent winner is more likely than not to fail to reach that threshold and will sometimes come from second place to secure victory. The margin of victory is likely to be narrow, the transfer of votes will not necessarily favour the most popular candidate and any mandate that is claimed will cover only a fraction of the electorate because most people do not vote in these elections. None of this evidence bodes well for the PCC elections where turnout will be lower still, ballot length will be relatively large and where assessment of the strategic situation will prove extremely difficult even for those voters with the time and inclination to think about it.

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Table 1: First and Second in Mayoral Elections, 2000-2012

	Won	%	Second	%
Labour	17	38.6	15	34.1
Independent	14	31.8	6	13.6
Conservative	7	15.9	16	36.4
Liberal Democrat	5	11.4	6	13.6
English Democrat	1	2.3	-	-
Respect	-	-	1	2.3
Total	44	100.0	44	100.0

Table 2: Mayoral election winners and vote share by authority

Authority	Year	Win	%	Year	Win	%	Year	Win	%
London	2000	Ind	40-50	2004	Lab	40-50	2008	Con	40-50
	2012	Con	40-50						
Doncaster	2002	Lab	40-50	2005	Lab	40-50	2009	ED	>=40
Hartlepool	2002	Ind	>=40	2005	Ind	40-50	2009	Ind	>=40
Lewisham	2002	Lab	>50*	2006	Lab	40-50	2010	Lab	40-50
Middlesbrough	2002	Ind	>50	2007	Ind	>50	2011	Ind	>50
Newham	2002	Lab	>50	2006	Lab	>50*	2010	Lab	>50
N. Tyneside	2002	Con	40-50	2003	Con	40-50	2005	Lab	40-50
	2009	Con	40-50						
Watford	2002	LD	>50*	2006	LD	>50	2010	LD	>50*
Bedford	2002	Ind	40-50	2007	Ind	40-50	2009	LD	>=40
	2011	LD	40-50						
Hackney	2002	Lab	40-50	2006	Lab	>50*	2010	Lab	>50
Mansfield	2002	Ind	40-50	2007	Ind	>50*	2011	Ind	40-50
Stoke	2002	Ind	>=40	2005	Lab	40-50			
Torbay	2005	Con	>=40	2011	Con	>=40			
Tower Ham.	2010	Ind	>50						
Leicester	2011	Lab	>50						
Salford	2012	Lab	>=40						
Liverpool	2012	Lab	>50						

Contests marked with an asterisk indicate an absolute majority was reached after the transfer of second votes.

Table 3: Rejected ballots at synchronous mayoral and local elections, 2011-12

Authority	Mayoral Turnout	Mayoral rejected	Local turnout	Local rejected
Middlesbrough	36.6	3.3	36.9	0.9
Mansfield	37.4	4.4	37.9	1.1
Bedford	47.0	4.3	47.5	1.2
Leicester	39.7	6.0	41.6	1.2
Torbay	41.2	3.3	41.8	1.3
Salford	26.1	2.6	26.9	1.1
Liverpool	31.7	2.8	32.0	0.8

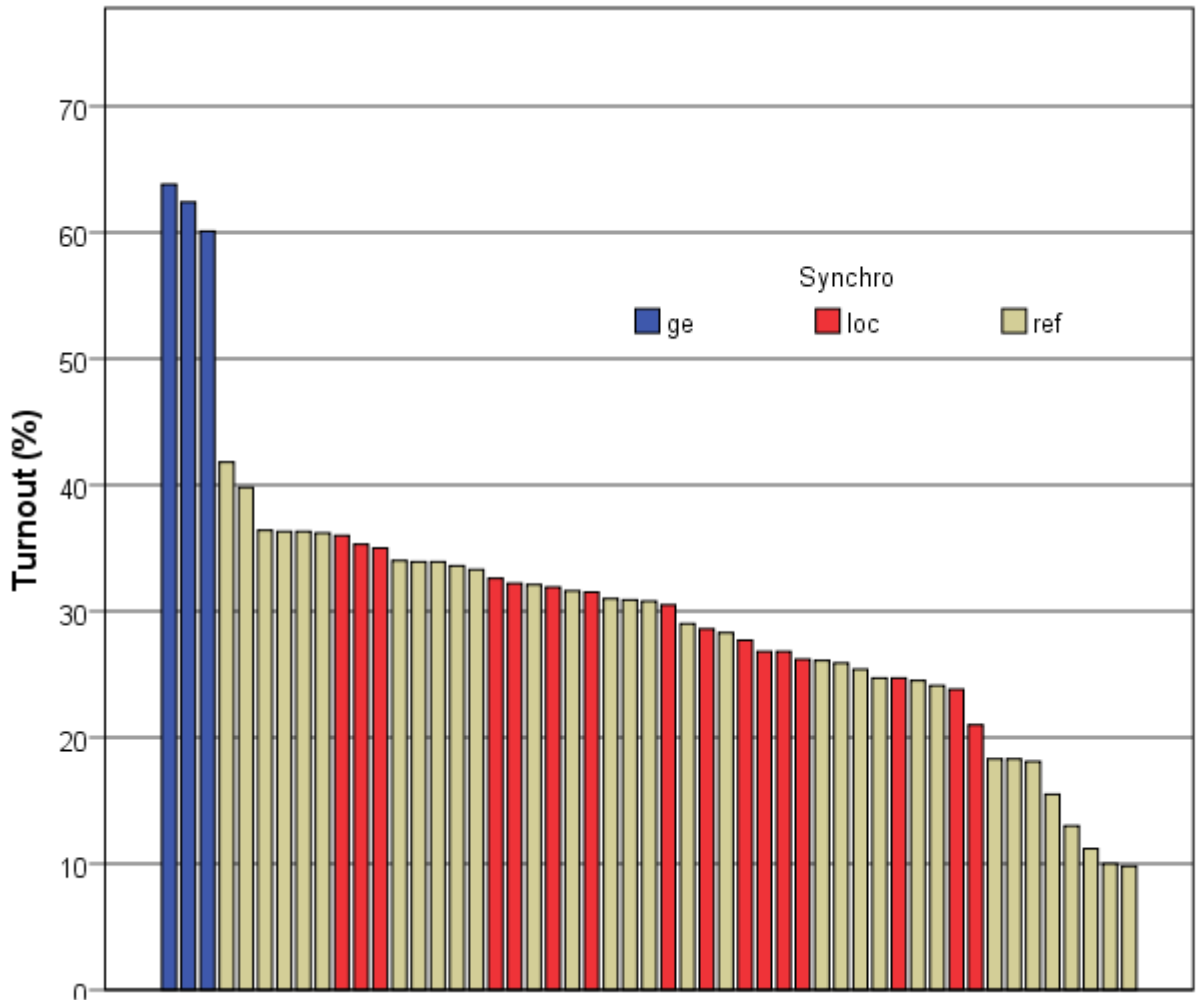


Figure 1: Rank order of turnout (%) in mayoral referendums 1998-2012

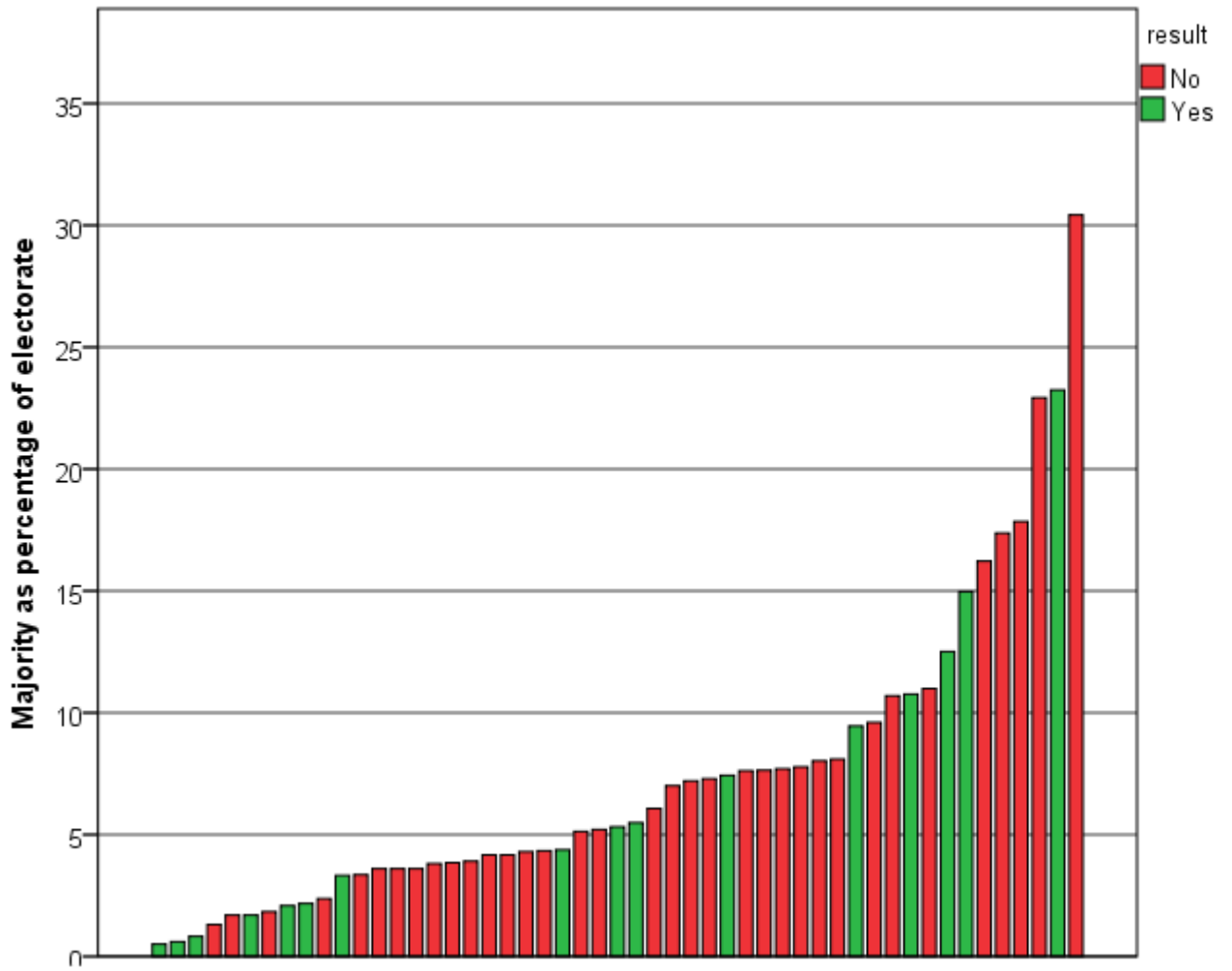


Figure 2: Rank order of % majority (electorate) and referendum outcome, 1998-2012

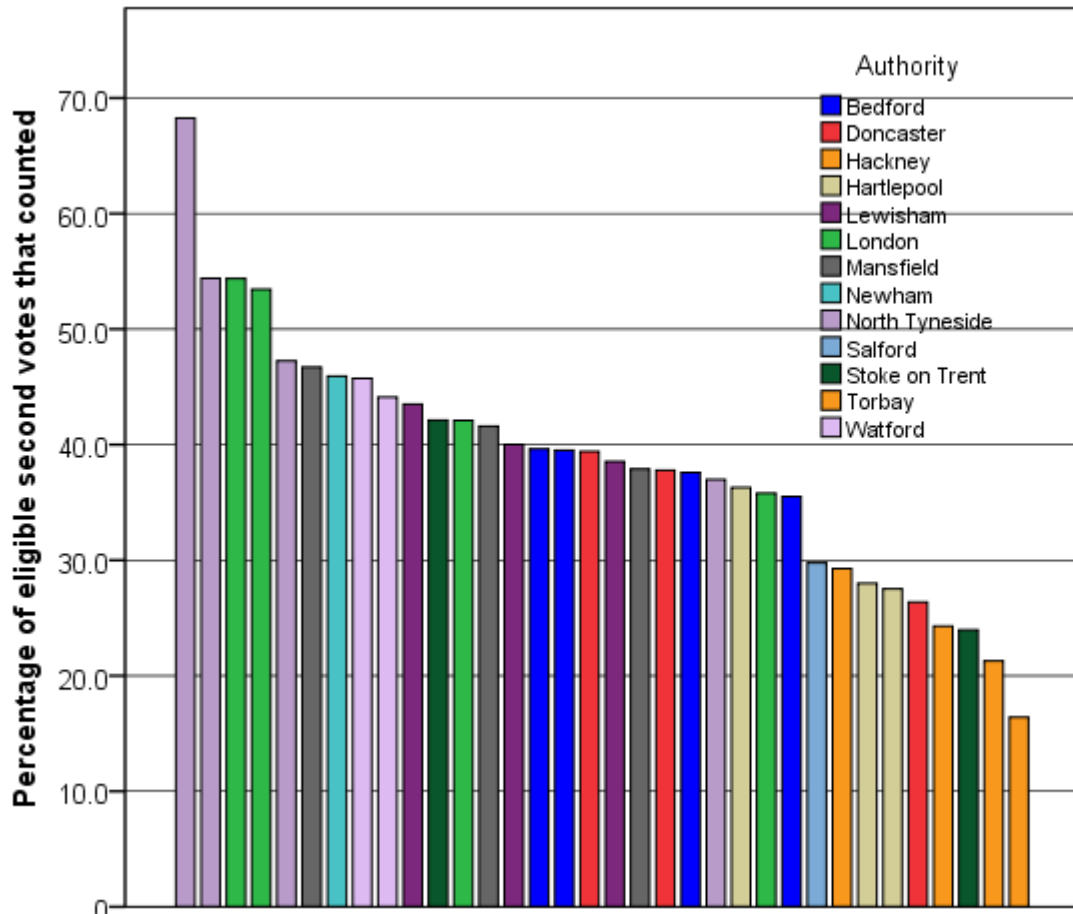


Figure 4: Rank order of % of eligible second votes that transferred

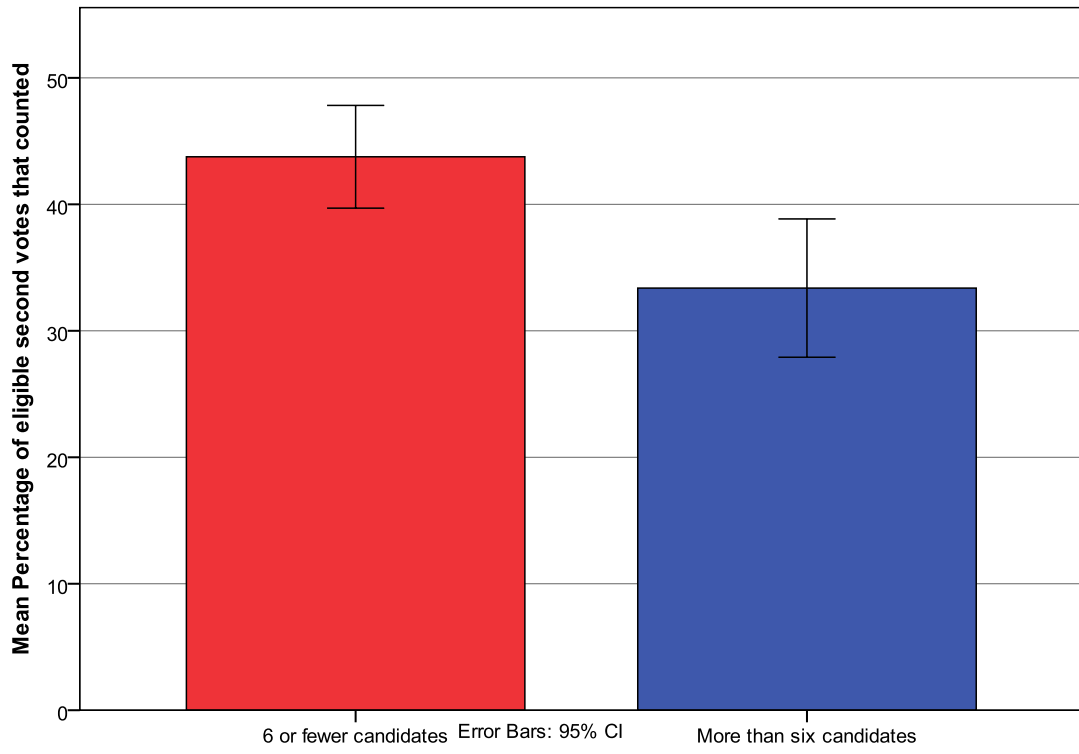


Figure 5: Mean percentage eligible votes transferred by number of candidates

Appendix A: Results of mayoral referendums

Authority	Date	Yes	%	No	%	T'out	Yes Post % elect	
<u>London</u>	7.5.98	1,230,759	72.0	478,413	28.0	34.1	24.5	N
Berwick *	7.6.01	3,617	26.2	10,212	73.8	63.8#	16.7	N
Cheltenham	28.6.01	8,083	32.7	16,602	67.3	31.0	10.2	Y
Gloucester	28.6.01	7,731	32.1	16,317	67.9	30.8	9.9	Y
<u>Watford</u>	12.7.01	7,636	51.7	7,140	48.3	24.5	12.7	Y
<u>Doncaster</u>	20.9.01	35,453	64.6	19,398	35.4	25.4	16.4	Y
Kirklees	4.10.01	10,169	26.7	27,977	73.3	13.0	3.5	N
Sunderland	11.10.01	9,375	43.4	12,209	56.6	10.0	4.3	N
Brighton & Hove	18.10.01	22,724	37.9	37,214	62.1	31.6	12.0	Y
<u>Hartlepool</u>	18.10.01	10,667	50.9	10,294	49.1	33.9	17.3	Y
<u>Lewisham</u>	18.10.01	16,822	51.4	15,917	48.6	18.3	9.4	Y
<u>Middlesbrough</u>	18.10.01	29,067	84.3	5,422	15.7	33.9	28.6	Y
<u>North Tyneside</u>	18.10.01	30,262	57.6	22,296	42.4	36.2	20.8	Y
Sedgefield	18.10.01	10,628	47.2	11,869	52.8	33.3	15.7	Y
Redditch	8.11.01	7,250	44.1	9,198	55.9	28.3	12.5	Y
Durham	20.11.01	8,327	41.0	11,974	59.0	29.0	11.9	Y
Harrow	7.12.01	17,502	42.6	23,554	57.4	26.1	11.1	Y
Harlow	24.1.02	5,296	25.5	15,490	74.5	36.4	9.3	Y
Plymouth	24.1.02	29,559	40.8	42,811	59.2	39.8	16.3	Y
<u>Newham</u>	31.1.02	27,263	68.2	12,687	31.8	25.9	17.7	Y
Shepway	31.1.02	11,357	44.0	14,438	56.0	36.3	16.0	Y
Southwark †*	31.1.02	6,054	31.4	13,217	68.6	11.2	3.5	N
West Devon	31.1.02	3,555	22.6	12,190	77.4	41.8	9.4	Y
<u>Bedford*</u>	21.2.02	11,316	67.1	5,537	32.9	15.5	10.4	N
<u>Hackney</u>	2.5.02	24,697	70.1	10,547	29.9	26.8	18.8	Y
<u>Mansfield*</u>	2.5.02	8,973	55.0	7,350	45.0	21.0	11.5	N
Newcastle-u-Lyme*	2.5.02	12,912	43.9	16,468	56.1	31.5	13.8	N
Oxford	2.5.02	14,692	44.0	18,690	56.0	32.6	14.3	N
<u>Stoke on Trent*</u>	2.5.02	28,601	58.2	20,578	41.8	26.8	15.6	N
Corby	1.10.02	5,351	46.2	6,239	53.8	30.9	14.3	Y
Ealing*	12.12.02	9,454	44.8	11,655	55.2	9.8	4.4	N
Ceredigion†*	20.5.04	5,308	27.5	14,013	72.5	36.3	10.0	N
Isle of Wight*	5.5.05	28,786	43.7	37,097	56.3	62.4#	27.3	N
<u>Torbay*</u>	14.7.05	18,074	55.2	14,682	44.8	32.1	17.7	Y
Fenland	15.7.05	5,509	24.2	17,296	75.8	33.6	8.1	N
Crewe & Nantwich*	4.5.06	11,808	38.2	18,768	60.8	35.3	13.6	N
Darlington	27.9.07	7,981	41.6	11,226	58.4	24.7	10.2	N
Bury*	3.7.08	10,338	40.1	15,425	59.9	18.3	7.3	N
<u>Tower Hamlets</u>	6.5.10	60,758	60.4	39,857	39.6	60.1#	36.4	N
Great Yarmouth*	5.5.11	10,051	39.2	15,595	60.8	36.0	14.1	N
<u>Salford*</u>	26.1.12	17,344	56.0	13,653	44.0	18.1	10.2	N
Birmingham	3.5.12	88,085	42.2	120,611	57.8	27.7	11.7	N
Bradford	3.5.12	53,949	44.9	66,283	55.1	35.0	15.7	N
<u>Bristol</u>	3.5.12	41,032	53.3	35,880	46.7	24.1	12.9	N
Coventry	3.5.12	22,619	36.4	39,483	63.6	26.2	9.5	N
Leeds	3.5.12	62,440	36.7	107,910	63.3	30.5	11.2	N
Manchester	3.5.12	42,677	46.8	48,593	53.2	24.7	11.5	N
Newcastle-u-Tyne	3.5.12	24,630	38.1	40,089	61.9	31.9	12.1	N
Nottingham	3.5.12	20,943	42.5	28,320	57.5	23.8	10.1	N
Sheffield	3.5.12	44,571	35.0	82,890	65.0	32.2	11.3	N
Wakefield	3.5.12	27,610	37.8	45,357	62.2	28.6	10.8	N

same day as General Election.

* Public petition triggered referendum.

† Referendum ordered by Secretary of State.

Appendix B: Summary of Mayoral Election Results

Place	Date	Cand.	Elected	Party	1 st vote %	Final %	Runoff party	T ^h out %
London	May 4, 2000	11	Ken Livingstone	Ind	39.0	45.3	Con	33.6
	Jun 10, 2004	10	Ken Livingstone	Lab	36.8	44.4	Con	36.9
	May 1, 2008	10	Boris Johnson	Con	43.2	48.4	Lab	45.3
	May 3, 2012	7	Boris Johnson	Con	44.0	47.8	Lab	38.0
Doncaster	May 2, 2002	7	Martin Winter	Lab	36.8	44.0	Con	27.1
	May 5, 2005	7	Martin Winter	Lab	36.7	42.0	Ind	54.5*
	June 4, 2009	6	Peter Davies†	ED	23.9	35.7	Ind	35.8
Hartlepool	May 2, 2002	5	Stuart Drummond	Ind	29.1	37.8	Lab	28.8
	May 5, 2005	7	Stuart Drummond	Ind	42.2	50.0	Lab	51.0*
	June 4, 2009	13	Stuart Drummond	Ind	24.5	32.0	Ind	31.2
Lewisham	May 2, 2002	5	Steve Bullock	Lab	45.0	55.1	Con	24.8
	May 4, 2006	6	Steve Bullock	Lab	37.7	42.8	LD	33.0
	May 6, 2010	7	Steve Bullock	Lab	44.5	49.6	LD	58.4*
Middlesbro	May 2, 2002	6	Raymond Mallon	Ind	62.8	-	-	41.6
	May 3, 2007	4	Raymond Mallon	Ind	58.7	-	-	30.8
	May 5, 2011	5	Raymond Mallon	Ind	50.4	-	-	36.5
Newham	May 2, 2002	6	Robin Wales	Lab	50.8	-	-	25.5
	May 4, 2006	5	Robin Wales	Lab	47.9	56.9	Resp	34.5
	May 6, 2010	5	Robin Wales	Lab	68.0	-	-	50.4*
N. Tyneside Byelect	May 2, 2002	5	Chris Morgan	Con	35.9	42.9	Lab	42.3
	Jun 12, 2003	5	Linda Arkley	Con	43.1	49.6	Lab	30.8
	May 5, 2005	4	John Harrison†	Lab	40.2	47.7	Con	61.4*
	June 4, 2009	6	Linda Arkley	Con	42.4	46.4	Lab	38.4
Watford	May 2, 2002	6	Dorothy Thornhill	LD	49.4	60.8	Lab	36.1
	May 4, 2006	4	Dorothy Thornhill	LD	51.2	-	-	38.1
	May 6, 2010	4	Dorothy Thornhill	LD	45.9	56.1	Con	65.2*
Bedford	Oct 17, 2002	8	Francis Branston	Ind	34.5	43.6	LD	25.3
	May 3, 2007	4	Francis Branston	Ind	36.7	45.3	Con	40.1
Byelect	Oct 15, 2009	6	Dave Hodgson	LD	26.8	38.6	Con	30.2
	May 5, 2011	5	Dave Hodgson	LD	37.7	45.8	Con	47.0
Hackney	Oct 17, 2002	8	Jules Pipe	Lab	42.0	49.3	Con	25.2
	May 4, 2006	7	Jules Pipe	Lab	46.9	54.5	Con	32.9
	May 6, 2010	6	Jules Pipe	Lab	53.9	-	-	58.0*
Mansfield	Oct 17, 2002	5	Tony Egginton†	Ind	29.6	42.4	Lab	18.5
	May 3, 2007	5	Tony Egginton	Ind	45.7	52.1	Lab	34.2
	May 5, 2011	6	Tony Egginton†	Ind	37.6	43.7	Lab	37.4
Stoke	Oct 17, 2002	12	Mike Wolfe†	Ind	21.3	28.9	Lab	24.0
	May 5, 2005	7	Mark Meredith	Lab	32.9	44.6	Con	50.8*
Torbay	Oct 20, 2005	14	Nicholas Bye	Con	21.9	29.4	LD	24.0
	May 5, 2011	9	Gordon Oliver	Con	25.7	30.7	Ind	41.2
T. Hamlets	Oct 21, 2010	5	Lutfur Rahman	Ind	51.8	-	-	25.6
Leicester	May 5, 2011	11	Peter Soulsby	Lab	55.1	-	-	40.7
Liverpool	May 3, 2012	12	Joe Anderson	Lab	59.3	-	-	30.8
Salford	May 3, 2012	10	Ian Stewart	Lab	46.0	52.3	Con	25.7

- * same day as general election
- † placed second after first count