



CONSTITUENCIES LEFT UNCHANGED IN THE DEMOCRATIC AUDIT BOUNDARY CHANGE MODEL

Lewis Baston, June 2011

The boundary changes resulting from the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 will be radical and extensive. Reducing the overall number from 650 to 600 necessitates large-scale change.

However, it has been past practice of Boundary Commissions to minimise the amount of ‘disruption of local ties’, which has usually been understood as meaning that where a constituency can (consistent with the other criteria for boundary drawing) be left alone, it generally will be unless doing so has severe adverse effects on other seats. This principle will continue in the current boundary review.

In preparing the model simulation, I was surprised at how many constituencies – even in the context of such a big change – could be left alone. Under the model outcomes, a total of 88 existing seats could be left as they are, amounting to 13.5 per cent of the current seats. In one region, South West, more than a quarter could be unaltered. This relatively high number is a consequence of the model’s adoption of the principle of ‘no change where possible’ in most areas.

	Unchanged seats	Total seats on 2010 actual boundaries	Share of 2010 actual seats unchanged
Eastern	4	58	6.9
East Midlands	6	46	13.0
London	3	73	4.1
North East	1	29	3.4
North West	12	75	16.0
South East	19	84	22.6
South West	15	55	27.3
West Midlands	12	59	20.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	12	54	22.2
ENGLAND (total)	84	533	15.8
Wales	0	40	0.0
Scotland	3	59	5.1
Northern Ireland	1	18	5.6
UNITED KINGDOM (total)	88	650	13.5

Outcomes along the lines proposed in the model would actually involve a slightly higher proportion of unchanged seats than redistributions that took place in 1950 and 1983, when 12.8 per cent and 10.4 per cent of seats respectively were left alone, but would be a more radical redistribution than any other post-war changes.

It may be fairly asked how this squares with the expectation that the new rules would lead to nearly every constituency being changed. Part of the answer relates to chance, or perhaps the efforts of electoral registration staff during 2010. Some areas (such as Doncaster and Coventry, between them accounting for six unchanged seats) were hovering on the threshold of whether they could remain unchanged or not – Doncaster would certainly have needed alteration on the December 2009 electorate figures. The registered electorate in these areas has increased sufficiently that a ‘no change’ solution is now clearly a viable option in each case.

Moreover, in some cases, counties’ entitlements to seats have shaken out more conveniently than they did on the December 2009 numbers, such as the northern part of the South East region. Another element is that it is not very long since the last review of boundaries, and the building blocks – wards – have not changed in many local authorities in England. A common source of relatively small changes in constituency boundaries in the past has been realigning them with ward boundary changes – only in Scotland and some of the unitary ex-county councils of England has this been much of a contributory factor in the model.

A final reason for the relatively high number of unchanged seats is the high priority the modelling methodology has given to leaving seats alone. The Boundary Commission for England may not choose to prioritise continuity quite so much. For instance, it may opt to propose modest changes to an existing constituency, despite the fact that its electorate falls within the quota, where it judges that this will enable more ‘natural’ constituencies to be created in neighbouring parts of the region in question. The figures presented here are probably towards the higher end of possibility for unchanged seats and there may well be fewer seats left unchanged in the final schema.

The detail of the unchanged model constituencies are provided overleaf.

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**Constituencies left unchanged in the Democratic Audit boundary model
(n=88)**

EASTERN	4
Cambridgeshire	Cambridge
Essex	Chelmsford
Suffolk	Ipswich; Waveney

EAST MIDLANDS	6
Leicestershire	Leicester East; Leicester South
Lincolnshire	Grantham & Stamford; Louth & Horncastle; South Holland & The Deepings
Northamptonshire	Corby

LONDON	3
	Bermondsey & Old Southwark; Camberwell & Peckham; Twickenham

NORTH EAST	1
Tyne & Wear	Sunderland Central

NORTH WEST	12
Greater Manchester	Heywood & Middleton; Leigh; Makerfield; Manchester Gorton; Manchester Withington; Rochdale; Salford & Eccles; Wigan; Worsley & Eccles South
Merseyside	Liverpool Riverside; St Helens North; St Helens South & Whiston

SOUTH EAST	19
Berkshire	Bracknell; Maidenhead; Newbury; Reading East; Reading West; Wokingham
Buckinghamshire	Beaconsfield
East Sussex	Eastbourne; Hastings & Rye
Hampshire	Basingstoke; Eastleigh; Southampton Itchen
Kent	Sittingbourne & Sheppey
Surrey	Epsom & Ewell; Surrey Heath; South West Surrey
West Sussex	Mid Sussex; East Worthing & Shoreham; Worthing West

SOUTH WEST	15
'Avon'	Bristol North West; Bristol South; North Somerset; Weston-super-Mare
Devon	North Devon; Exeter; Torbay
Dorset	Bournemouth East; West Dorset
Gloucestershire	Cheltenham; The Cotswolds; Stroud; Tewkesbury
Wiltshire	North Swindon; South Swindon

WEST MIDLANDS	12
Shropshire	Shrewsbury & Atcham; North Shropshire
Staffordshire	Burton; Cannock Chase
West Midlands	Birmingham Hall Green; Sutton Coldfield; Coventry North East; Coventry North West; Coventry South; Solihull
Worcestershire	Worcester; Wyre Forest

YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER	12
North Yorkshire and York	Harrogate & Knaresborough; Richmond, Scarborough & Whitby; Selby & Ainsty; Skipton & Ripon, Thirsk & Malton; York Central; York Outer
South Yorkshire	Don Valley; Doncaster Central; Doncaster North
West Yorkshire	Batley & Spen

SCOTLAND	3
Islands (by legislation)	Na h-Eileanan an Iar; Orkney & Shetland
Mainland	East Lothian

NORTHERN IRELAND	1
	North Antrim

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The main author of projection is Lewis Baston, with assistance from Kevin Larkin.

Lewis has been Senior Research Fellow at Democratic Audit since July 2010. His principal areas of expertise are electoral systems, constitutional reform, the history of elections, boundaries and redistricting and devolution. Before joining Democratic Audit Lewis was Director of Research at the Electoral Reform Society and had worked at ERS since 2003. From 1998 to 2002 he was a research fellow at the Centre for the Understanding of Society and Politics (CUSP) at Kingston University.

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The full ward-by-ward detail of the Democratic Audit boundary modelling will be made available in due course.