

The 2011 election

Owain Roberts and Martin Jennings

Despite securing their highest ever share of the vote in an Assembly election, Labour did not gain an outright majority of the 60 seats available.

Although Labour remained by far the largest party group in the Assembly and experienced significant increases in their popular share of the vote across Wales, they did not gain a clear majority. Labour returned 30 seats – a number on a par with their 2003 totals and their joint best Assembly electoral performance to date.

It was also the Conservatives' strongest electoral showing in Assembly elections, with an increase in their number of seats from 12 to 14. As a result, they are now the main opposition party to Labour in the Assembly, leapfrogging Plaid Cymru to second place.

For both Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats, it was their worst performance in an Assembly election. The Liberal Democrats were reduced to five seats, down one on their 2007 total. Plaid won a total of 11 seats, four less than they won at the previous Assembly election.

For the first time since the 1999 Assembly election, no independent candidates were elected. No gains were made either by any of the smaller parties.

Decreased turnout

Despite hopes that voter turnout for the Assembly election would increase as a result of holding the referendum on changing the electoral system for the House of Commons on the same day, the overall turnout for the Assembly election was 2 percentage points less than in 2007. Around 950,000 people cast valid votes in 2011, a turnout of 41.4 per cent

compared with the 43.4 per cent who turned out to vote in 2007.

This still places Assembly elections behind turnout levels for recent UK general elections, where the corresponding turnout figure for the 2010 election was 65.6 per cent.

Votes and swings

Labour won 42.3 per cent of the constituency vote, their highest ever in Assembly elections and up 10.1 per cent on their 2007 constituency vote share. Their share of the regional vote also increased to 36.9 per cent, up 7.2 per cent from 2007.

Labour received a higher proportion of the vote than was seen in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 Assembly elections. It was Labour's largest share of the vote in Wales in any election since the 2005 UK general election.

Although there was a substantial increase in Labour's vote nationally, there was considerable variation between seats. Some top Labour targets, such as Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, did not change hands, whereas some requiring much larger swings than the national average, such as Cardiff Central, did.

The Conservatives also saw an increase in their vote share, albeit by a smaller margin than Labour's, polling 25 per cent in the constituencies and 22.5 per cent in the electoral regions.

Plaid Cymru's share of the vote was its lowest ever at an Assembly election, decreasing to 19.3 per cent of the constituency vote and 17.9 per cent of the regional vote. The Liberal Democrats' share of the vote also dropped to their lowest ever Assembly levels, polling 10.6 per cent in the constituencies and 8 per cent in the regions.

Party gains

A number of constituency and regional seats changed hands between the main parties during the election.

Labour regained the constituency seats of Blaenau Gwent, Llanelli and Cardiff North – seats they held at various stages following the 1999 and 2003 elections. They also gained Cardiff Central for the first time ever at an Assembly level.

The Conservatives also won the Montgomeryshire and Aberconwy constituencies for the first time at the Assembly level. They also gained two additional regional seats; one each in the South Wales West and South Wales East electoral regions.

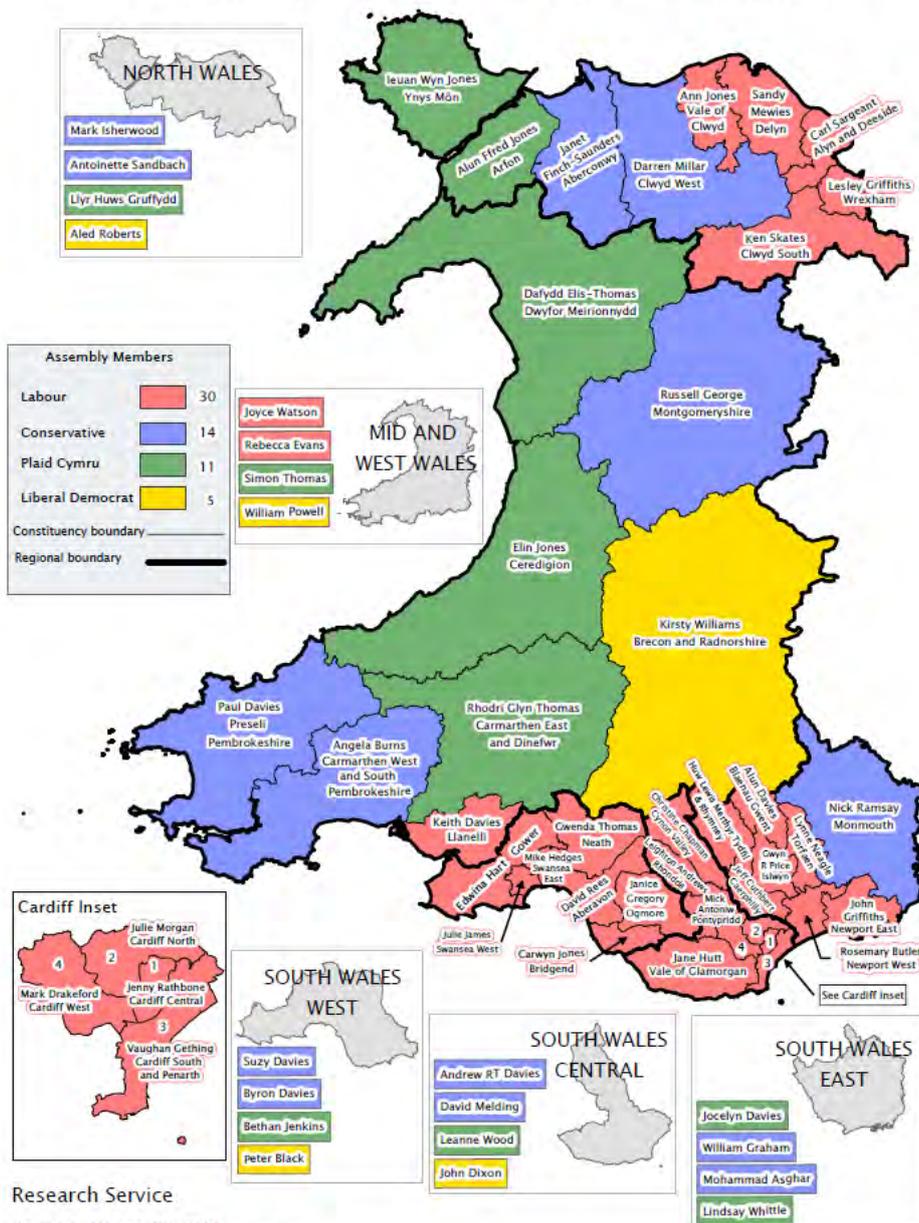
The Liberal Democrats did not gain any additional constituency seats, but gained two regional seats in both the Mid and West Wales and South Wales Central electoral regions following the loss of Montgomeryshire and Cardiff Central. Plaid Cymru did not gain any additional constituency or regional seats.

The next Assembly election

As a result of the UK Government's proposals to introduce fixed-term parliaments of five years for the House of Commons, the date of the next Assembly election may be moved by a year to 5 May 2016 to avoid the UK general election taking place on the same day. This change will be confirmed once the *Fixed-Term Parliaments Bill* completes its legislative progress through both Houses of the UK Parliament.

For the first time therefore, the Fourth Assembly term is projected to last five rather than the usual four years.

Assembly Members: Fourth Assembly

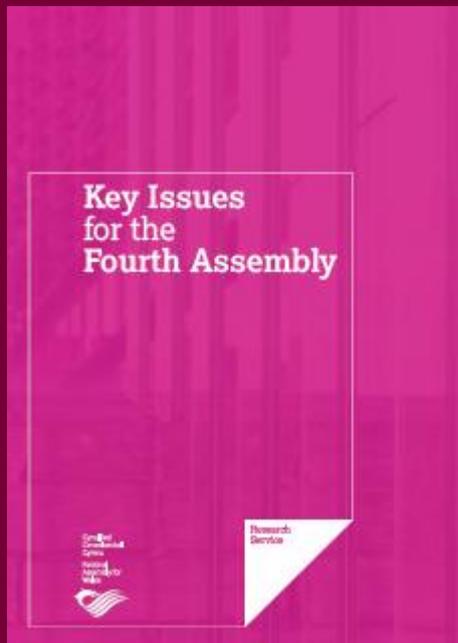


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Key Issues for the Fourth Assembly

This document has been specially prepared for Assembly Members by the Research Service. It sets out some of the key issues likely to matter to Members during the Fourth Assembly.

[Key Issues for the Fourth Assembly](#)

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