

## UK Boundary Review - The Facts

### Why are the boundaries being reviewed?

One of the principles of a fair parliament is equal-sized constituencies to ensure equal representation for all citizens. At the moment some constituencies are smaller than others.

The coalition government has pledged to reduce the number of MPs in Westminster from 650 to 600 and equalise the size of the constituencies. The rationale is that reducing the number of MPs will save the taxpayer money and equalising the size of the constituencies will 'level the playing field'. It has been argued that unequal sized seats give Labour an unfair advantage as their MPs are elected on a smaller number of votes than the other main parties

### Who is responsible?

The four national Boundary Commissions are the independent bodies responsible for reviewing constituency boundaries in the UK.

On 13 September 2011, the Boundary Commission for England published their initial proposals for the revised parliamentary boundaries under a new set of rules laid out in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.

### What is being proposed?

The new rules stipulate that the number of MPs in England must be reduced from 533 to 502 and that each constituency must contain a similar number of registered electors. The electorate in each constituency must be no more than 5% above or below the electoral quota – calculated by dividing the total number of registered voters by the number of constituencies (not including four exempt constituencies).

The UK electoral quota for the 2013 review is 76,641, therefore every constituency in England - except two covering the Isle of Wight - must have an electorate that is no fewer than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473.

	Current number of MPs	Revised number of MPs	Change
England	533	502	-31
Scotland	59	52	-7
Wales	40	30	-10
Northern Ireland	18	16	-2

### Who will be affected?

Attention is currently on the fate of politicians, but most of us will be affected in some way as our MP may change and we may even find ourselves living in a new seat with a different party in charge.

The boundary decisions will be based on mathematical rather than geographical considerations so some voters might find themselves grouped together with other communities which they feel little connection to.

Some seats will even cross traditional boundaries such as “Devonwall” a controversial decision to create a constituency across the border of Devon and Cornwall, and for the first time the Isle of Wight will be divided into two.

Additionally under our current system swing seats are incredibly influential in deciding elections and the review may well mean voters shifting from a safe seat to a marginal without having to move house.

MPs from the same party will find themselves competing over fewer seats and some survivors will be burdened with increased case work. More frequent boundary reviews will be necessary to maintain the size of the constituencies within the +5% quota limit and frequently shifting boundaries could disrupt the constituency link between MP and voters, which is often claimed as a major benefit of FPTP. The continuing reviews will only serve to further undermine this link

### **What are the issues?**

One of the main issues with the proposals is that unregistered voters are not considered in the current assessments of constituency size although they are obviously still entitled to support from their MP. As such, urban and socially deprived areas where registration is low will be under-represented while affluent areas where registration is high will have further representation.

The boundaries will have been drawn up based on the current electoral register – which is already missing around 10% of those eligible to vote - but with the government set to move on Individual Voter Registration (IVR) in 2014 registration rates are set to plummet.

It's the job of parliament to hold the government (the prime minister and his cabinet), to account. If you reduce the number of MPs in parliament without reducing the size of government you increase the power of the executive and make it more difficult to challenge. This could reduce the ability of parliament to offer meaningful dissent and therefore to do it's job affectively.

### **What will happen next?**

The Boundary Commission proposals are now open to public consultation although the process will be different to previous consultations on this issue. The initial 12-week consultation period will rely on written and oral representations at public hearings, which will be held in each region in England. Information on how to participate can be found [here](#).

Although members of the public are invited to participate and make their views or objections known, any objection will need to be accompanied with a counter proposal setting out the composition of each constituency in the area. It is therefore unlikely that many voters will be able to meaningfully contribute to the process which instead is likely to be dominated by political parties themselves.