‘...somewhat more disruptive than we had in mind’ (Mark Field MP): the fracturing of communities in the Boundary Commission proposals

Ron Johnston
THE ISSUE

The *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act, 2011*, means a very new constituency map is now being drawn because:

- Number of MPs reduced from 650 to 600:
- A single electoral quota means unequal reductions in seats:
  - England 533-502
  - Scotland 59-52
  - Wales 40-30
  - N Ireland 18-16
- All seats – with four exceptions – must have electorates within +/-5% of the quota
MPs traditionally elected to represent places – pre-1832 two each from the Shires and the Boroughs: an organic criterion dominated.

Reform Acts (1832, 1866, 1885, 1918) didn’t change this, but greater equalisation of constituency size (rotten boroughs lost, shires gained – new boroughs created) when franchise extended: some use of arithmetic criterion as well
1944 brief experiment: both criteria to be deployed – organic criterion (constituencies nest within local government map – including small districts) and arithmetic (all within 25% of national electoral quota)

Commissions couldn’t deliver so in 1949 arithmetic criterion made secondary and weakened – all constituencies should have electorates ‘as equal as is practicable’ within the local government matrix
THE 1958 MODIFICATION

1944 Act required redistributions every 5-7 years – so new constituencies for 1950 and then again for 1955. Unpopular with MPs and party organisations SO period changed to 10-15 years (later 8-12). Further rules added that Commissions MUST take into account community ties broken and inconveniences caused by changes so that Organic criterion predominated: presumption of continuity of community representation – MPs for places
SO WHY CHANGE IT?

Election results 1997 on increasingly disproportional and biased pro-Labour.
Conservative belief that this substantially because of variations in constituency size
SO – **Fairness should dominate (all votes equal)**

1. Make the arithmetic criterion predominant (all constituencies within +/-5% of UK quota – 76,641)
2. Have more frequent redistributions (every five years to fit Fixed Term Parliaments legislation)
WHY REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MPs?

• There are too many (workload?)
• Reduce the cost of politics (£12million)
• Increase public trust in politics/politicians after expenses scandal.

With the new rules, first redistribution bound to involve major change to the current map of constituencies – but thereafter?
HOW MUCH CHANGE?

THE 2011-2012 COMMISSIONS’ RECOMMENDATIONS
THE OVERALL CONSEQUENCE IN ENGLAND: MUCH MORE CHANGE THAN EVER BEFORE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Index</th>
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Old to New

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NC – no change (OLD TO NEW: all of wards together in 2007 together again in 2011 proposals; NEW FROM OLD: all of wards together in 2011 proposals were together in 2007 constituency): the larger the index, the greater the change; protected constituencies omitted 2011
WHAT SORT OF ‘BIG CHANGE’?
OLD CONSTITUENCIES

Ilford South - electorate 2011, 86,401, distributed to:
Ilford North 35.3%
East Ham 22.4%
Barking and Dagenham 21.3%
Wanstead and Woodford 21.1%

Basildon and Billericay – electorate 2011, 65,673, distributed to:
Billericay and Great Dunmow 51.0%
Basildon and Thurrock East 49.0%
WHAT SORT OF ‘BIG CHANGE’?
NEW CONSTITUENCIES

Beverley - 2011 electorate 73,614, drawn from
East Yorkshire 50.3%
Beverley and Holderness 49.7%
Brixton – 2011 electorate 77,575, drawn from
Dulwich and West Norwood 37.0%
Vauxhall 37.8%
Streatham 25.2%
## CHANGE BY COUNTRY: 2011

<table>
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NC – no change (OLD TO NEW: all of wards together in 2007 together again in 2011 proposals; NEW FROM OLD: all of wards together in 2011 proposals were together in 2007 constituency): the larger the index, the greater the change; protected constituencies omitted 2011
WHERE IS THE PROPOSED CHANGE IN ENGLAND’S REGIONS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Constituencies</th>
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N – number of constituencies 2007; CL – constituencies to lose; WR – constituencies with 2011 electorates within +/-5% of 76,641; NC – number of constituencies not changed in 2011 Commission proposals; NC+ - number of constituencies unchanged but wards added
CHANGE IN ENGLISH REGIONS: OLD TO NEW

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Major changes are in the more urban regions (shown in red)
CHANGE IN ENGLISH REGIONS: NEW FROM OLD

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Major changes are in the more urban regions (shown in red)
THE INDIVIDUAL CONSEQUENCES
‘...somewhat more disruptive than we had in mind’

**Anticipated**

- The expected local authority border crossings (but more than expected – e.g. London)
- The squeeze
- The edge effects
- Making up the numbers (‘orphan wards’)

**Less anticipated**

- The non-communities (and why?)
BORDER CROSSINGS: LONDON

32 boroughs (excluding City of London)

- 37 of proposed 68 constituencies involve wards from two boroughs (in 2007 – 10 of 73);
- 9 boroughs lack a single seat comprising wards drawn from that borough alone (Lambeth split six ways; Brent, Ealing and Enfield each split five ways)
- Only 2 boroughs have no constituency containing wards from another borough (Bromley and Tower Hamlets)
- Several borders (Lambeth-Wandsworth; Croydon-Sutton; Brent-Harrow) crossed more than once.
THE SQUEEZE

Within a constrained space constituencies built from the edges inwards – those in the middle ‘crushed’ if there is a seat to be lost

e.g.
Tatton in Cheshire, 65,200 electors –
68.7% to Northwich, 31.3% to Macclesfield

Witham in Essex, 67,451 electors –
53.9% to Braintree and Witham, 25.0% to Maldon, 21.2% to North East Essex
THE EDGE EFFECT

Where either a coastline, a national boundary or a regional boundary (Act suggested these be used, BCE consulted and decided to use them) it may be that odd-shaped constituencies result:

e.g. Berwick and Morpeth: old Berwick only 55,785 electors, long coastal strip (Hexham – 60,499 – coming in from west!)

Christchurch (69,008) along SW and SE border through Bournemouth suburbs
MAKING UP THE NUMBERS: ‘ORPHAN WARDS’

A constituency slightly too small so add a bit on from another – sometimes no physical link, let alone community of interest:

**Forest of Dean** (currently 68,703) hemmed in by Wales, West Midlands, one ward each from two neighbours, including city centre of Gloucester (Tewkesbury also has a northern Gloucester suburb);

**Mersey Banks** – two wards from Halton, north of river with Cheshire wards – no bridge there.

**Henley (80,320)** – Radley ward (1,982) added from Vale of White Horse District – no direct link across Thames to rest of constituency (Abingdon and Oxford North, 79,704) – an orphan ward
THE LESS-ANTICIPATED:
‘SPLIT MY WARD NOT MY CITY’

In many urban areas, wards relatively large so that not possible to create constituencies that are combinations of wards

e.g. Leeds 541,763 electors = ‘entitlement’ 7.1 constituencies – could have allocated seven but not possible given ward sizes (33, averaging 13,500)

SO – either, split wards (perhaps polling districts) – BCS and BCW adopted this policy (BCS, twenty-nine wards; BCW, four electoral divisions; BCNI – one ward)

OR – cross boundaries into places with smaller wards (BCE adopted this policy)
THE LEEDS SOLUTION

Three constituencies entirely within Leeds (North, North East, South East [5 wards each])

Guiseley and Yeadon – 3 Leeds wards, 2 Bradford
Leeds South and Outwood – 3 Leeds wards, 2 Wakefield
Leeds South West and Morley – 4 Leeds wards, 1 Kirklees
Leeds West and Pudsey – 4 Leeds ward, 1 Bradford
Leeds North West and Nidderdale – 4 Leeds wards and 5 (rural) Harrogate wards

Two others cross the W/N Yorks boundary (Selby and Castleford; Wakefield East and Pontefract)
THE WIDER CONSEQUENCES?
SOUTH AND WEST OF LEEDS

Much of rest of West Yorkshire split so that several independent towns, long with their own representation, no longer have – e.g.: Batley, Dewsbury and Wakefield

Batley West and Dewsbury West wards together in Mirfield constituency
Birstall (Batley suburb) in Bradford South and Cleckheaton
Batley East in Leeds South West and Morley
Dewsbury East and South in Dewsbury and Wakefield West
Wakefield East in Wakefield East and Pontefract
THE WIDER CONSEQUENCES?
NORTH AND EAST OF LEEDS

County of North Yorkshire, including York, currently has eight constituencies all within the size range – widely expected that these would not be changed.

But because three seats created crossing out of the West Yorkshire metropolitan county (Leeds North West and Nidderdale; Selby and Castleford – includes three Wakefield wards; Wakefield East and Pontefract – includes two Selby wards) all but one of them have been substantially altered.
BIRMINGHAM

Currently, 40 wards, 10 constituencies, 4 wards each
Proposals: electorate 731,731, entitlement 9.57
Constituencies:
Seven – within Birmingham, four wards each
Other 12 wards in six different seats:

4 B’ham, 1 Solihull; 4 B’Ham, 1 Sandwell;
1 B’Ham, 7 Sandwell; 1 B’ham, 6 Solihull;
1 B’ham, 1 Sandwell, 5 Walsall;
1 B’ham, 5 Solihull, 3 N Warwicks.
BIRMINGHAM – BEFORE AND AFTER

CURRENT (2007-)

BC PROPOSAL 2011
IN SUMMARY:
FRACTURED URBAN BRITAIN

• In general change is much more extensive than at previous reviews, much of which was inevitable because of the arithmetic requirement and reduction of MPs

• Many more constituencies than previously have been proposed that combine areas with little in common: the organic tradition in British Parliamentary representation – the representation of communities – has been very substantially downgraded. Many settlements split between constituencies for the first time. Has this been exacerbated by the unwillingness to split wards in some urban areas?
NOTTINGHAM – BEFORE AND AFTER

CURRENT (2007-)

BC PROPOSAL 2011
FRACTURE AGAIN NEXT TIME (2016-2020)?

Could again be ‘somewhat more disruptive...’ because:

1. Differential electorate changes – countries and regions;
2. Differential electorate changes – individual constituencies;
3. Rewarding; and
4. IER – if get ‘complete and accurate roll’ London’s entitlement would increase from 68 to c.76
1. Do communities matter – and at which scale?
   - Local authorities
   - Wards

2. Does continuity matter?

   If no to both – new model of representative democracy is being introduced as an unintended consequence – frequent change of constituencies and little fit to local government communities

   If yes, how soon before the Act is amended – 1958 revisited?