

# UK Electoral Geography and open data

**Chris Lightfoot**

(you may know me from such websites as...

<http://ex-parrot.com/~chris/wwwitter/>

<http://www.writetothem.com/>

<http://planning.beasts.org/>

<http://roughly.beasts.org/>

<http://politics.beasts.org/>

...)

# Why?

- Conduct an experiment into whether it is actually, *literally* possible to bore an audience rigid

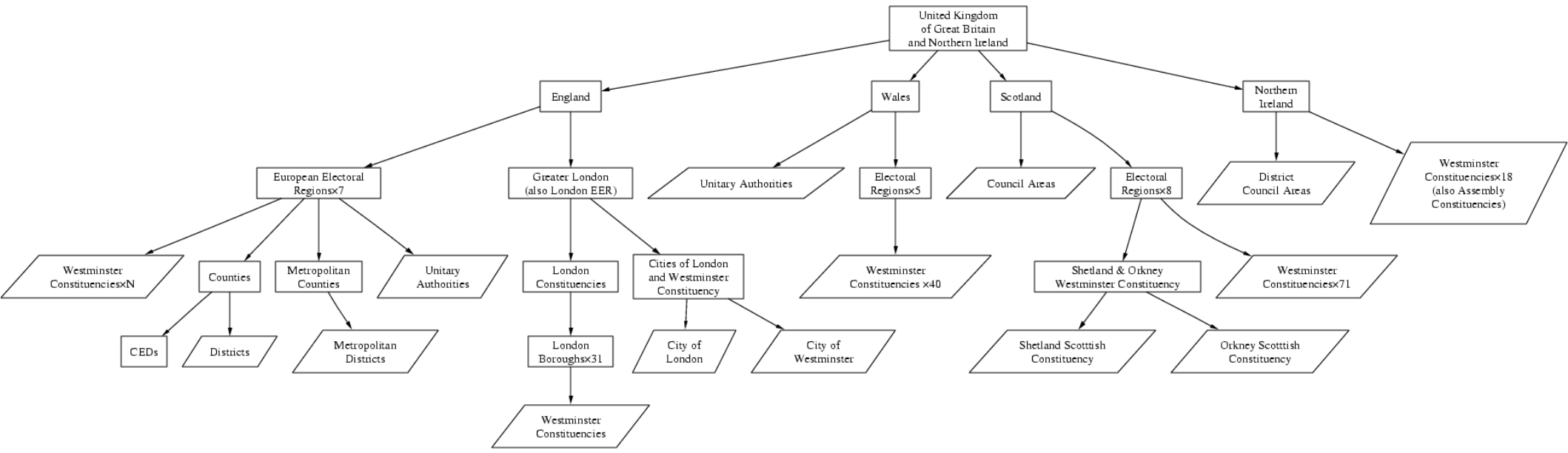
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- Actually this stuff is quite interesting
- ... and it is important

The UK's electoral geography is...  
quite complicated



# The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

- Four bits:
  - Two countries:
    - England
    - Scotland
  - One principality
    - Wales
  - One “province” (depending on which side you’re on)
    - Northern Ireland

# United Kingdom

- International boundary
- ★ National capital
- +— Railroad
- Road

0 50 100 Kilometers  
0 50 100 Miles



# Government Office Regions

(+NI, Scotland, Wales)

- Places where, err, the government has offices?
- Statistical geography
- Coterminous with European Electoral Regions

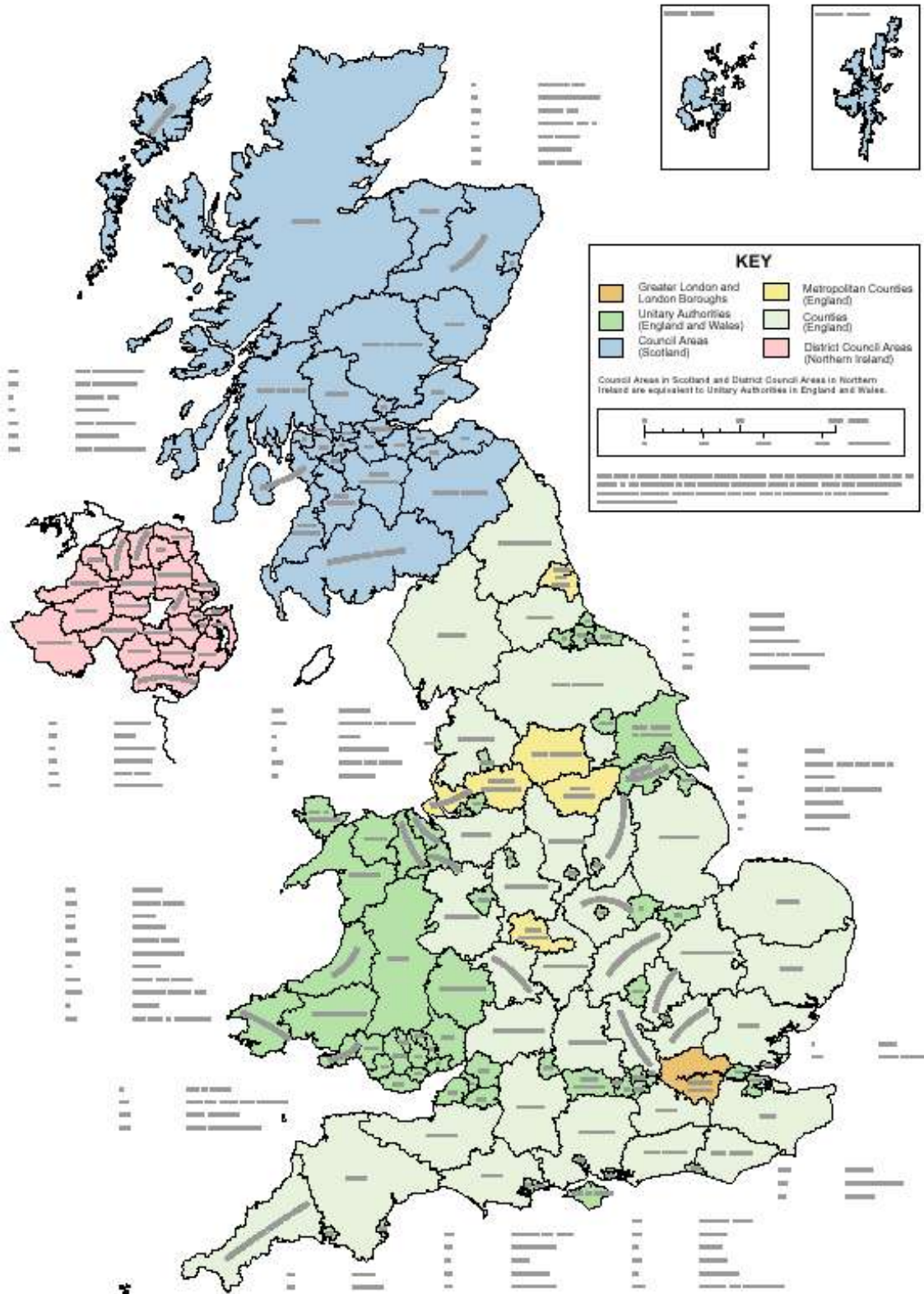






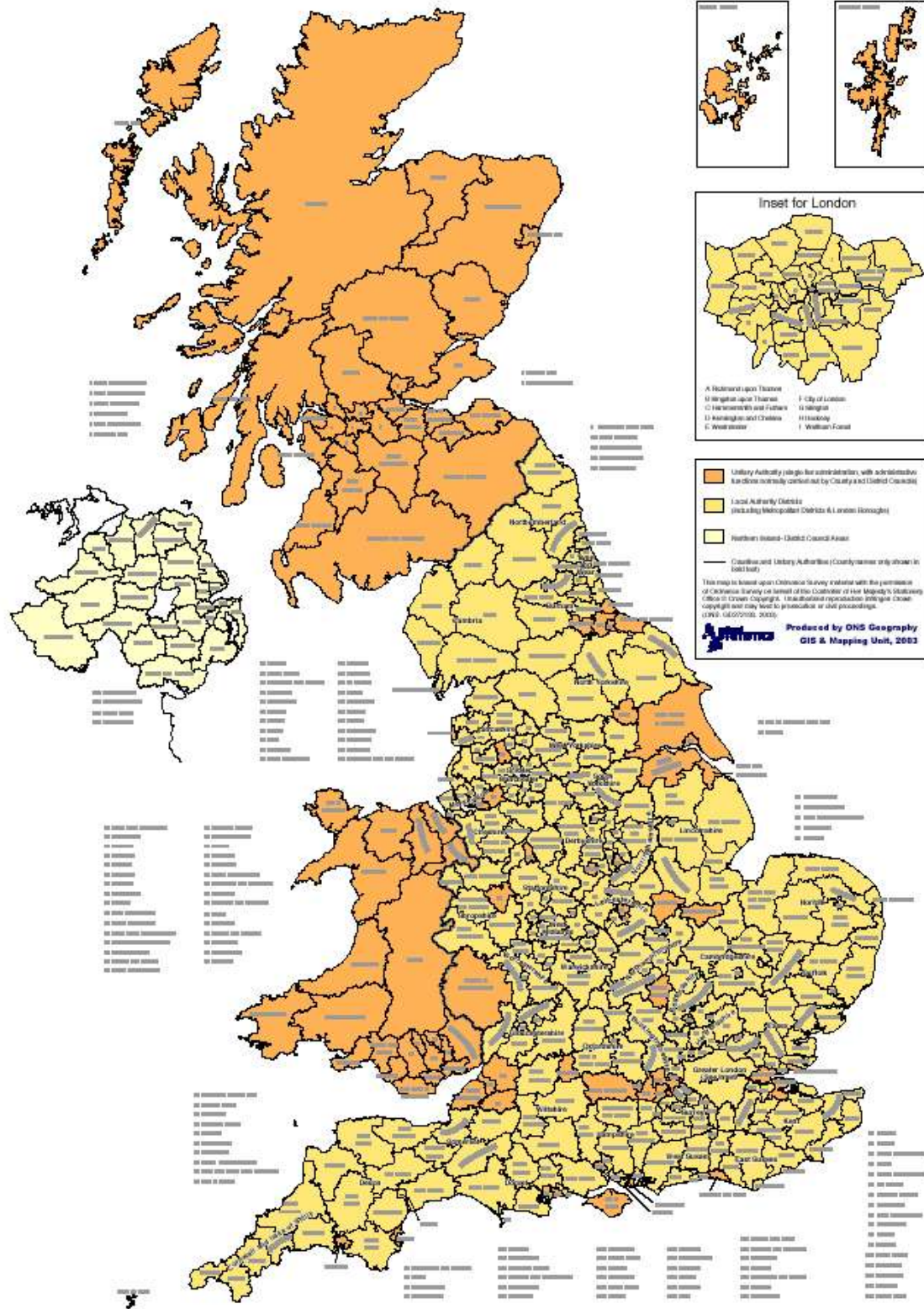
# Counties

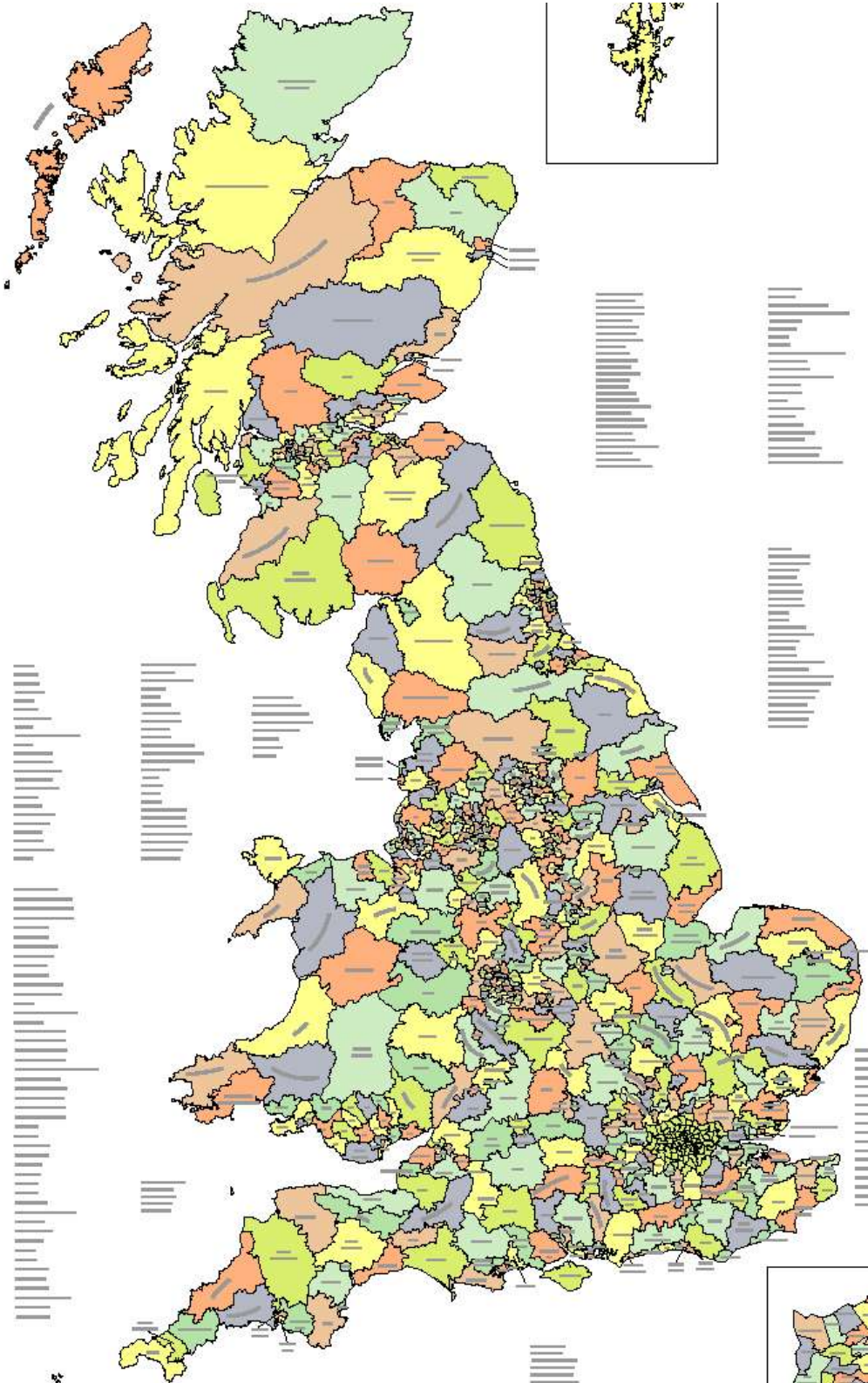
- English counties have been established ~1300 years
- But they keep moving them around
- Transport, education, libraries, police, ...



# District authorities

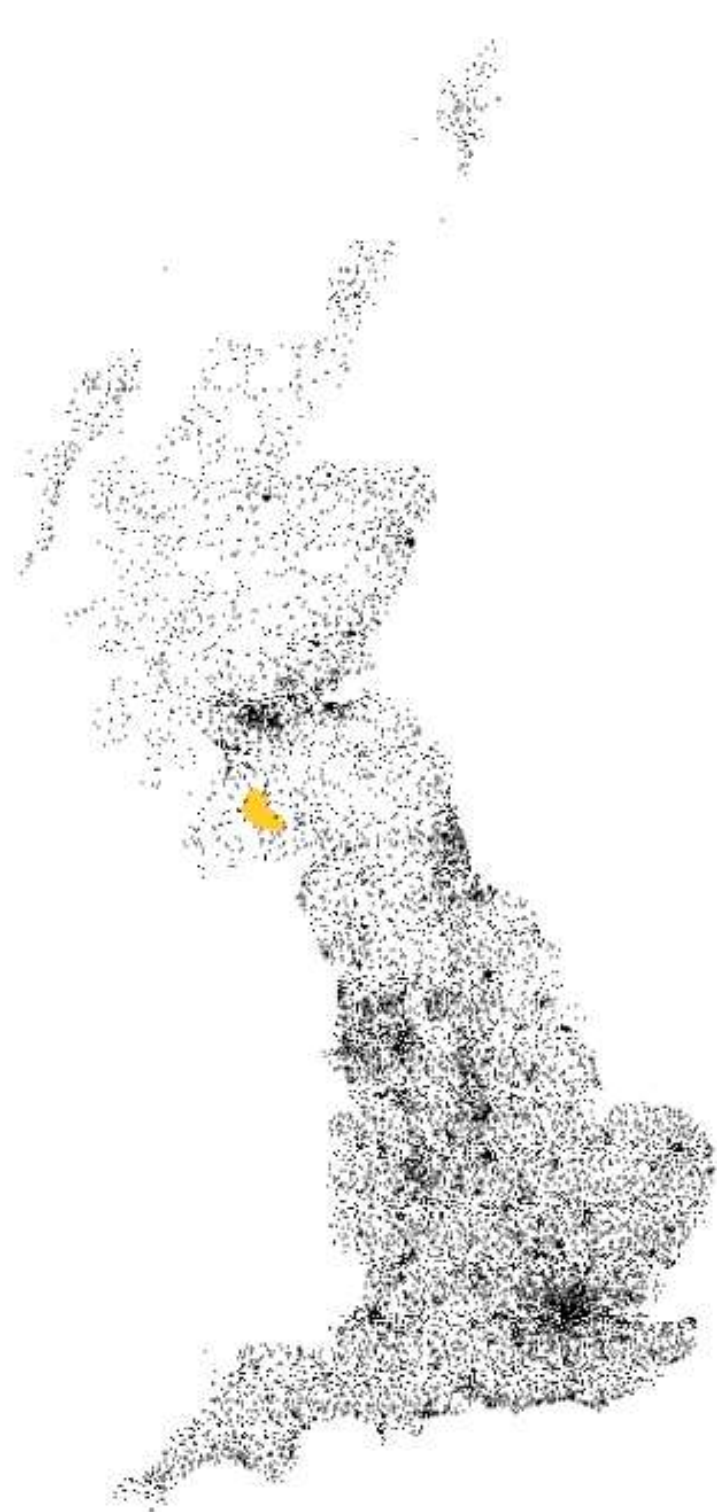
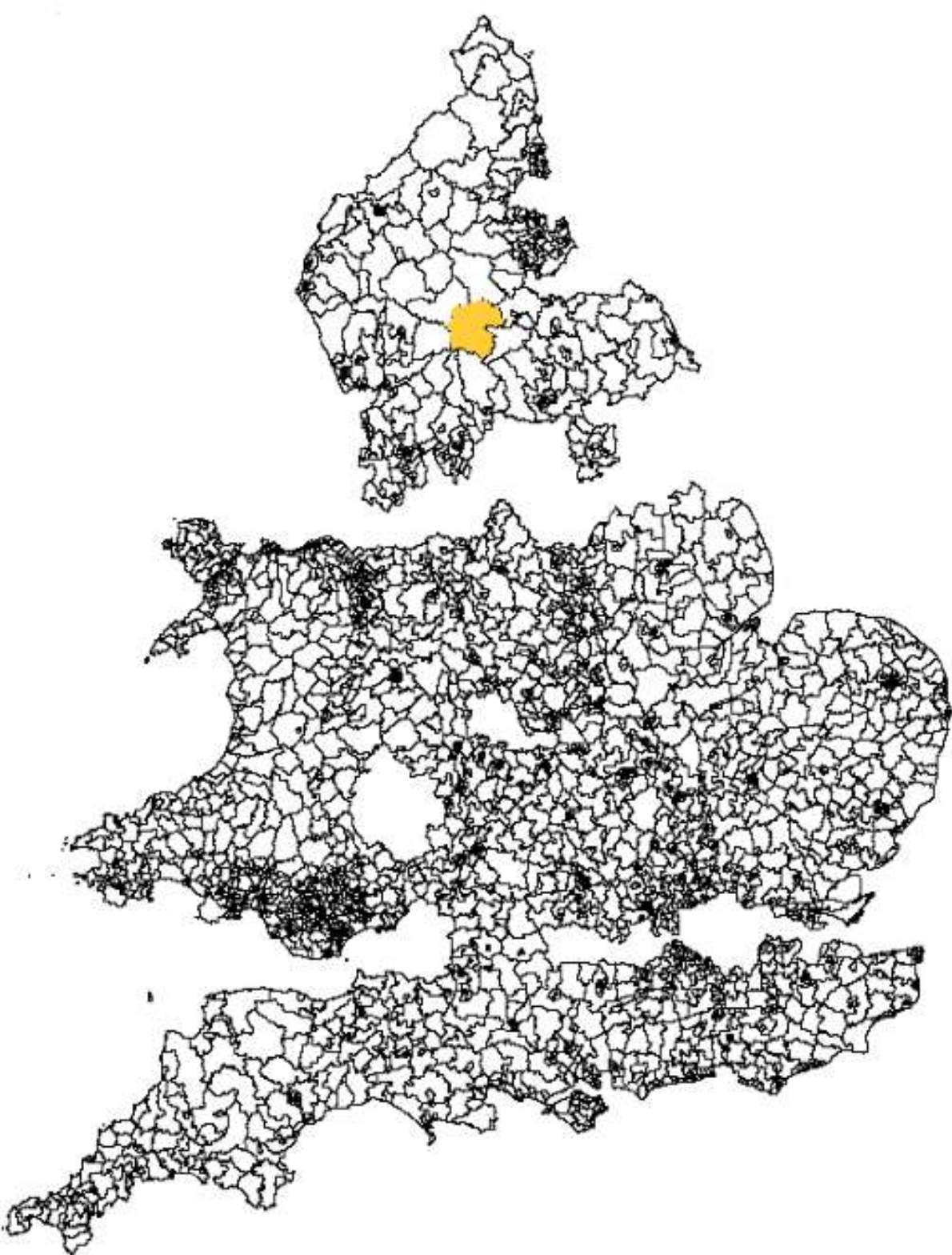
- Relatively recent (19<sup>th</sup> century)
- Municipal stuff: drains, rubbish, planning, ...





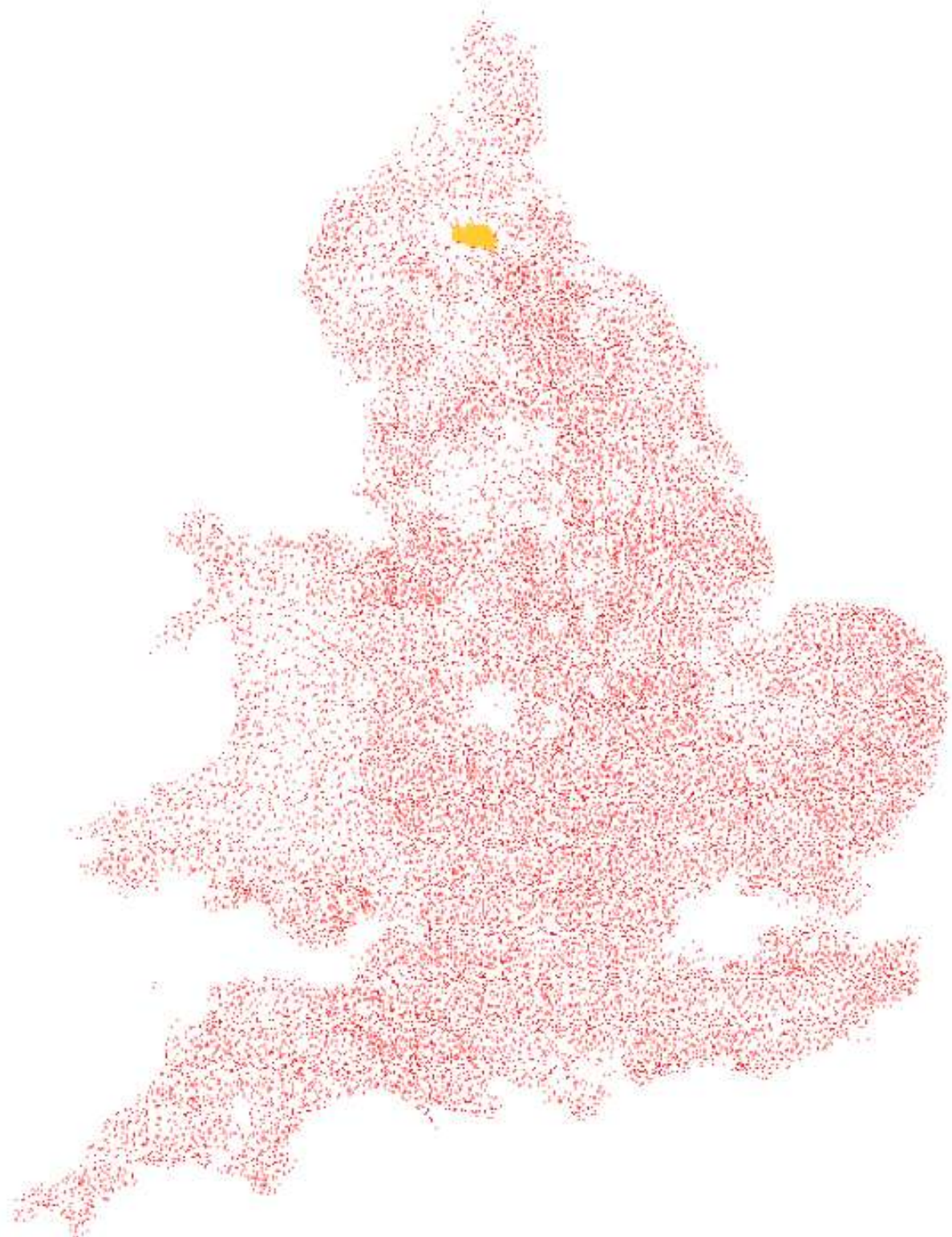
# Wards and electoral divisions

- Electoral units within each district and county, respectively
- Constituencies are made up of wards (in principle)
- Wards are made up of parishes (in principle)



# Parishes

- Very old indeed (1500 years?)
- Have had civil functions ('civic parish') for almost as long
- Smallest unit of geography for statistics and administration



# What's this useful for?

The image shows two overlapping web browser windows. The left window displays the WriteToThem.com website, which is in a 'Beta Test' phase. It features a yellow header with the site name and a navigation menu. The main content area has a heading 'Contact your Councillors, MP, MEPs, MSPs, Welsh and London Assembly Members for...' and a search box for UK postcodes. Below the search box, there is a link to 'this Postcode Finder' and another link to 'NotApathetic.com'. At the bottom, there are links for 'FaxYourMP', 'mySociety', 'GovEval', 'Contact Us', 'Guidelines for Campaigners', and 'Copyright'. The right window shows the profile page for Anne Campbell on TheyWorkForYou.com. The profile includes a photo, a title 'Anne Campbell, former MP', and a list of key facts: 'Former Labour MP for Cambridge', 'Left Parliament on 11 April 2005', and 'Majority: 8,579 voters'. Below this, there are links for 'Voting record', 'Performance data', 'Recent appearances in Parliament', 'Register of Members' Interests', 'Expenses', and 'Early Day Motions signed by this MP'. A 'Voting record' section provides more detail on her votes, specifically mentioning 'Very strongly for introducing foundation hospitals' and 'Moderately for introducing student top-up fees'. On the right side of the profile, there are two sidebars: one for emailing the page to a friend with fields for email and name, and another for searching the MP's speeches. At the bottom right, there are 'More useful links for this MP' including her personal website, biographies, and parliamentary career information.

**WriteToThem.com** Beta Test

Contact your Councillors, MP, MEPs, MSPs, Welsh and London Assembly Members for...

First, type your UK postcode:

If you don't know your Postcode you can try [this Postcode Finder](#)

Not voting on 5th May? Or know someone who isn't? [NotApathetic.com](#) is

The new FaxYourMP. [Built by mySociety](#). [Data by GovEval](#).  
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**TheyWorkForYou.com** beta


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Recent appearances

**Anne Campbell, former MP**



- Former Labour MP for Cambridge
- Left Parliament on 11 April 2005
- Majority: 8,579 voters

- [Voting record](#)
- [Performance data](#)
- [Recent appearances in Parliament](#)
- [Register of Members' Interests](#)
- [Expenses](#)
- [Early Day Motions signed by this MP](#) (From [edma.is.co.uk](#))

**Voting record**

How Anne Campbell voted on key issues in the 2001-2005 parliament (From Public Whip) :

- **Very strongly for** introducing **foundation hospitals**.  
[votes, speeches](#)
- **Moderately for** introducing **student top-up fees**.

Email this page to a friend

Their email:

Your email:

Your name:

[\(privacy policy\)](#)

Search this MP's speeches

More useful links for this MP

- [Anne Campbell's personal website](#)
- Biographies from [The Guardian](#) & [BBC News](#)
- [Parliamentary career](#) (From The Guardian)
- [Election results for](#)

# But...

- Only digital copies of data are from OS
- ... and they're expensive (of course)

Can this data be opened?

# How?

- Geographies are established by secondary legislation
- So the data is free, right? (Well, Crown Copyright, anyway)

# But...

- Secondary legislation refers to:
  - other extant, geographies
  - maps (not free, nor published on the web)
  - descriptions of walking the boundary(!)
- Different in England, NI, Scotland, Wales
  - and for different tiers
- Google for:  
"boundaries order" site:legislation.hmso.gov.uk
- It's a big job

# Why is this important?

- Fundamental to the electoral process
- Only one source of the data
- Barrier-to-entry for new political projects

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## Postal votes 'wide-open to fraud'

The judge in a vote-rigging trial says the postal voting system is "wide open to fraud" and has strongly attacked the government's attitude to the problem.

Richard Mawrey QC was speaking as he ruled there had been "widespread fraud" in six Birmingham council seats won last year by Labour.

He accused the government of being not only complacent, but "in denial", about the failings of the system.

More people than ever are preparing to vote by post in the general election.

### 'Steal me' envelopes

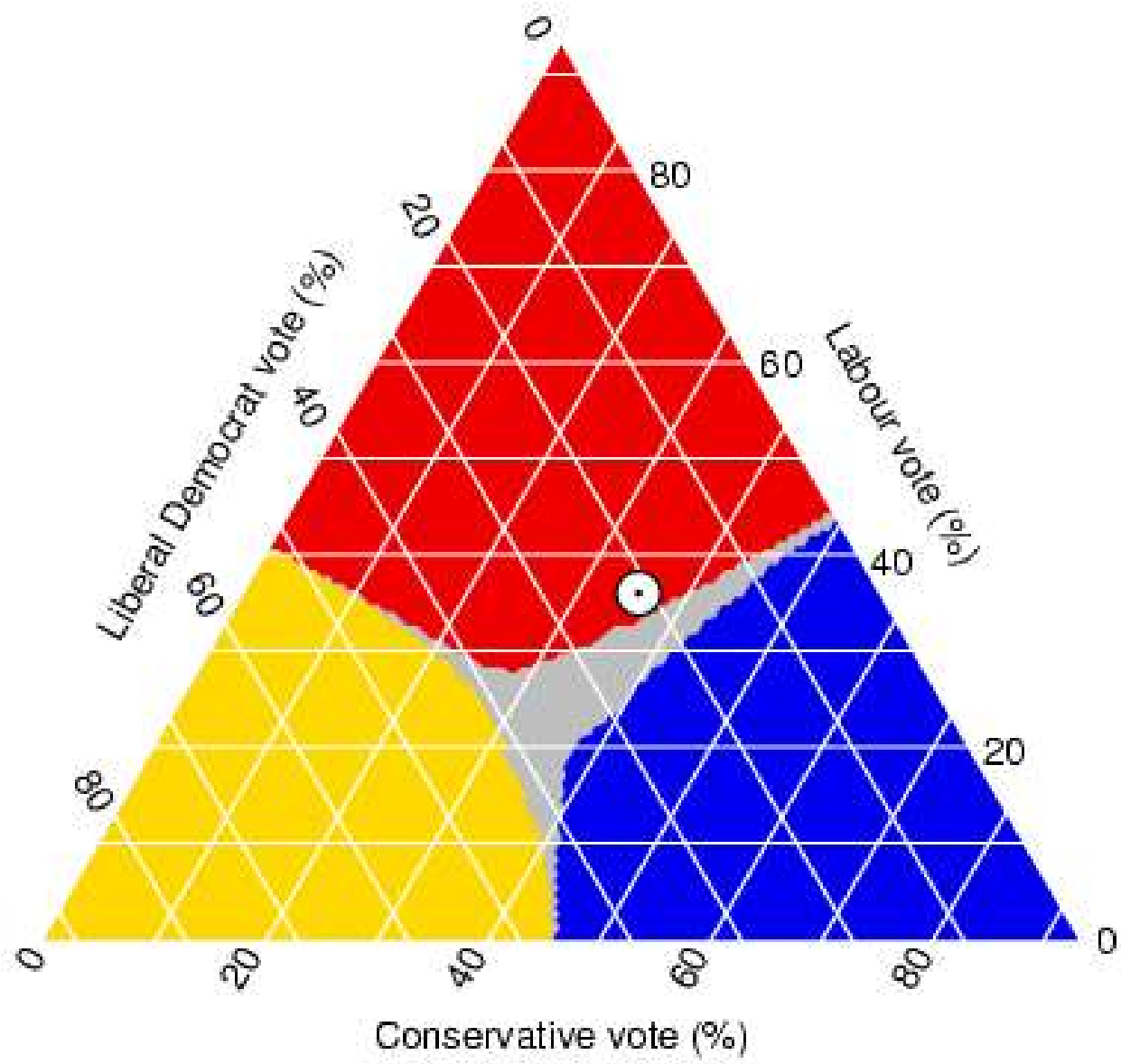


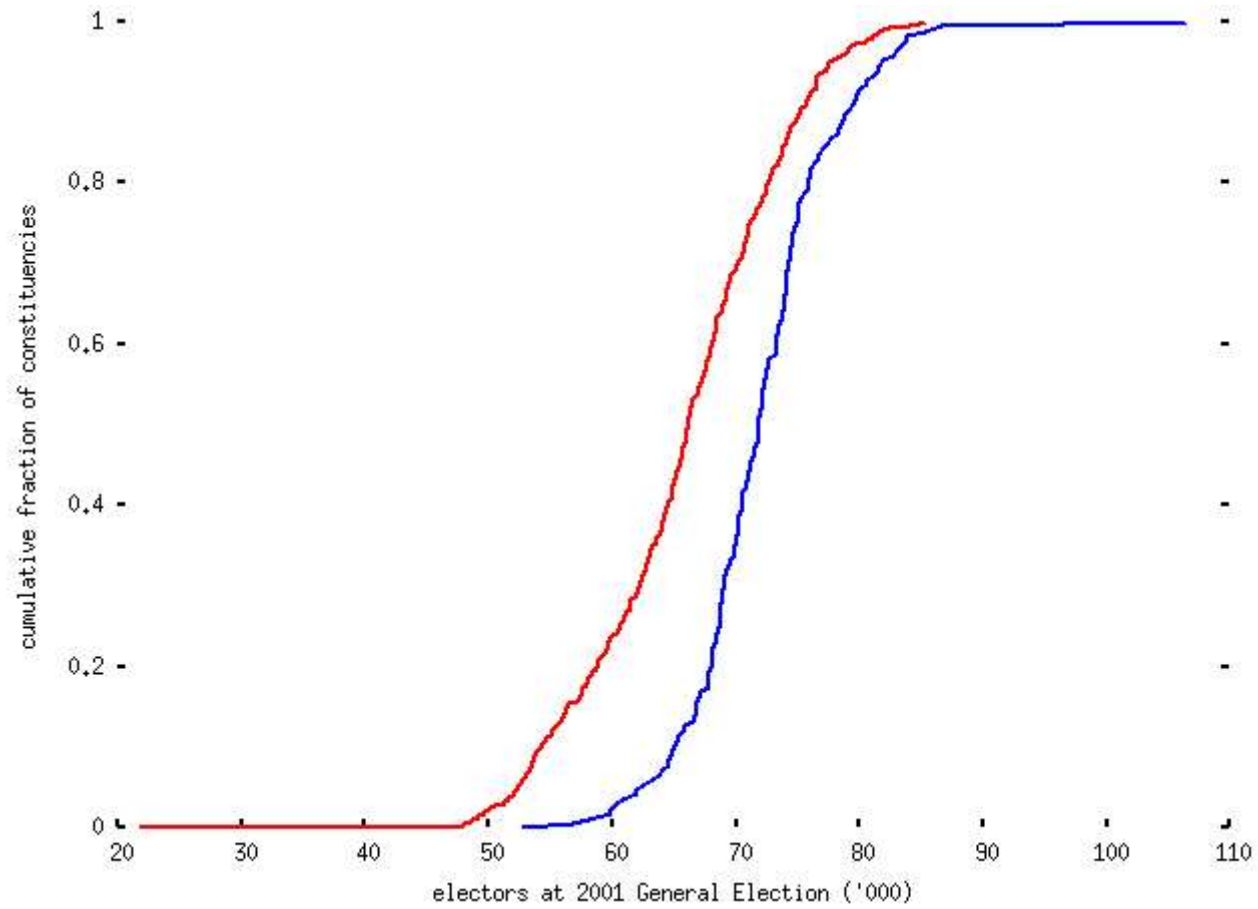
The hearings were seen as a test case over postal voting



#### SEE ALSO:

- ▶ [Judge upholds ruling on postal votes](#)  
04 Apr 05 |
- ▶ [Judge hits out at government over postal voting](#)  
22 Mar 05 |
- ▶ [Vote fraud trial begins](#)  
14 Mar 05 |
- ▶ [Labour trio charged with election fraud](#)  
02 Mar 05 |
- ▶ [Election Co. says no fraud](#)  
21 Feb 05 |







1. Florida, 22nd & 23rd Districts