

## **Election Forecasting in the UK: The BBC's Experience**

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### **Abstract**

The paper reviews the various statistical methods used by the BBC to forecast different types of election in the UK in the last thirty years. Elections in this period were of three main types:

- The Single-Member District Plurality system (Westminster Parliament, European Parliament until 1999, and annual elections for local government councils)
- National Referendums (Entry to the EEC, Welsh and Scottish devolution, London Assembly, Good Friday Agreement in Ulster)
- Variants of the Additional Member system used for the Welsh, Scottish and London assemblies post 1997, and the Regional List System used for the European Parliament in 1999 (PR regional list system)

The forecasting methods used in three different contexts are described:

- Predictions of the result before the election takes place using opinion-poll series and other data
- Predictions of the result as soon as the polling stations close using exit polls and other techniques

- Predictions of the final outcome on election night itself using the subset of actual results declared

The paper describes the special features of the UK electoral systems that determine the statistical methods used and includes comparisons with election forecasting in other countries. The BBC's performance in election-night forecasting over the period is assessed. Media aspects of the presentation of election forecasts are also highlighted.

**Key Words:** UK elections, forecasting, prediction, polls