

# Electoral Statistics for Scotland

## as at 2 March 2020

Published on 5 January 2021



This statistical report provides information on the number of people registered as at 2 March 2020 to vote in UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections.

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## 1. Introduction

This publication provides statistics on the number of people included on the Electoral Register as at 2 March 2020, and therefore registered to vote at parliamentary and local elections.

Parliamentary constituency boundaries are reviewed periodically. This is principally so that constituencies can be updated to take account of changes in population over time. Changes are also made to reflect local government boundary changes, so that administrative boundaries coincide as much as possible.

The reviews are undertaken by independent Boundary Commissions and are currently required every five years. There are four Commissions, one each for the four nations of the United Kingdom. The Commissions are independent of Government but must follow the Rules for Redistribution of seats set out in legislation and decided by Parliament.

The [Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21](#)<sup>1</sup> was introduced on 19 May 2020 and at the time of writing had completed its legislative process in the Houses of Parliament and was awaiting Royal Assent. Assuming the Bill therefore passes into law, the next review of UK parliamentary constituency boundaries, which is due to start in 2021, will have to be completed by the Boundary Commissions by 1 July 2023. Due to concerns about the potential impact of Covid-19 epidemic on the annual canvas exercise carried out by Electoral Registration Offices each autumn to update the electoral registers, the Bill was amended in its Commons stages to provide that the next boundary review will, on a one-off basis, be based on the number of registered electors at 2 March 2020. It will capture the registrations that took place in the run-up to the December 2019 General Election, subject to the monthly updates, as required, to the register between 12 December 2019 and 2 March 2020.

This publication is about how many people are registered to vote. Statistics and analysis of the actual turnout at elections are published by the [Electoral Commission](#).

### Key Terms

Electoral register	An official list of people in an area who are entitled to vote in an election
Electorate	All the people in a country or area who are registered to vote in an election
Elector	A person who has the right to vote in a parliamentary or local government election
Constituency	An electoral area that elects one Member of (the UK) Parliament, or one Member of the Scottish Parliament. (There are 59 UK Parliamentary and 73 Scottish Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, with different sets of boundaries.)
Ward	A local government electoral area. Council areas are divided into ward for electoral purposes, with 3 or 4 councillors elected for each ward

<sup>1</sup> Further background to the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21 is available in a House of Commons Library [research briefing](#).

## Who can vote?

This depends on your age, where you live, and your citizenship:

		Type of election		
		Local Government <sup>1</sup>	Scottish Parliament <sup>1</sup>	UK Parliament
Electorate	<b>Main Electorate</b> (Resident in Scotland on qualifying date)	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Service Personnel</b> (and spouses, Crown Servants and British Council employees)	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Peers</b>	✓	✓	X
	<b>EU Citizens</b> (Resident in Scotland on the qualifying date)	✓	✓	X
	<b>Overseas Electors</b> (Have been on the electoral register within the last 15 years)	X	X	✓

1. The Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020 extended the right to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections to a) convicted prisoners sentenced to prison terms of 12 months or less, and b) qualifying foreign nationals. However, as the Act only came into force on 8 July 2020 it does not affect the statistics in this report which relate to the electoral registers as at 2 March 2020.

For example, British citizens resident overseas are entitled to vote at UK Parliament elections but not at Scottish Parliament or local government elections. The minimum voting age for UK Parliament elections is 18, while 16 and 17-year-olds are eligible to vote at Scottish Parliament and local government elections. Further background information about the Electoral Register, and the definitions and eligibility criteria that apply, is available in the [Background note to Electoral Register](#) on the NRS website.

## Why does the electorate change in size?

There are three main reasons:

- **The population changes.** People move to or from an area. The number of people old enough to vote changes. People die in smaller or greater numbers.
- **More people get interested in politics.** This could be because of a significant vote, a specific political campaign or a current social issue.
- **The rules on who can vote change.** For example, in 2015 Scotland lowered the voting age to 16 for Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

## Who uses these figures?

Electoral Commission	Administering elections Research and analysis on the electoral process
Central government	Informing policy on elections Quality assuring population estimates between censuses
Boundary Commission for Scotland	The design of constituencies and electoral areas
Political parties UK Parliament Scottish Parliament	Background information on the political and electoral process
Local government Academics Members of the public	Research and analysis of the political and electoral process

## Where do the figures come from?

The summary electoral statistics included in this publication are based on data supplied by the 15 Electoral Registration Offices (EROs) in Scotland. The EROs are responsible for creating and maintaining the Electoral Register in their area and publish two versions of it – the full register and the ‘open register’ – usually as at 1 December each year. National Records of Scotland (NRS) carries out quality checks on the summary statistics provided and then publishes an analysis of the information.

## 2. UK Parliament electors

The total number of UK parliamentary electors in Scotland at 2 March 2020 was 4,079,600. This is the highest total ever recorded and represents an increase of 91,100 (2.3%) compared with the number registered at 1 December 2019. It was also 26,500 (0.7%) higher than the number of people who were on the electoral register at the time of the General Election on 12 December 2019.

**Table 1: Total electorate for UK parliament elections, December 2019 and March 2020**

1 December 2019	12 December 2019	2 March 2020
3,988,550	4,053,140	4,079,612

At 2 March 2020, the average number of electors in the 59 UK Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland was 69,100. The constituency with the most people registered to vote was Linlithgow and East Falkirk (88,500), followed by the neighbouring constituencies of Falkirk (86,200) and Livingston (83,500). The constituencies with the smallest electorates were Na h-Eileanan an Siar (21,200) and Orkney and Shetland (34,800); the mainland constituency with the smallest electorate was Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (46,900).

At 2 March 2020, the electoral register for UK parliamentary elections in Scotland included:

- 15,400 British citizens resident overseas, 0.4% of the total electorate (This is nearly a third higher than the 11,600 recorded at 1 December 2019, an increase which is likely to have been triggered by the General Election on 12 December.)
- 1,900 Service voters, 0.05% of the total electorate
- 697,600 people registered for postal voting, 17.1% of the total electorate.

## 3. Scottish Parliament and Local Government electors

The total number of Scottish Parliament and local government electors at 2 March 2020 was 4,227,700, which is also the highest ever recorded. It was 60,300 (1.4%) higher than the number of registered electors as at 1 December 2019.

By council area the number of these electors was highest in Glasgow City (457,200), City of Edinburgh (394,700) and Fife (287,700). It was lowest in Orkney (17,500), Shetland (18,000) and Na h-Eileanan Siar (21,900). A total of 73,100 electors were 16 or 17-years-old, 1.7% of the total electorate. This proportion ranged from 1.3% in Glasgow City to 2.4% in West Lothian.

The average number of electors in the 73 Scottish Parliamentary constituencies was 57,900. The constituency with the most people registered to vote was Linlithgow, with

74,600. The smallest Scottish Parliamentary constituency electorate was the Orkney Islands (17,500), while the smallest on the mainland being Argyll and Bute (49,500)<sup>2</sup>.

At 2 March 2020, the electoral register for Scottish Parliament and local government elections included:

- 1,900 Service voters, 0.04% of the total electorate
- 714,900 people registered for postal voting, 17.1% of the total electorate
- 145,300 EU citizens, 3.4% of the total electorate
- 73,100 people aged 16 or 17 years old, 1.7% of the total electorate

#### **4. Links to related statistics**

Electoral statistics for each of the constituent countries in the UK are published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and are available in the electoral registration section of the [ONS website](#).

<sup>2</sup> Although it does have areas that are not on the Scottish mainland, the Argyll and Bute constituency is not protected by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 (PVSaCA). As such, Argyll and Bute was held to the same standards as the rest of the mainland when constituency boundaries were re-drawn. More information on the PVSaCA is included in the [background notes](#).

## 5. Background notes

1. Electoral statistics usually relate to registers published on 1 December each year. However, for the purposes of the data collection to inform the next review of UK parliamentary constituency boundaries, a reference date of 2 March 2020 was chosen. This was to mitigate the potential impact of Covid-19 on the [annual electoral register canvass](#).
2. Due to the priority given to administering the December 2019 General Election, ten Electoral Registration Offices published their electoral registers in the first few weeks of November and one in December, while the other four delayed doing so until the start of February 2020. The electoral statistics for 2019 included in this publication therefore only nominally relate to a reference date of 1 December 2019. The publication date for each ERO is shown below:

Electoral Registration Office	Publication date of electoral register
Ayrshire	5 November 2019
Central Scotland	8 November 2019
Dumfries and Galloway	5 December 2019
Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute	11 November 2019
Dundee	5 November 2019
Fife	1 February 2020
Glasgow	1 November 2019
Grampian	1 February 2020
Highland and Western Isles	1 February 2020
Lanarkshire	12 November 2019
Lothian	14 November 2019
Orkney and Shetland	1 February 2020
Renfrewshire	4 November 2019
Scottish Borders	6 November 2019
Tayside	7 November 2019

3. Following the completion of the [Fifth Electoral Review](#) of council ward boundaries by the [Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland](#), ward boundaries have changed for most of Scotland's local authority areas. There are now 354 electoral wards with effect from 4 May 2017.
4. Definitions of the various groups of electorate shown in the tables are as follows:
  - **Attainers:** For UK Parliament elections, eligibility to vote is conditional on the voter being aged 18 or over on the date of the relevant election or referendum. For Scottish Parliament or Local Government elections eligibility to vote is conditional on the voter being aged 16 or over on the date of the relevant election or referendum. The Electoral Register includes people who will attain the age of 16 or 18 (dependent on the type of election) during the currency of the register (between 2 December 2019 and 30 November 2020). They are called attainers. Note that in the published tables, whilst attainers are identified separately, they are also included as part of the total electorate figures. The calling of the December 2019 General Election resulted in some delays in the registration process for attainers, particularly for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections, which means that the 2019 figures shown for attainers in this publication will be underestimates.
  - **Residents:** In order to be classed as 'resident' in a constituency the elector must be normally living at an address within the constituency area on the qualifying date. If the elector is temporarily absent (for example on holiday or away at university) this will not disqualify them from being classed as resident.
  - **Overseas electors:** Those who are not resident in the UK, but have been resident here and included in the Electoral Register within a period of 15 years of the qualifying date for the current register (or resident here and too young to be registered at the time of residence). They are registered in the same parliamentary constituency as before they went abroad or, if they were too young to register, in the constituency where their parent or guardian was registered. Overseas electors cannot vote at Scottish Parliament or Local Government elections, but are entitled to vote at UK Parliament and European Parliament elections.
  - **Service electors:** Service electors are members of HM Armed Forces and their spouses, plus Crown servants and British Council employees and their spouses residing abroad. They do not register in the same way as residents and may not necessarily reside in the area of registration. Spouses of members of the Armed Forces have the option of registering as residents while in the UK. New rules for Service electors were introduced in January 2007, whereby Service elector applications are required to be completed every three years (later extended to five years in March 2010) rather than indefinitely as previously. This means that many service electors may not have renewed their application because they have now left the Services, or have opted to register as civilian electors, as they are entitled to do. Further background on armed forces voting is available [here](#).
  - **Prisoners:** Remand prisoners, unconvicted prisoners and civil prisoners can vote if they are on the Electoral Register. Convicted persons detained in pursuance of their sentences were not eligible to vote in the period covered by these statistics. The [Scottish Elections \(Franchise and Representation\) Act 2020](#)

extended the right to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections to a) convicted prisoners sentenced to prison terms of 12 months or less, and b) qualifying foreign nationals. However, as the Act only came into force on 8 July 2020 it does not affect the statistics included in this report as they relate to electoral registers as at 2 March 2020.

- **Peers:** A Peer is a member of the House of Lords. Peers can vote in Scottish Parliament, Local Government and European Parliament elections, At 1 December 2019, there were 43 Peers on the Electoral Register for these elections. Peers do not have the right to vote at UK Parliamentary elections.
5. Information on previous elections held and a list of upcoming elections and referendums is available from the [Electoral Commission](#).
  6. The boundaries and electorates of some constituencies in Scotland are protected. The [Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011\(PVSA\)](#) stated that the electorate of almost all constituencies must be within 5% of the national average. This requirement would override considerations of local geographical and political boundaries, with a few exceptions:
    - The island constituencies of Orkney and Shetland and Na h-Eileanan an Iar are explicitly protected.
    - Constituencies covering more than 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> do not have to comply with the above requirement (this applies to Ross, Skye and Lochaber).

## Notes on statistical publications

### National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (available on the [UKSA](#) website).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is National Records of Scotland's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in May 2011.

### Information on background and source data

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy, etc can be found in the [Metadata](#) document that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

### National Records of Scotland

We, the National Records of Scotland, are a non-ministerial department of the devolved Scottish Administration. Our aim is to provide relevant and reliable information, analysis and advice that meets the needs of government, business and the people of Scotland. We do this as follows:

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Recording the present – At our network of local offices, we register births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths, divorces and adoptions in Scotland.

Informing the future – We are responsible for the Census of Population in Scotland which we use, with other sources of information, to produce statistics on the population and households.

You can get other detailed statistics that we have produced from the [Statistics](#) section of our website. Scottish Census statistics are available on the [Scotland's Census](#) website.

We also provide information about [future publications](#) on our website. If you would like us to tell you about future statistical publications, you can register your interest on the Scottish Government [ScotStat website](#).

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### **Enquiries and suggestions**

Please contact our Statistics Customer Services if you need any further information.  
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