Scottish Parliament Elections

Thursday 7th May 2026

It might be your first time voting in a Scottish Parliamentary election, or you might not remember how to vote. Use our handy guide to find out everything you need to know to take part in the upcoming election.

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Scottish Parliament Election

At a Scottish Parliament election people can vote for who they want to be their MSP. The person will represent their constituency or region in Holyrood for up to 5 years.

The next Scottish Parliament election will take place on **Thursday 7th May 2026**.

You can find out which candidates are standing in your constituency and region on your Council's website and on local noticeboards or in newspapers. You might even have received some leaflets or flyers in the post. The MSP you currently have in your constituency, or MSPs in your region, may not be standing again for election.

To vote in the Scottish Parliament election you must live in Scotland and be either:

- a British citizen
- an Irish citizen
- a foreign national of another country who is permitted to enter or stay in the UK

You must also be 16 or over on the day of the election.

You'll be sent a poll card just before the election telling you when to vote and at which polling station. You can only vote at the polling station location on your card. Polling stations are open from 7am until 10 pm.

Members of the Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament makes laws on a wide range of issues that affect Scotland and the people living here.

The Scottish Government is accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

- There are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament.
- The MSPs are elected to represent people in an area.
- They contribute to debates and vote on laws and other matters.
- They can ask questions and raise issues in the Parliament.
- They also do a lot of work in Committees, for example looking in detail at the planning stage of new laws and reviewing the progress and impact of changes.

Every person in Scotland has **eight** Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) that represent them:

• **One MSP who represents people in a constituency.**
• Seven MSPs who represent all the people in a bigger region.

It does not matter whether or not you vote for the person or party that is elected. Once an MSP is elected, they represent everyone living within the constituency or region.

Members of the Scottish Parliament

A third of current MSPs are standing down at the election in May. This means that the next Government and group of MSPs will look very different. Below is a breakdown of the current 129 MSPs and the Parties to which they belong:

Scottish National Party – 60 MSPs *(Party leader - John Swinney)*

Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party – 28 MSPs *(Party leader - Russell Findlay)*

Scottish Labour – 21 MSPs *(Party leader - Anas Sarwar)*

Scottish Green Party – 7 MSPs *(Party leaders - Ross Greer and Gillian Mackay)*

Scottish Liberal Democrats – 5 MSPs *(Party leader - Alex Cole-Hamilton)*

Reform UK – 1 MSP - Graham Simpson *(Party leader - Lord Malcolm Offord)*

Independent (No Party Affiliation) – 6 MSPs

- Jeremy Balfour
- Foysol Choudhury
- Fergus Ewing
- John Mason
- Ash Regan
- Colin Smyth

No Party Affiliation – 1 MSP Presiding Officer - Alison Johnstone

How to register to vote

You can register to vote on the UK Government website: https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote.

You can use the register to vote service to:

- Get on the electoral register so you can vote in elections
- Update your name, address or nationality by registering again with your new details (if you live in the UK)

The deadline to register to vote for the Scottish Parliament election is **by 5pm on 20 April 2026.**

If you are unsure whether you are eligible to register to vote, or which elections you can vote in, you can contact your local Electoral Registration Officer (ERO).

You can do this by going online to: electoralcommission.org.uk/voter, or you call the helpline on 0800 328 0280 to find contact details for your Electoral Registration Officer.

If you are currently homeless or don't have a permanent or fixed address you are still able to register to vote by filling in the form "Electoral registration form for someone with no fixed or permanent address". You can get this form online or posted to you by the Electoral Registration Office: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-to-vote-if-you-havent-got-a-fixed-or-permanent-address.

Different ways to vote

Proxy Vote:
This is when you allow someone else to vote on your behalf. This might be a trusted friend or family member. You can apply for proxy voting under certain circumstances like being away on polling day, having a medical issue or disability, not being able to vote in person due to work or military service. You must ***apply by 5pm on 28 April 2026*** to vote by proxy in the Scottish Parliament election.

Postal vote:
You can vote by post if you don't want to or cannot vote in person at a polling station. You can apply online or by post for a postal vote and you must ***apply by 5pm on 21 April 2026*** to vote.

In-person vote:
You can vote in-person by going along to your Polling Place or 'Polling Station'. Polling Places are usually primary schools or community halls near to your home. When you arrive you will give your name and address and will be given a ballot paper. You will put a cross next to the constituency candidate of your choice and a cross next to the party to represent your region.

Constituency Member	
Mr John Smith	X
Mrs Jane Doe	
Mr Joe Blogs	
Miss Jane Blog	

Regional Members	
Silver Party	X
White Party	
Gold Party	
Purple Party	

Useful words to know

- **MSP:**

This is short for Member of the Scottish Parliament. People vote for MSPs to represent them in the Scottish Parliament.

- **Election:**

This is when people can vote for the person they want to run the country or region. There are elections for your MP, MSP and Councillor, elections fall on Thursdays.

- **Constituency/constituent:**

A constituent is someone who lives in a constituency, each constituency differs in its total number of constituents.

- **Polling Place/Station**:

This is where you can go and vote in person. Polling Places are usually primary schools or community halls.

- **Manifesto:**

Before an election a political party will publish a manifesto. This will contain a set of policies that the party stands for and would like to introduce if they are elected into Government.

- **Devolved matters:**

These are things that the Scottish Parliament can make laws about. This includes: the economy, education, health, justice, rural affairs, housing, environment, climate change, equal opportunities, consumer advocacy and advice, transport and taxation.

- **Reserved matters:**

These are things that the Scottish Parliament cannot make laws about, like immigration, foreign affairs, nationality, defence and national security.

Connecting Equalities is a Scottish Government funded project for Equalities and Human Rights. We work alongside diverse groups of older people connecting their everyday experiences to rights and equalities to help shape what matters to them for a good life.

To read more about the project and see our other resources check out our website: https://otbds.org/projects/connecting-equalities/

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