

People registered to vote



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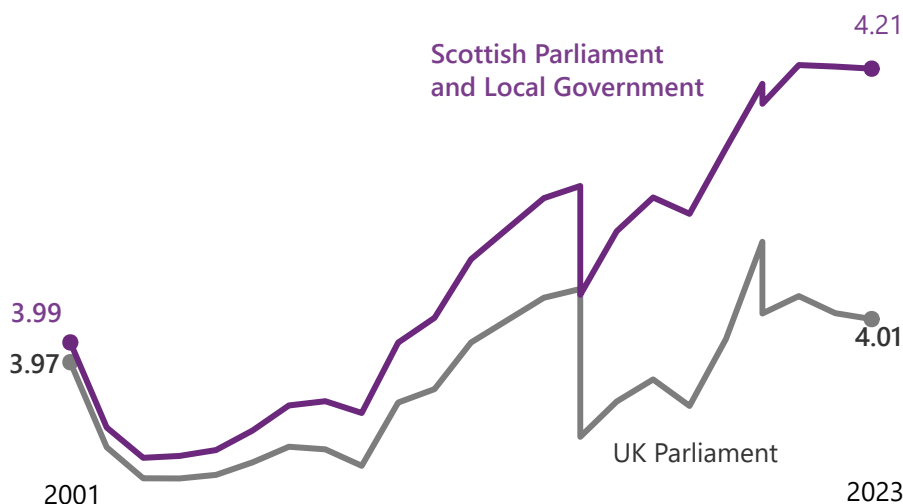
The number of people registered on 1 December 2023 to vote in elections in Scotland. This includes General Elections, Scottish Parliamentary Elections and local government elections.

The number of people registered to vote in Scotland decreased in 2023

Compared to 2022, the electorate for UK Parliamentary elections decreased by 0.1% and the electorate for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections by 0.05%.

Note: The decrease in 2015 was caused by the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

Number of people on the electoral register (millions)



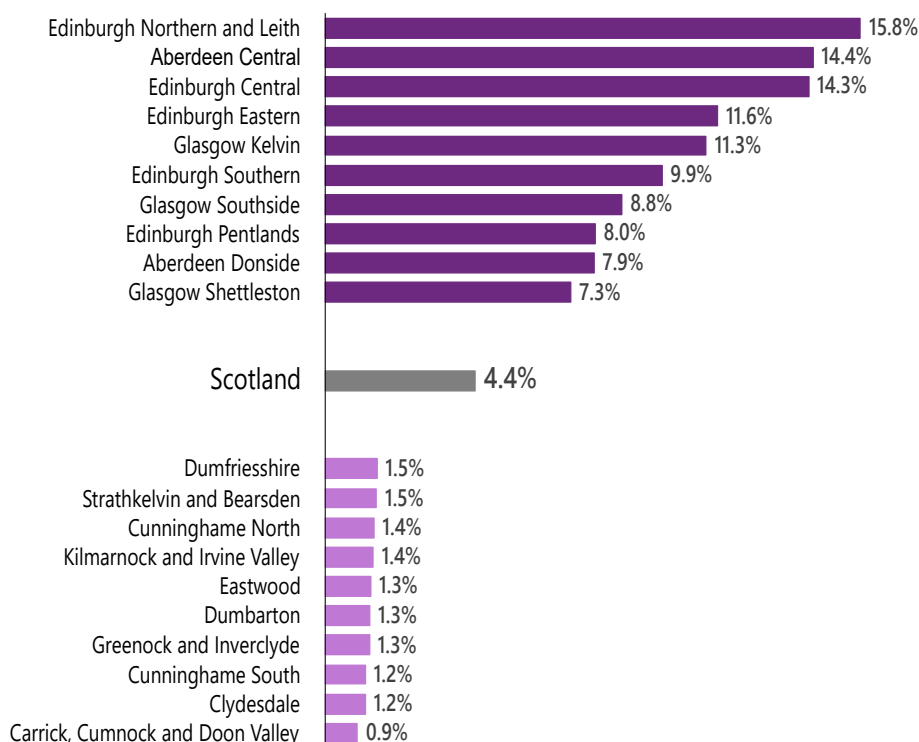
In 2015 the voting age for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections was lowered to 16.

Foreign nationals account for 4.3% of people registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections.

The constituencies with the highest proportion of foreign nationals are found in councils with large numbers of students such as Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow .

The constituencies with the lowest proportion of foreign nationals are found in more rural areas and some urban areas outside the main cities such as Ayrshire, Dumfriesshire, Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire.

Proportion of foreign nationals (%)

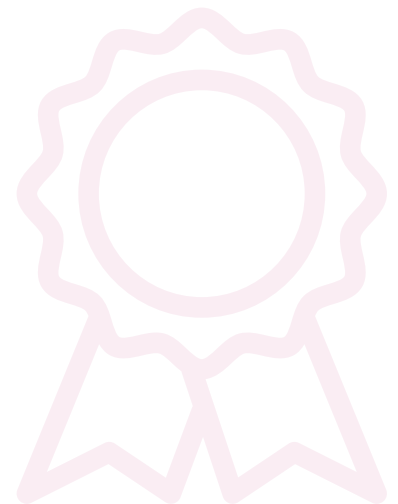
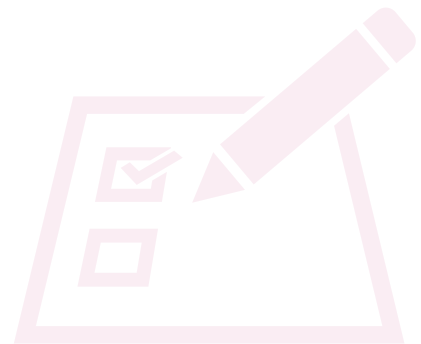


The Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020 extended the right to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections to a) convicted prisoners sentenced to prison terms of 12 months or less, and b) qualifying foreign nationals.

Summary of main points

At 1 December 2023

- The total number of people registered at December 2023 to vote in **Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections** was **4,241,800**, a decrease of nearly 2,000 (0.05%) compared with December 2022;
- **921,900** electors (21.7% of the total electorate) had registered for **postal voting** in the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. This represented a decrease of 33,400 (3.5%) compared with December 2022;
- of the 4,241,800 people registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections, **76,100** (1.8% of the total electorate) were **aged 16 or 17**;
- just under **189,500** qualifying **foreign nationals** resident in Scotland were registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections, 4.5% of the total electorate;
- the number of people registered to vote in **UK Parliamentary elections** was **4,007,200**, a decrease of 5,500 (0.1%) compared with December 2022;
- **888,400** electors (22.2% of the total electorate) had registered for **postal voting** in UK Parliamentary elections;
- **3,500 British citizens resident overseas** were registered to vote in UK Parliamentary elections. This was a decrease of 700 (16.4%) compared with December 2022.



Contents

1. Overview	5
2. People registered to vote in UK Parliamentary elections.....	7
3. People registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections	8
4. Local Government electoral wards	9
5. 16 and 17 year old voters	9
6. Postal voters.....	9
7. Overseas voters	9
8. Foreign national voters	10
9. Opted out voters	11
10. Service voters.....	12
12. Links to related statistics	13
Notes on statistical publications	14

Definitions and other contextual information for the statistics presented in this publication are available in a separate [background note](#).

1. Overview

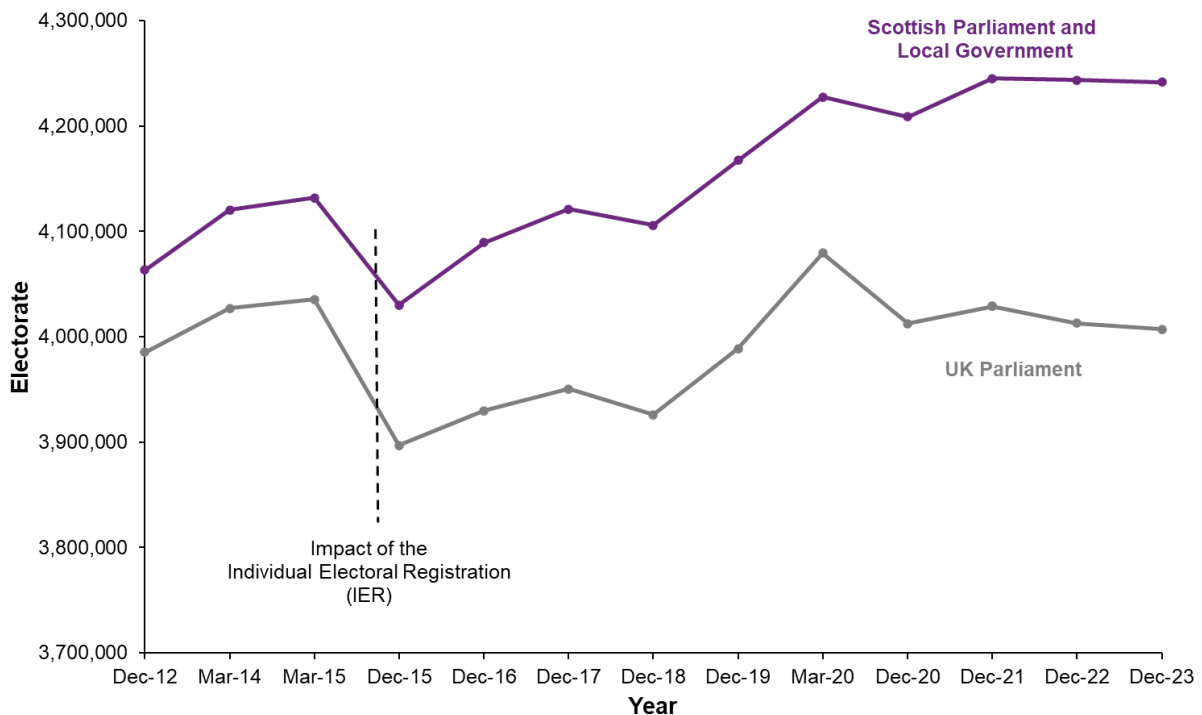
Why does the electorate change in size?

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. [Figure 1](#) shows a generally upward trend between 2012 and 2023 in the number of people registered to vote in elections in Scotland. This is consistent with the small increase of 4% in the population aged 18 and over in this period.
- **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 minimum voting age to 16 for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections.

[Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#) illustrate trends in the number of registered voters in the context of key election events in the last decade. An increase in registered voters is often seen in the lead-up to elections and referendums, as people register to ensure they can vote. The number can then fall back as Electoral Registration Offices carry out their annual canvass to update the registers. For example, they aim to take account of deaths and changes of address.

Figure 1: The number of people registered to vote in Scotland shows a generally upward trend between 2012 and 2023



Note

From December 2012 to December 2015, the reference point for these statistics was 1 March. All other reference points are 1 December. Two reference points occurred during 2015 and 2020 - March and December for both years. The IER was introduced in September 2014 but the impact would have occurred in September 2015 (start of the new academic year). See [background note](#).

Figure 2: Increases between 2012 and 2023 in the number of people registered to vote in UK Parliamentary elections generally correlate to the timing of UK General elections

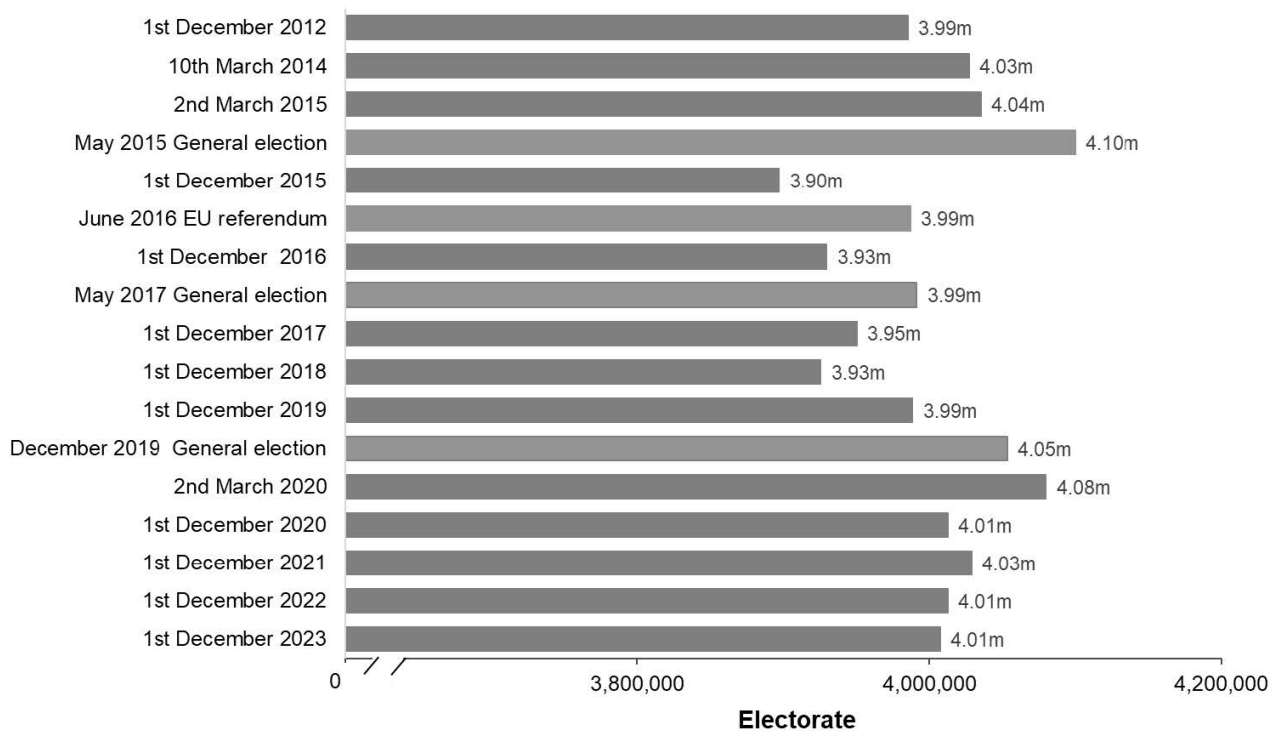
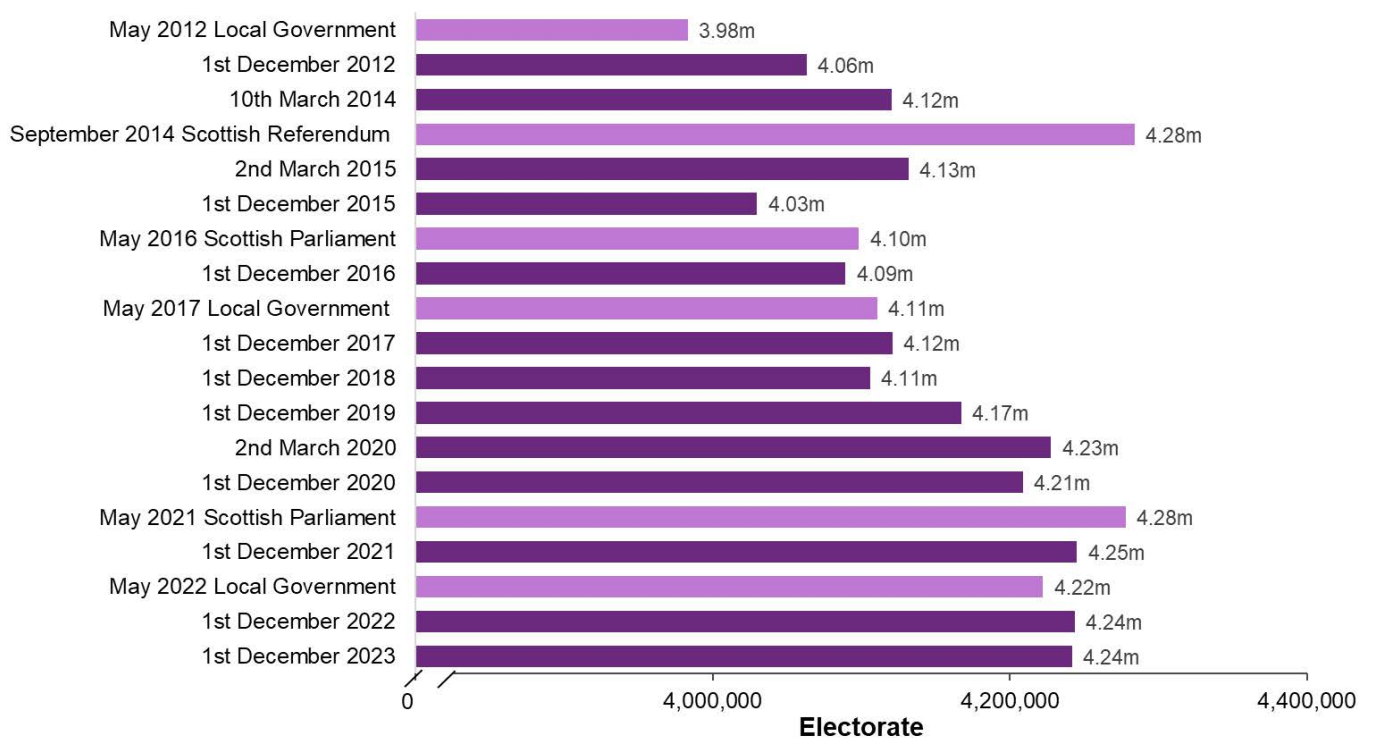


Figure 3: Increases between 2012 and 2023 in the number of people registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections generally correlate to the timing of parliamentary and local elections



2. People registered to vote in UK Parliamentary elections

The data in this publication on UK Parliamentary constituencies relate to the new constituencies which came into force on 29 November 2023 following the [Boundary Commission for Scotland's 2023 Review](#). The figures on the electorates of these constituencies in the years 2020 to 2022 are estimates derived from a [calculation](#) of the overlap between the new constituencies and the previous ones.

The number of registered voters for UK Parliamentary elections in Scotland totalled 4,007,200 at 1 December 2023. This was 5,500 (0.1%) lower than the number at 1 December 2022. As noted above it is not uncommon for the number of people registered to vote to fall back a little in periods with no widespread or significant elections.

Of the 57 new UK parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, 27 recorded an increase and 30 a decrease in their electorate in the year to December 2023.

The largest percentage increases were in:

- Glasgow South West (5.6%)
- Gordon and Buchan (4.3%)
- Aberdeen North (4.3%)
- Edinburgh West (4.0%)

The largest percentage decreases were in:

- Glasgow North (5.6%)
- Glasgow West (5.1%)
- Dundee Central (4.9%)
- Glasgow North East (4.8%)
- Edinburgh North and Leith (4.5%)

At December 2023, the average number of registered voters per UK parliamentary constituency was 70,300.

The constituencies with the largest electorates were:

- Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (77,100)
- Stirling and Strathallan (76,900)
- Livingston (76,700)

The constituencies with the smallest electorates were:

- Na h-Eileanan an Iar (21,100)
- Orkney and Shetland (34,100)

The smallest electorate in a mainland constituency was Glasgow North (65,100).

3. People registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections

The total number of registered voters for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections in Scotland at 1 December 2023 was 4,241,800. This was a decrease of just 2,000 (0.05%) compared with 1 December 2022.

Between December 2022 and December 2023, the local government electorate increased in 16 of the 32 council areas. The largest percentage increase was in Highland (up by 2.3%). The largest percentage decrease was in Dumfries and Galloway (down by 1.8%).

The council areas with the highest number of these electors were:

- Glasgow City (454,300)
- City of Edinburgh (397,200)
- Fife (287,800)

The council areas with the lowest numbers were:

- Orkney (17,600)
- Shetland (17,700)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (21,900)

At December 2023, the average number of registered voters per Scottish Parliamentary constituency was 58,100. The constituency with the most people registered to vote was Linlithgow (76,400). The smallest electorate was in Orkney Islands (17,600), with the smallest on the mainland in Argyll and Bute (49,500)¹.

In the year to December 2023, the number of registered voters increased in 34 of the 73 Scottish Parliamentary constituencies.

The largest percentage increases were in:

- Inverness and Nairn (3.4%)
- Aberdeen Central (2.5%)
- Na h-Eileanan an Iar (2.2%)

The largest percentage decreases were in:

- Glasgow Kelvin (4.1%)
- Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn (3.3%)
- Edinburgh Central (2.1)
- Galloway and West Dumfries (2.0%)

¹ 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 constituencies is included in the [background notes](#).

4. Local Government electoral wards

For local government elections, council areas are split into electoral wards. Each ward has either two, three or four elected councillors. At December 2023, there were a total of 355 electoral wards, with an average of 11,900 registered voters per ward. However, this varied depending on the number of elected members and other local considerations.

For seven wards there are just two elected members. The number of registered voters in these wards ranged from 1,000 in Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh to 1,700 in Sgìre an Rubha (both in Na h-Eileanan Siar).

The 183 three-member wards had 10,200 registered voters on average. This ranged from 1,800 in North Isles (Orkney Islands) up to 19,800 in Leith (City of Edinburgh).

The 165 four-member wards had an average of 14,300 registered voters. This ranged from 2,900 in Lerwick South (Shetland Islands) up to 30,100 in Liberton/ Gilmerton (City of Edinburgh).

5. 16 and 17 year old voters

At December 2023, there were 76,100 registered voters aged 16 or 17. This was a decrease of 400 (0.6%) compared with December 2022. They accounted for 1.8% of the total electorate. The council areas where 16 and 17 year olds made up the highest proportion of the electorate were Aberdeenshire (2.5%), West Lothian (2.4%) and East Renfrewshire (2.4%). This proportion was lowest in Glasgow City (1.2%).

6. Postal voters

At December 2023, a total of 921,900 registered voters for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections (21.7% of the total electorate) had opted for a postal vote. This represented a decrease of 33,400 (3.5%) compared with December 2022. Over a fifth of voters in Scotland are now able to cast their ballot earlier than polling day. This compares with a seventh of voters in 2013.

Registration for postal voting was generally higher in more rural or remote constituencies.

7. Overseas voters

At December 2023, a total of 3,500 British citizens resident overseas were registered voters for UK Parliamentary elections, 0.1% of the total electorate. This was a decrease of 700 (16.4%) compared with December 2022.

The number of such voters tends to be higher in years where there is a referendum or general election. So for instance it was relatively high in 2016 (15,200), 2017 (12,800) and 2019 (11,600). The highest recorded number was in March 2020 (15,400), this was most likely due to the general election held in December 2019.

8. Foreign national voters

From July 2020, the electoral franchise was extended to all foreign nationals living in Scotland, not just EU and qualifying commonwealth citizens. At December 2023, there were 189,500 foreign nationals² registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. This represented 4.5% of the total electorate, and is the highest number ever recorded. It was an increase of 7,900 (4.4%) compared with December 2022. [Figure 4](#) shows this upward trends from 2012.

The council areas with the highest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2023 were:

- City of Edinburgh (11.2%)
- Aberdeen City (10.2%)
- Glasgow City (6.8%)

The council areas with the lowest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2023 were:

- East Ayrshire (1.3%)
- Inverclyde (1.3%)
- North Ayrshire (1.3%)
- South Ayrshire (1.4%)

The constituencies with the highest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2023 were:

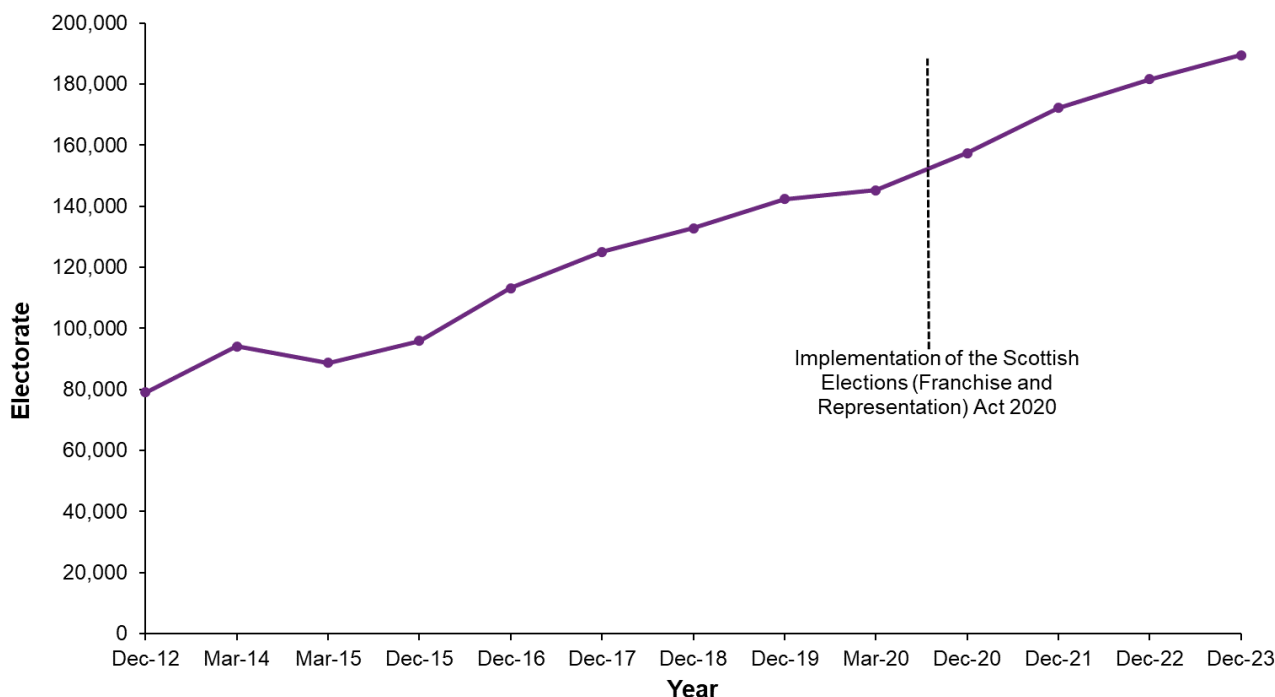
- Edinburgh Northern and Leith (15.8%)
- Aberdeen Central (14.4%)
- Edinburgh Central (14.3%)

The constituencies with the lowest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2023 were:

- Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (0.9%)
- Clydesdale (1.2%)
- Cunninghame South (1.2%)

² Citizens of the Republic of Ireland and qualifying Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK are entitled to vote in all parliamentary and local government elections in the UK, and are not included as 'foreign nationals' in these statistics.

Figure 4: The number of foreign nationals registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections increased over the period 2012 to 2023

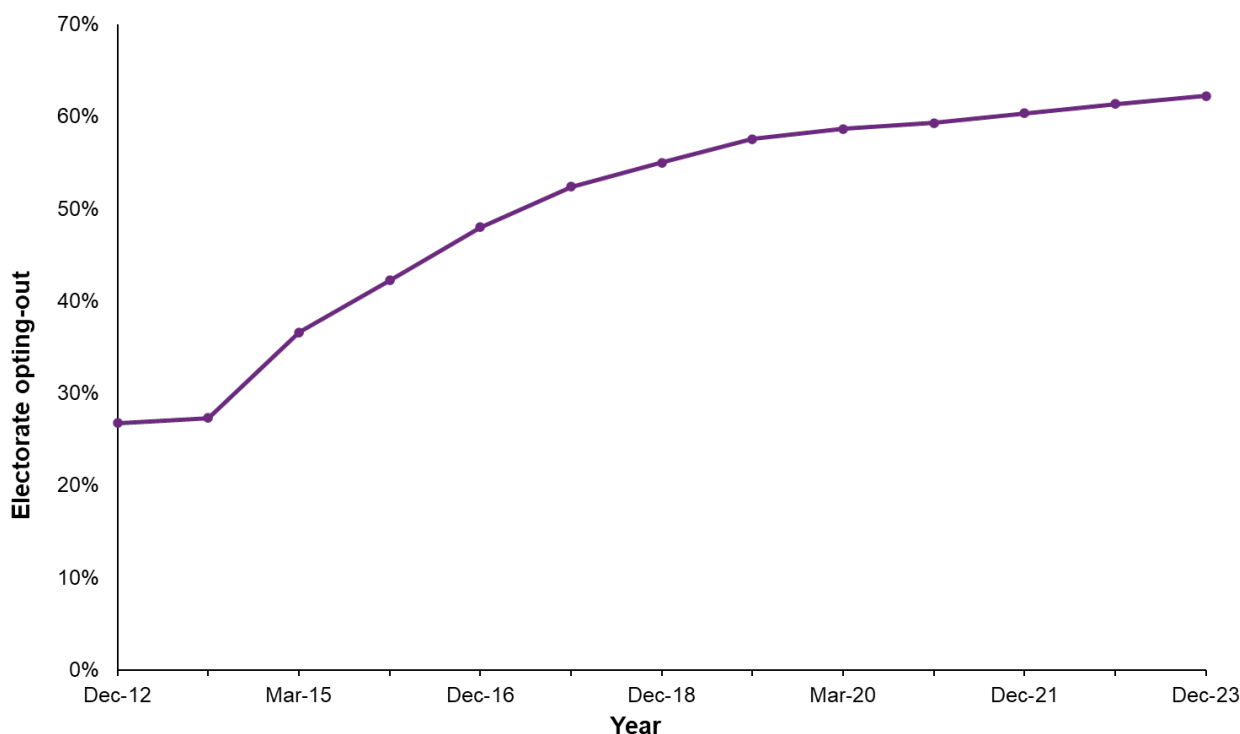


Note: Two reference points occurred during 2015 and 2020 - March and December for both years. Dotted line indicates the extension of the electorate franchise to qualifying residents from all countries following the implementation of the [Scottish Elections \(Franchise and Representation\) Act 2020](#).

9. Opted out voters

There are two versions of the electoral register – the full register and the ‘open register’. The full register is used only for elections. It can also be used in certain specified circumstances, for example preventing and detecting crime. The open register is available to anyone who wants to buy a copy, for example marketing companies. Electors can opt out of the open register. In December 2012, around a quarter of registered voters opted out of the open register. Since then it has risen each year, and by December 2023 had reached a high of 62%. [Figure 5](#) illustrates this upward trend.

Figure 5: The percentage of people registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections opting out of the full register increased slightly each year from 2012 to 2023



Note: Two reference points occurred during 2015 and 2020 - March and December for both years.

10. Service voters

At December 2023, the number of service voters registered to vote in Parliamentary and local elections in Scotland was around 800. This represented just 0.02% of the total electorate and was the smallest number recorded in the last decade.

11. Anonymous voters

Anonymous registration is available to electors whose safety would be at risk if their name or address were listed on the electoral register. The number of anonymous registered voters in Scotland is small. [Table 1](#) shows the trend from 2012 to 2023. At December 2023, there were 147 such people on the electoral register for UK Parliamentary elections. The corresponding number on the electoral register for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections was 159.

Table 1: Total number of anonymous voters, 2017 to 2023

People registered to vote	Dec 2017	Dec 2018	Dec 2019	Mar 2020	Dec 2020	Dec 2021	Dec 2022	Dec 2023
UK Parliamentary elections	116	130	194	215	188	176	178	147
Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections	127	137	207	223	193	186	186	159

12. Links to related statistics

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish electoral statistics for each of the UK countries. These are available in the electoral registration section of the [ONS website](#). The next ONS publication, Electoral Statistics, UK: 2023 is due for publication on 11 April 2024.

Notes on statistical publications

National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has designated these statistics as Accredited Official 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).

Accredited Official 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 Accredited Official 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 Accredited Official Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. Accredited Official 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 Accredited Official 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 [About this Publication](#) document that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

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