

# Electoral Statistics for Scotland

as at 1 December 2018

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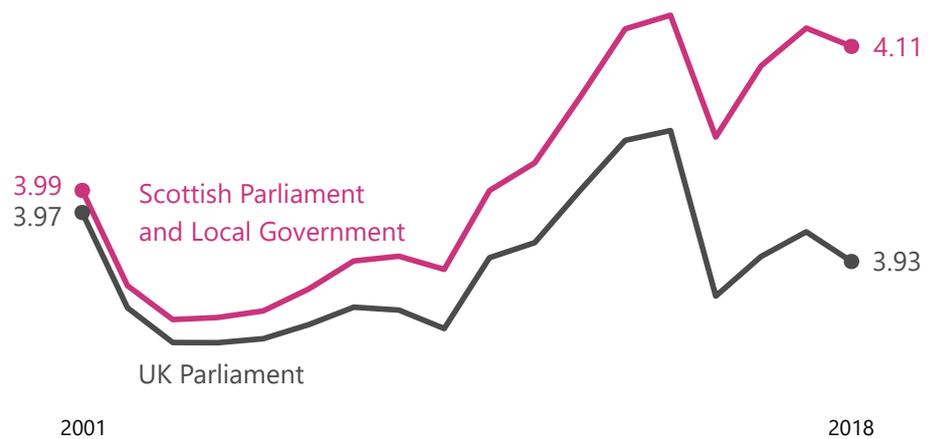


This statistical report provides information on the number of people registered to vote in UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections.

**Electorates in Scotland have decreased in 2018**

The decrease in electorate compared with 2017 is 0.6% for the UK Parliament electorate in Scotland and 0.4% for the Scottish Parliament and Local Government electorate. The decrease in 2015 was caused by the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

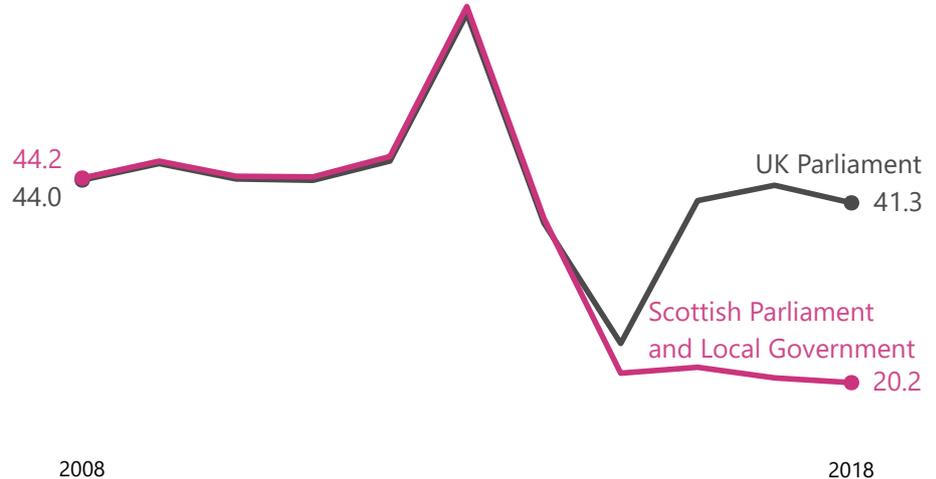
Number of people registered to vote (millions)



**Number of attainers remains similar to the previous year**

Attainers are people who will become old enough to vote (18 for UK Parliament, or 16 for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections) before December 2019. Since the voting age was lowered in Scotland, there have been more attainers for UK Parliament elections than for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections.

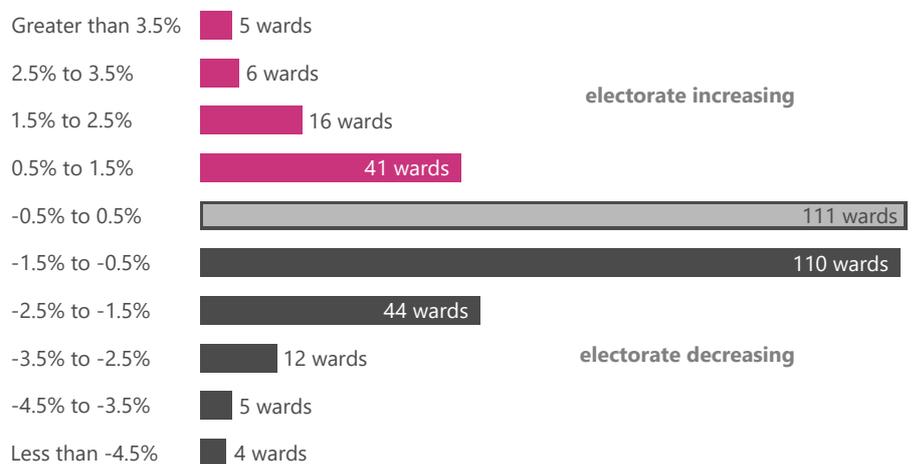
Number of attainers (thousands)



**Most electoral wards see a decrease compared to their electorate in 2017**

Electoral wards are the sub-council level areas that are used to elect councillors for Local Government elections. There are a total of 354 electoral wards across Scotland. Between December 2017 and December 2018, the electorate for 65% of electoral wards (231 wards) decreased.

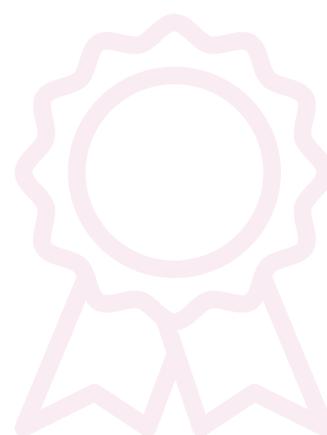
Change in electorate over previous year



## Summary of main points

### Between December 2017 and December 2018:

- The total number of **UK Parliamentary electors** in Scotland fell to **3,925,800**. This is a decrease of 24,800 (0.6%) on the previous year, and followed increases in the previous two years.
- The number of registered **Scottish Parliament and Local Government electors** also fell slightly, to **4,105,800**. This is a decrease of 15,300 (0.4%) on the previous year.
- At 1 December 2018, there were **78,400 young people aged 16 or 17** registered to vote at Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections, accounting for 1.9% of the total electorate. This is a decrease of 5,200 (6.2%) on the previous year.
- Over a sixth of the Scottish electorate was registered for postal voting at 1 December 2018. This proportion has generally increased over the period since 2008 when it was about a tenth.
- At 1 December 2018, there were **132,800 (non-UK) EU citizens** registered to vote in Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections, an increase of 7,800 (6.2%) on the previous year and nearly three times higher than the figure of 45,800 recorded for 2008. This represents 3.2% of the total electorate in 2018 and is the highest recorded number of EU citizens registered to vote in Scotland, but the latest year-on-year increase is smaller compared with the increases recorded between 2015 and 2016 (18.0%) and 2016 and 2017 (10.4%).



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## Introduction

This publication provides statistics on the number of people included on the Electoral Register as at 1 December 2018, and therefore registered to vote at parliamentary and local elections.

Each year National Records of Scotland (NRS) collates electoral statistics from data supplied by the 15 Electoral Registration Offices (EROs) in Scotland. The EROs are responsible for creating and maintaining the Electoral Register.

The difference in who is entitled to vote at parliamentary and local elections depends largely on age, residence and citizenship conditions. 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 and European 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.

References in this publication to electoral statistics for 2018 relate to the number of people on the Electoral Register as at the reference date of 1 December 2018. Please refer to the [background notes](#) for information about changes to the reference date over time and details on comparing electoral statistics for different years.

Changes in the electorate numbers mainly occur due to three reasons:

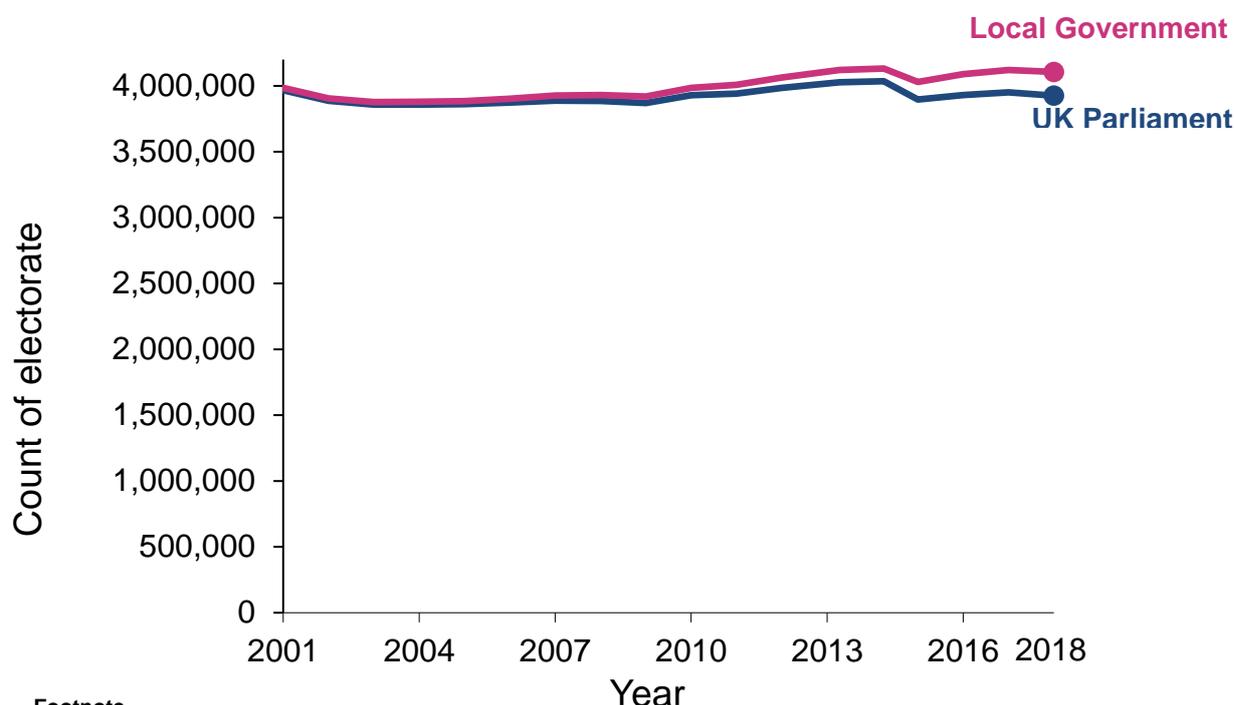
- A change in size of the population who are entitled to vote. This change can be brought about by migration to or from an area, people becoming old enough to vote in a given election, and deaths.
- A change in the proportion of the eligible population who actually register to vote as a result, for example, of better canvassing or an increased public interest in the political landscape.
- Changes in definitions of eligibility. For example, in 2015 the minimum voting age for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections was lowered to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote.

The statistics in this publication are used by the Electoral Commission and central government to inform electoral policy, in the work of the Boundary Commission for Scotland for constituency design, and by political parties and members of the UK Parliament and Scottish Parliament. They are also of interest to local government, academics and members of the public with an interest in the political process. The vast majority of the adult population is recorded on the Electoral Register, and so the statistics are also an important source of comparator data for population estimates between censuses.

## Findings

Figure 1 shows the patterns in Scottish electorates since 2001. Over this period, there has been a slight overall upward trend in the number of people registered to vote in parliamentary and local elections. However, a drop in numbers is evident in 2015. This was mainly due to the introduction of [Individual Electoral Registration](#) (IER) in 2014, which affected the registration of students. Prior to the introduction of IER, block registration was permitted, particularly for students in halls of residence, but this practice has now been discontinued with individuals now responsible for their own registration.

**Figure 1: Scottish electorate since 2001**



### Footnote

\*From December 2012 to December 2015, the reference point for these statistics was in March. All other reference points are 1 December.

Since the drop in 2015, electorates in Scotland have generally increased, which could be attributed to the heightened period of electoral activity seen over the last few years, with voters going to the polls on four occasions since May 2016 ([Scottish Parliament election](#) in May 2016, the [EU Referendum](#) in June 2016, the [Local Government elections](#) in May 2017 and the [UK General Election](#) in June 2017). In contrast, there were slight decreases between 2017 and 2018 in both the UK Parliament electorate (down by 0.4% to 3,926,000) and in the Scottish Parliament electorate (down by 0.6% to 4,106,000). This may in part reflect that no UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament or Local Government elections are scheduled over the next year or so - similar decreases were observed in 2009, following the 2007 Scottish Parliament election and before the 2010 General Election.

At December 2018, the proportion of the Scottish electorate registered for postal voting was 17.6% (690,200 people) for UK Parliament elections and 17.2% (705,700 people) for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections. (This means that just over a

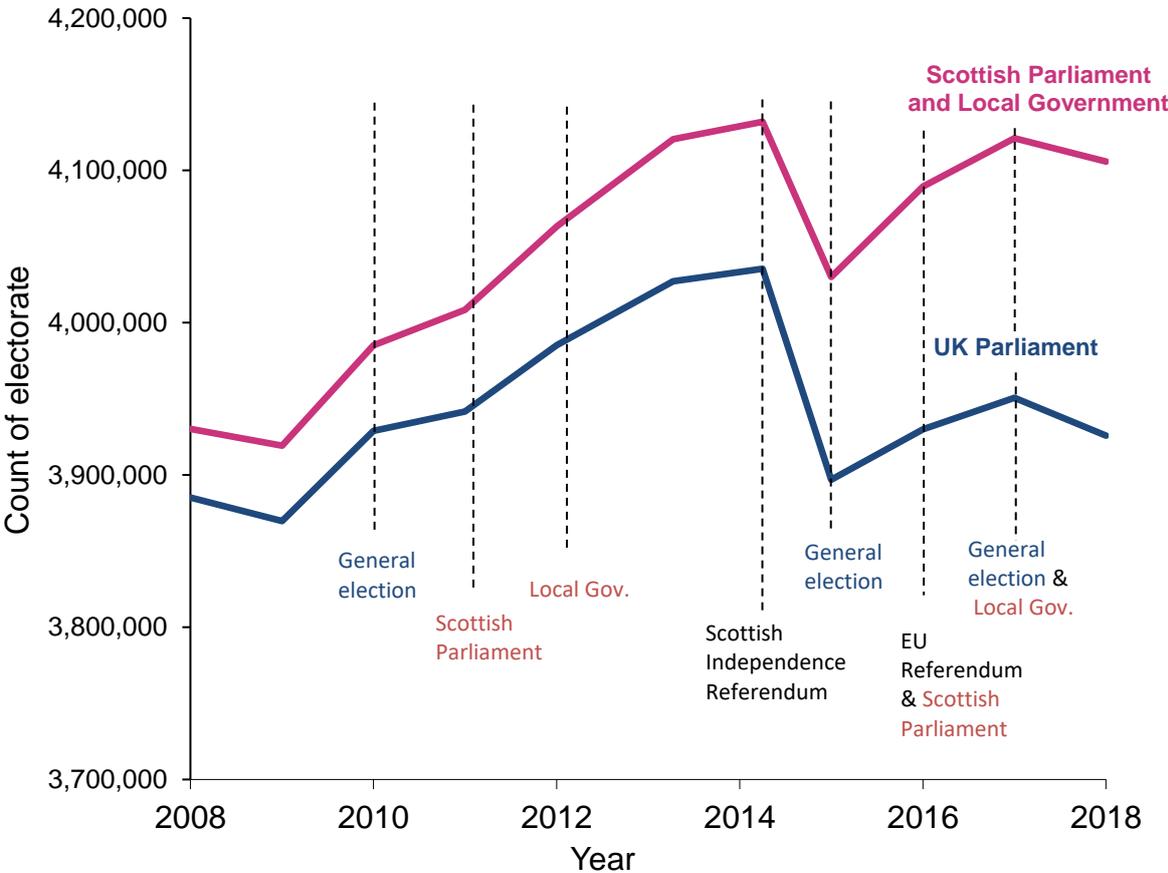
sixth of voters in Scotland can cast their ballot earlier than polling day.) Both these proportions represent a slight decrease compared with the previous year, but were still well above the level around a decade ago (10.0% in 2008 for UK Parliament elections, and 11.3% in 2009 for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections).

At December 2018, there were 132,800 (non-UK) EU citizens registered to vote in Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections, an increase of 7,800 (6.2%) on the previous year and nearly three times higher than the 45,800 recorded in 2008. This represented 3.2% of the total electorate and is the highest recorded number of EU citizens registered to vote in Scotland, although the latest year-on-year increase is smaller compared with the increases recorded between 2015 and 2016 (18.0%) and 2016 and 2017 (10.4%).

A total of 6,700 British citizens resident overseas were on the Electoral Register for UK Parliamentary elections as at 1 December 2018, 0.2% of the total electorate. The corresponding figures for 2016 (15,200) and 2017 (12,800) were higher, most probably reflecting the staging of the EU Referendum and the General Election in those years.

The number of service voters registered at December 2018 to vote in parliamentary and local elections in Scotland was 2,700, 0.1% of the total electorate. This is broadly similar to the figures recorded over the previous ten years.

**Figure 2: Scottish electorate changes correlated to key votes**



**Footnotes for Figure 2**  
 1) From December 2012 to December 2015, the data reference point was 1 March. All other reference points are 1 December.  
 2) Events point to the last data point before the event as this is when its impact will be seen

## **UK Parliament electors**

Of the 59 UK Parliamentary constituencies, 46 saw decreases in their electorate between 2017 and 2018. The largest percentage decrease was in Dundee West (down by 4.5%). Of the 13 constituencies which saw an increase, the largest percentage increase was in Paisley and Renfrewshire North (up by 3.9%).

At December 2018, the average number of electors per UK Parliamentary constituency was 66,500. The constituency with the most people registered to vote was Linlithgow and East Falkirk with 85,400, followed by the neighbouring constituencies of Falkirk (82,800) and Livingston (80,500). The constituency with the smallest electorate was Na h-Eileanan Siar with 21,000, and the mainland constituency with the smallest electorate was Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross with 46,400.

Between December 2008 and December 2018, the constituency with the largest percentage increase in its electorate was Paisley and Renfrewshire North (up by 12.0%). The constituency with the largest percentage decrease in its electorate over the same period was North East Fife (down by 10.3%) – most probably reflecting the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in 2014.

## **Scottish Parliament and Local Government electors**

Of the 73 Scottish Parliamentary constituencies, 47 saw a decrease in their electorate between 2017 and 2018. The largest percentage decrease was in Aberdeen Central (down by 4.7%) and the largest percentage increase in Paisley (up by 4.9%).

At December 2018, the average number of electors per Scottish Parliamentary constituency was 56,200. The constituency with the most people registered to vote was Linlithgow, with 72,500. The smallest Scottish Parliamentary constituency electorate was the Orkney Islands (17,100), with the smallest mainland constituency being Argyll and Bute (48,300)<sup>1</sup>.

Between 2017 and 2018, the local government electorate decreased in 21 out of 32 council areas. The largest percentage decrease was in Dundee City (down by 3.9%) and the largest percentage increase in Renfrewshire (up by 3.9%).

For the purpose of local government elections, council areas are split into electoral wards, with each ward having either three or four elected councillors. At December 2018, the average number of electors per ward was 11,600. However, this varied depending on the number of elected members and other local considerations. Three member wards each had 9,700 electors on average, and four member wards each had an average of 13,800 electors.

<sup>1</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](#).

Since the voting age was lowered in 2015, the number of 16 and 17 year olds registered to vote steadily increased until 2017. At December 2018, a total of 78,400 people aged 16 or 17 were registered to vote in Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections, a decrease of 6.2% compared with the previous year. They accounted for 1.9% of the total electorate. The council areas where 16 and 17 year olds made up the highest proportion of the electorate were East Renfrewshire and West Lothian (at 2.5%).

### **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](#).

**Table 1: Total number of electoral registrations, by electorate, 2008 to 2018**

	2008 December	2009 December	2010 December	2011 December	2012 December	2014 March <sup>1</sup>	2015 March <sup>1</sup>	2015 December	2016 December	2017 December	2018 December
<b>UK Parliament</b>											
Total electorate	3,885,148	3,869,700	3,928,979	3,941,592	3,985,257	4,027,187	4,035,394	3,896,852	3,929,963	3,950,643	3,925,820
Attainers <sup>2</sup>	43,970	45,902	44,100	43,940	46,200	63,471	38,963	24,827	41,561	43,357	41,296
Service voters	2,043	1,924	2,662	2,576	2,739	2,750	4,226	3,929	3,511	3,127	2,738
Overseas electors	792	874	1,876	1,186	1,168	868	2,588	7,729	15,230	12,790	6,679
Postal voters <sup>5</sup>	389,442	436,565	492,514	525,793	566,262	557,927	660,472	668,118	699,186	714,060	690,207
<b>Scottish Parliament and Local Government</b>											
Total electorate	3,930,244	3,919,219	3,985,161	4,008,411	4,063,206	4,120,494	4,131,926	4,029,958	4,089,477	4,121,140	4,105,824
Attainers <sup>3</sup>	44,204	46,186	44,415	44,341	46,726	64,299	39,513	21,343	22,035	20,788	20,232
Service voters	2,043	1,924	2,662	2,576	2,739	2,750	4,226	3,929	3,511	3,133	2,746
Peers	52	53	54	56	54	53	45	46	48	47	43
Citizens of the EU	45,836	50,340	58,004	67,949	79,063	94,122	88,688	95,946	113,185	124,973	132,767
Postal voters <sup>5</sup>	-	442,694	492,255	525,772	566,264	569,583	661,844	660,809	713,734	729,690	705,705
16 and 17 year olds <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	48,962	79,621	83,536	78,383
<b>European Parliament</b>											
Total electorate	3,888,895	3,872,375	3,929,584	3,941,991	3,985,480	4,044,217	4,045,826	3,896,805	3,930,041	3,950,690	3,925,863
Attainers <sup>2</sup>	44,001	45,916	44,100	43,941	46,200	63,572	38,982	24,827	41,561	43,357	41,296
Service voters	2,043	1,924	2,662	2,576	2,739	2,750	4,226	3,929	3,511	3,127	2,738
Peers	52	53	54	56	54	53	45	46	48	47	43
Overseas electors	792	874	1,876	1,186	1,168	868	2,588	7,729	15,230	12,790	6,679
Citizens of the EU	3,691	2,621	551	343	169	16,976	10,390	43	30	0	0

**Footnotes**

1) To accommodate major changes to the system of electoral registration, the reference dates for 2014 and 2015 were changed to 10 March and 2 March respectively. The reference date has now reverted to 1 December.

2) Attainers in the UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary electorates are those who will reach the age of 18 during the currency of the Register. The 'Total electorate' figures in this table include these attainers.

3) The 'Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act' which was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 18 June 2015, gave 16 and 17 year olds eligibility to vote in both Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections.

Therefore, attainers in the Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government electorates are those who will reach the age of 16 during the currency of the Register. The 'Total electorate' figures in this table include these attainers.

4) 16 and 17 year olds on the Register, as at 1 December.

5) Data on postal voters collected from 2007 for UK Parliament and from 2009 for Scottish Parliament and Local Government.

## Background notes

1. Electoral statistics usually relate to registers published on 1 December each year. However, in 2014 and 2015 the reference date was changed to 10 March 2014 and 2 March 2015 respectively, to facilitate the change to a system of Individual Electoral Registration. The reference date has since changed back to 1 December. The different reference date in 2014 and 2015 should be considered when looking at time series of the electoral statistics.
2. 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 council areas. There are now 354 electoral wards with effect from 4 May 2017. For the 2016 publication, the electoral registration offices (EROs) who supply the electoral data to the National Record of Scotland (NRS) were still in the process of adopting the required changes to ward boundaries. Hence, a number of EROs were able to submit the data using the new 2017 ward boundaries, while a number of EROs submitted the data using the previous 2007 ward boundaries. To allow for a continuous time series to be created for the new wards, estimates from the full Electoral Register were calculated for the new wards using postcode information. Due to attainers not being available in the full Electoral Register, the distribution of 16 and 17 year old electors was used to distribute attainers to the new wards. For the December 2017 statistics and later publications, all EROs submitted data on the basis of the new (2017) electoral ward boundaries.
3. Definitions of the various groups of electorate shown in the tables are as follows:
  - **Attainers:** For UK Parliament or European 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 2018 and 30 November 2019). 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.
  - **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 from [House of Commons Library](#)
  - **Prisoners:** Remand prisoners, unconvicted prisoners and civil prisoners can vote if they are on the Electoral Register. However, convicted persons detained in pursuance of their sentences are not eligible to vote.
  - **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 2018, there were 43 Peers on the Electoral Register for these elections. Peers do not have the right to vote at UK Parliamentary elections.
4. Information on previous elections held and a list of upcoming elections and referendums is available from the [Electoral Commission](#).
5. 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 [About this Publication](#) document that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

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