

# People registered to vote

(previously called Electoral Statistics)

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The number of people registered on 1 December 2022 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 2022

Compared to 2021, the electorate for UK Parliamentary elections decreased by 0.4% and the electorate for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections by 0.03%. Note: the decrease in 2015 was caused by the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

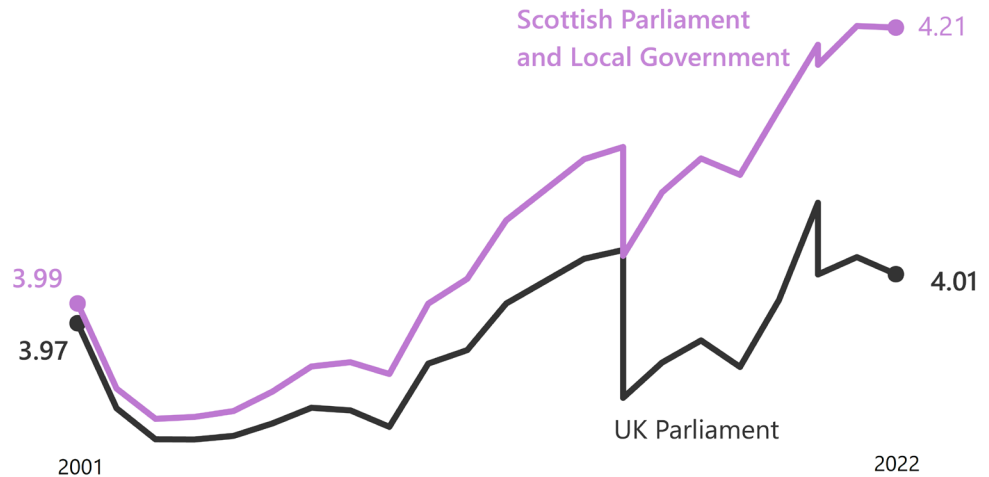
Foreign nationals account for 4.3% of people registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections.

This proportion was highest in constituencies in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow. It was smallest in constituencies in Ayrshire, Dumfries, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire.

People registered to vote in Scotland

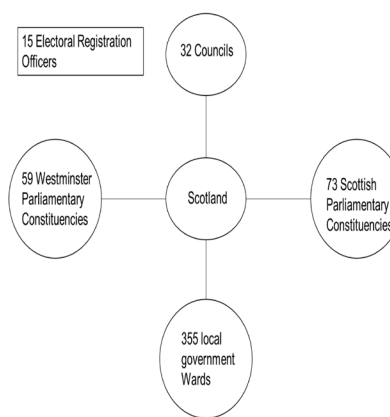
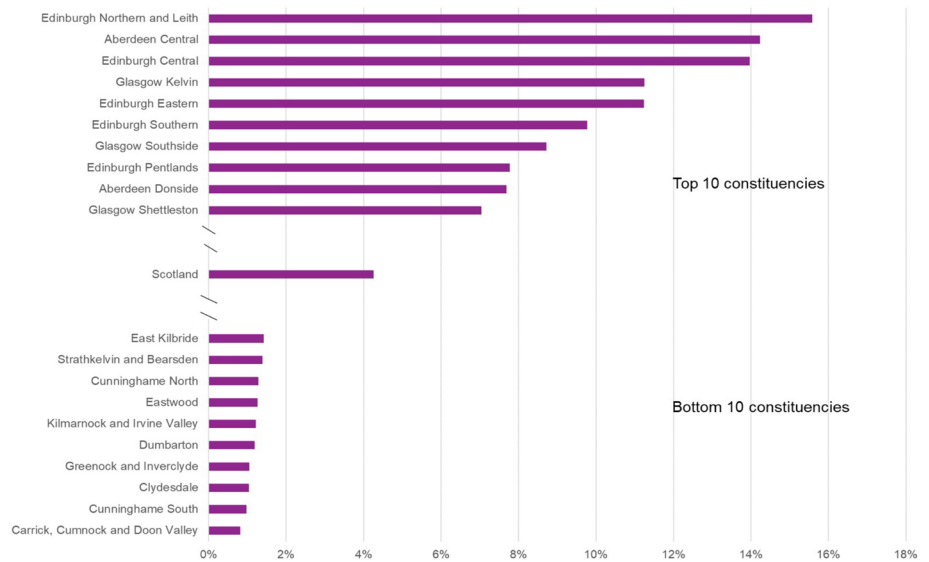
Electoral statistics are broken down into council, constituency and ward areas. There are 15 Electoral Registration Officers who collect this information and register the voter. The eligibility to vote is made up mainly from 6 categories of voters.

Number of people on the electoral register (millions)



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

Proportion of foreign nationals (%)



		Type of election		
		Local Government <sup>1</sup>	Scottish Parliament <sup>1</sup>	UK Parliament
Electorate	Main Electorate (Resident in Scotland on qualifying date)	✓	✓	✓
	Service Personnel (and spouses, Crown Servants and British Council employees)	✓	✓	✓
	Peers	✓	✓	✗
	Foreign nationals (Resident in Scotland on the qualifying date)	✓	✓	✗
	Prisoners (Serving 12 months or less)	✓	✓	✗
	Overseas Electors (Have been on the electoral register within the last 15 years)	✗	✗	✓

Note that this diagram is simplified – it does not include information on homeless, those with no permanent address and certain types of voluntary inpatients.

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.

## Summary of main points

### At 1 December 2022

- The number of registered voters in Scotland for **UK Parliamentary elections** was **4,012,700**. This was a decrease of 16,000 (0.4%) on the previous year.
- The number of registered voters for **Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections** was **4,243,800**. This was a decrease of 1,400 (0.03%) on the previous year.
- There were **76,600 young people aged 16 or 17** registered to vote at Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections, accounting for 1.8% of the total electorate. This was a decrease of around 1,000 (1.3%) on the previous year.
- Nearly a million people were registered for **postal voting** in UK Parliamentary elections (927,900, 23.1% of the total electorate) and also in the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections (955,300, 22.5% of the total electorate).
- There were **181,500 foreign nationals** registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections, 4.3% of the total electorate. This was an increase of 9,400 (5.5%) on the previous year.



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

# 1. Overview

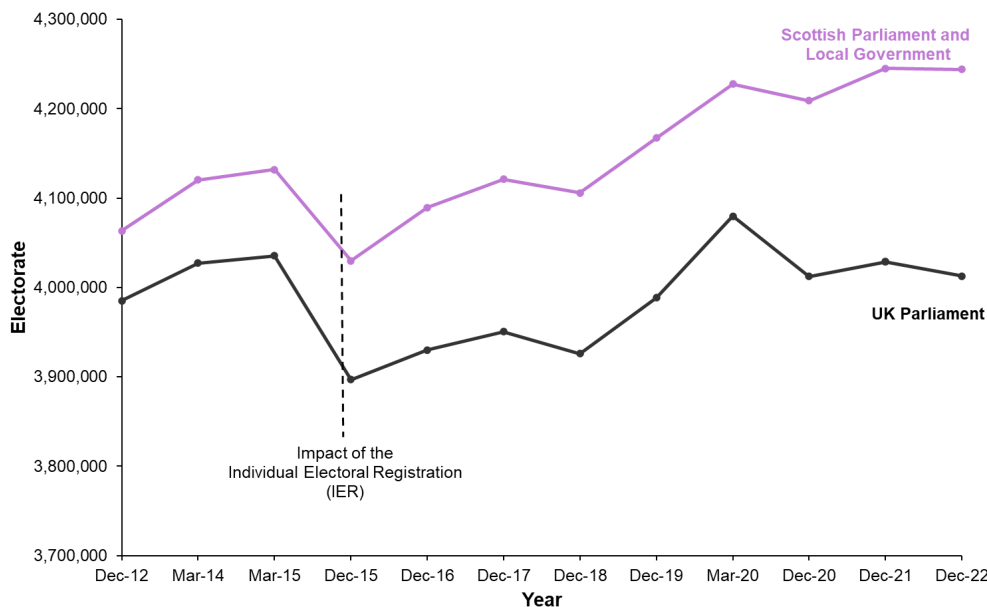
## Why does the electorate change in size?

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 2022 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 ten years. 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.

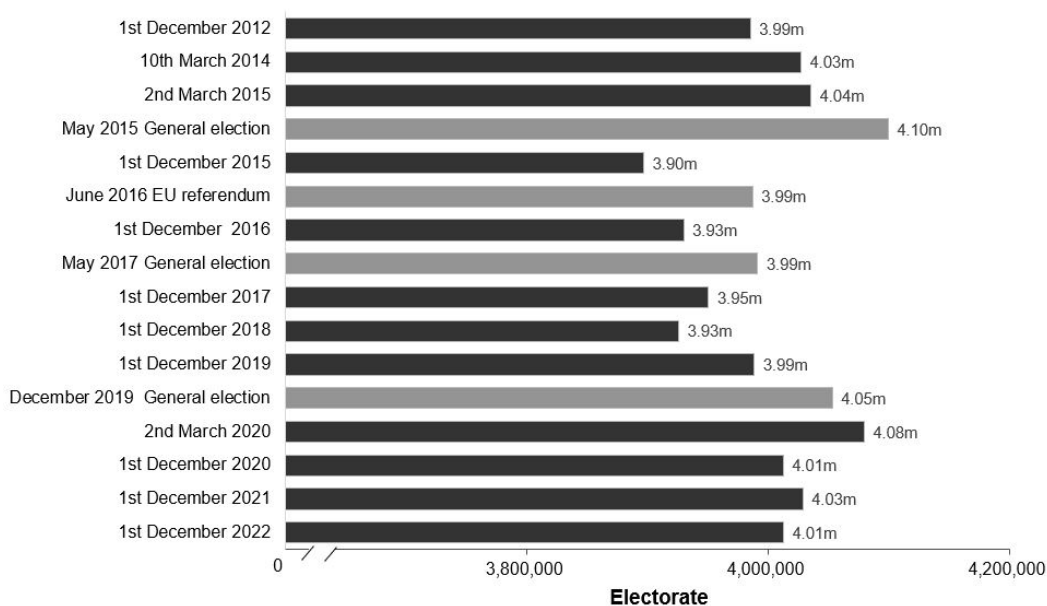
**Figure 1: Number of people on the electoral register, 2012 to 2022**



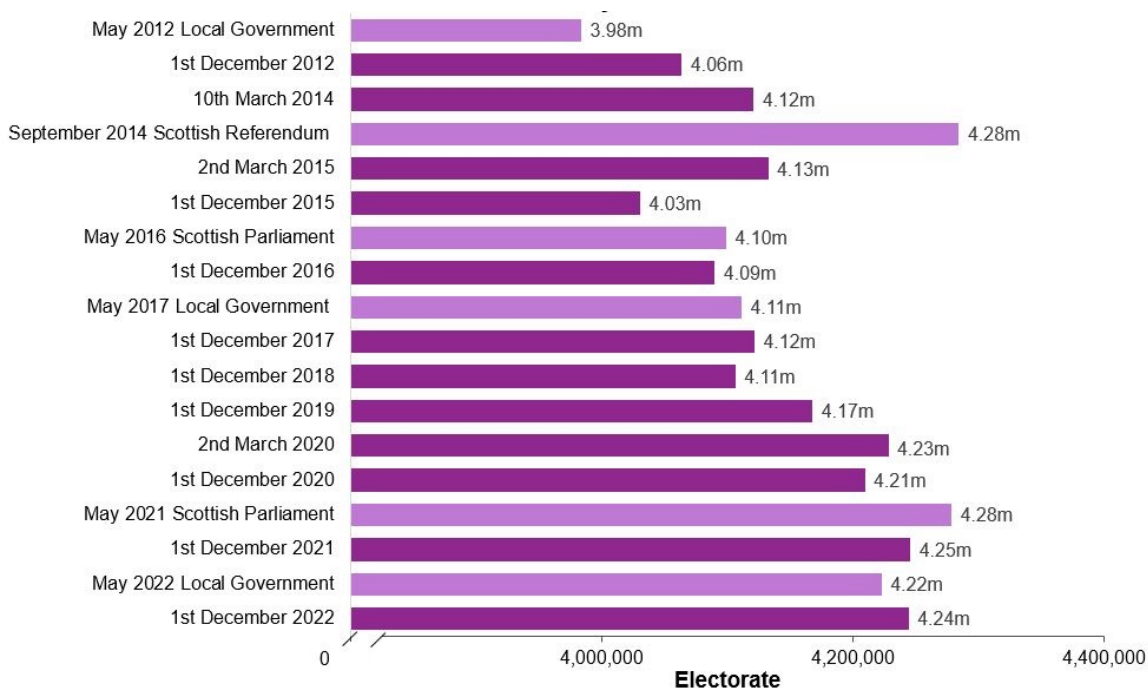
**Note**

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)

**Figure 2: People registered to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, correlated to key votes, Scotland, 2012 to 2022**



**Figure 3: People registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections, correlated to key votes, Scotland, 2012 to 2022**



## 2. People registered to vote in UK Parliamentary election

The number of registered voters for UK Parliamentary elections in Scotland totalled 4,012,700 at 1 December 2022. This was 16,000 (0.4%) lower than the number at 1 December 2021. 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 59 UK parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, 18 recorded an increase in their electorate in the year to December 2022.

The largest percentage increases were in:

- Dumfries and Galloway (1.7%)
- Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (1.1%)
- Livingston (0.9%).

The largest percentage decreases were in:

- Glasgow North (2.8%)
- East Dunbartonshire (2.2%)
- West Dunbartonshire (2.1%).

The percentage decreases in the other 35 constituencies ranged from 0.02% to 1.9%.

At December 2022, the average number of registered voters per UK parliamentary constituency was 68,000.

The constituencies with the largest electorates were:

- Linlithgow and East Falkirk (87,400)
- Livingston (84,200)
- East Lothian (84,000).

The constituencies with the smallest electorates were:

- Na h-Eileanan an Iar (21,100)
- Orkney and Shetland (34,400).

The smallest electorate in a mainland constituency was in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (46,600).

### **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 2022 was 4,243,800. This was a decrease of just 1,400 (0.03%) compared with 1 December 2021 (which saw a record high recorded for the December count), and followed the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2021 and the local government elections in May 2022.

Between December 2021 and December 2022, the local government electorate increased in 18 of the 32 council areas. The largest percentage increase was in Dumfries and Galloway (up by 1.8%). The largest percentage decrease was in East Dunbartonshire (down by 2.0%).

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

- Glasgow City (462,200)
- City of Edinburgh (398,200)
- Fife (287,200).

The council areas with the lowest numbers were:

- Orkney (17,700)
- Shetland (17,900)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (21,400).

At December 2022, the average number of registered voters per Scottish Parliamentary constituency was 58,100. The constituency with the most people registered to vote was Linlithgow (76,300). The smallest electorate was in Orkney Islands (17,700), with the smallest on the mainland in Argyll and Bute (49,700)<sup>1</sup>.

In the year to December 2022, the number of registered voters increased in 38 of the 73 Scottish Parliamentary constituencies.

The largest percentage increases were in:

- Dumfriesshire (1.9%)
- Galloway and West Dumfries (1.8%)
- Almond Valley (1.5%)
- Perthshire South and Kinross-shire (1.5%).

The largest percentage decreases were in:

- Strathkelvin and Bearsden (2.1%)
- Clydebank and Milngavie (2.0%)
- Glasgow Kelvin (1.9%).

#### 4. Local Government electoral wards

For local government elections, council areas are split into electoral wards. Each ward has either three or four elected councillors. At December 2021, there were some changes to North Ayrshire ward names, area codes and number of councillors. The number of wards decreased from ten to nine. Some changes to ward names and area codes in the Shetland Islands were also recorded in December 2021 statistics. The new electoral ward codes and names in Na h-Eileanan Siar came into effect in the May 2022 local elections, increasing the number of wards from 9 to 11. More information on these changes can be found in the [background note](#), and [table 6](#).

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



**Table 1: New ward changes in Na h-Eileanan Siar, May 2022**

Number of electoral ward	Name of electoral ward	Number of councillors to be returned
1	Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh	2
2	Uibhist a Deas, Èirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faoghla	3
3	Uibhist a Tuath	2
4	Na Hearadh	2
5	Sgìre nan Loch	2
6	Sgìr' Ùige agus Càrlabhadh	2
7	An Taobh Siar agus Nis	3
8	Loch a Tuath	3
9	Steòrnabhadh a Tuath	4

At December 2022, there were a total of 355 electoral wards, with an average of 12,000 registered voters per ward. However, this varied depending on the number of elected members and other local considerations. The ward with the smallest number of elected members (2), and also the lowest registered voters (1,000) was Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh 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 19,600 in Colinton/ Fairmilehead (City of Edinburgh).

The 165 four-member wards had an average of 14,300 registered voters. This ranged from 3,000 in Lerwick South (Shetland Islands) and Steòrnabhadh a Tuath (Na h-Eileanan Siar) up to 29,600 in Liberton/ Gilmerton (City of Edinburgh).

## 5. 16 and 17 year old voters

At December 2022, there were 76,600 registered voters aged 16 or 17. This was a decrease of 1,000 (1.3%) compared with December 2021. 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 East Renfrewshire (2.5%) and Aberdeenshire (2.5%). This proportion was lowest in Glasgow City (1.2%).

## 6. Postal voters

At December 2022, a total of 955,300 registered voters for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections (22.5% of the total electorate) had opted for a postal vote. This represented an increase of 800 (0.1%) compared with December 2021. This means that nearly a quarter of voters in Scotland are now able to cast their ballot earlier than polling day. This compares with a seventh of voters in 2012.

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

## 7. Overseas voters

At December 2022, a total of 4,200 British citizens resident overseas were registered voters for UK Parliamentary elections, 0.1% of the total electorate. This was a decrease of 2,500 (36.9%) compared with December 2021.

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).

## 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 2022, there were 181,500 foreign nationals<sup>2</sup> registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. This represented 4.3% of the total electorate, and is the highest number ever recorded. It was an increase of 9,400 (5.5%) compared with December 2021.

The council areas with the highest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2022 were:

- City of Edinburgh (10.9%)
- Aberdeen City (10.0%)
- Glasgow City (6.7%).

The council areas with the lowest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2022 were:

- Inverclyde (1.0%)
- East Ayrshire (1.1%)
- North Ayrshire (1.1%)
- South Ayrshire (1.3).

The constituencies with the highest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2022 were:

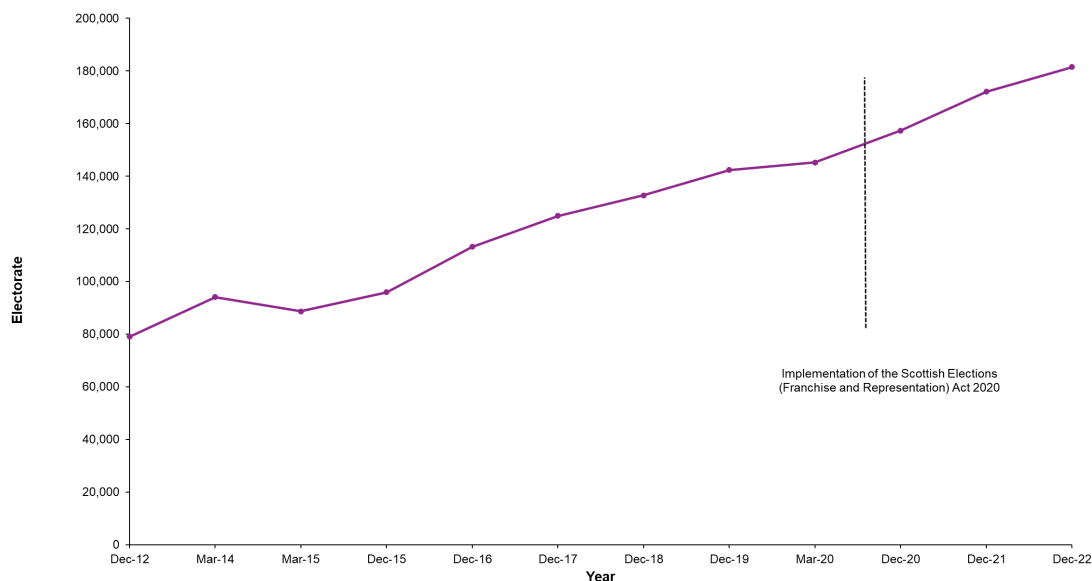
- Edinburgh Northern and Leith (15.6%)
- Aberdeen Central (14.2%)
- Edinburgh Central (14.0%).

The constituencies with the lowest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2022 were:

- Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (0.8%)
- Cunninghame South (1.0%)
- Clydesdale (1.0%)
- Greenock and Inverclyde (1.0%).

<sup>2</sup> 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: Foreign nationals registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections, 2012 to 2022**

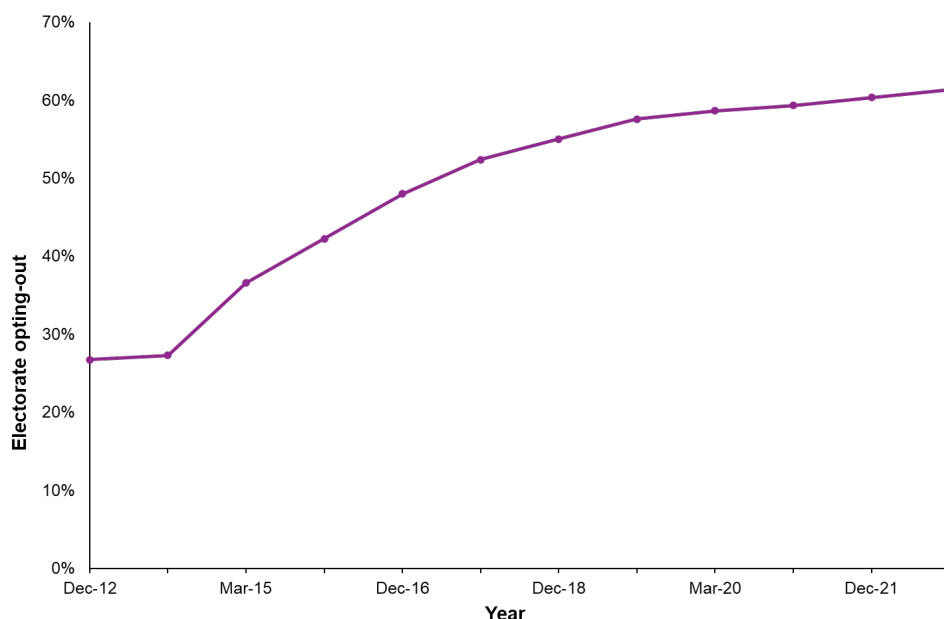


Note: Two reference points occurred during 2015 and 2020 - March and December for both years. Dotted line indicates the extension of the electorate franchise to qualifying residents from all countries following the implementation of the [Scottish Elections \(Franchise and Representation\) Act 2020](#).

## 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 yearly, and by December 2022 had reached a high of 61%.

**Figure 5: Percentage of people registered to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections opted out of the full register**



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

## 10. Service voters

At December 2022, the number of service voters registered to vote in parliamentary and local elections in Scotland was around 900. This represented 0.02% of the total electorate. This was a decrease of 300 (25.6%) compared with December 2021.

## 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. At December 2022, there were 178 such people on the electoral register for UK Parliamentary elections. The corresponding number on the electoral register for Scottish Parliament and local government elections was 186.

**Table 3: Total number of anonymous voters, 2017 to 2022**

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

## 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: 2022 is due for publication on 20 April 2023.

## 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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