

Most common surnames – Main Points

The list of surnames that occur most often in Scotland's registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths are a count of the surnames for births, of both parties (e.g. bride and groom) for marriages, and of the deceased for deaths. Different spellings are counted separately. Surnames which occurred fewer than ten times (in total) in a year do not appear in the list for that year.

The surnames from the birth, marriage and death registers may not be representative of the surnames of the population of Scotland as a whole, as:

- they include the surnames of non-residents who were born / married / died here;
- they exclude the surnames of residents who were born / married / died elsewhere; and
- some age-groups have very low birth, marriage and death rates, whereas others account for most births, marriages and deaths.

A summary table shows the 'Top Twenty' surnames, and the number of times that they occurred, in every fifth year from 1975 to 2010 and then for every year since. In each of those years, the top three remained the same, however, the frequency of occurrence for each name has seen an overall downward trend.

- SMITH (1,940 occurrences in 2023)
- BROWN (1,355 occurrences in 2023)
- WILSON (1,185 occurrences in 2023)

The rest of the names in top 20 in 2023 have also been present in top 20 (or very close to) for every year that data exists.

- CAMPBELL (4th in 2023 with 1,094 occurrences)
- STEWART (5th in 2023 with 1,055 occurrences)
- THOMSON (6th in 2023 with 1,024 occurrences)
- ROBERTSON (7th in 2023 with 1,017 occurrences)
- ANDERSON (8th in 2023 with 929 occurrences)
- SCOTT (9th in 2023 with 782 occurrences)
- TAYLOR (10th in 2023 with 772 occurrences)
- MURRAY (11th in 2023 with 736 occurrences)
- REID (12th in 2023 with 727 occurrences)
- MACDONALD (13th in 2023 with 718 occurrences)
- CLARK (14th in 2023 with 625 occurrences)
- WALKER (15th in 2023 with 614 occurrences)
- YOUNG (16th in 2023 with 580 occurrences)
- MITCHELL (17th in 2023 with 575 occurrences)
- ROSS (18th in 2023 with 566 occurrences)
- WATSON (19th in 2023 with 558 occurrences)
- PATERSON (20th in 2023 with 539 occurrences)

Despite the top names keeping their high ranks over the years, they have all decreased in occurrences since 1975. The top three names have decreased by 779

occurrences for SMITH, 615 occurrences for BROWN, and 701 occurrences for WILSON between 1975 and 2023. Similarly, the decrease in occurrences since 2000 has been 264, 112, and 253 for the top 3 names respectively.

The names which have risen most since 1975 and 2000 reflect Scotland's growing diversity. KHAN was the fastest rising name from 1975-2023, going from 17 occurrences in 1975 to 146 in 2023. The name was also fastest rising from 2000-2023, with occurrences rising from 61 in 2000. ALI was the joint 900th most common name in birth, marriage and death registers in 1975, but rose to 142nd most common in 2023. Other names that rose by 50 or more occurrences between 1975 and 2000 were JONES, KAUR, WILLIAMS, SINGH, AHMED, ALI, and KHAN. Another name that rose by more than 50 occurrences since 2000 was the name WARD.