



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Elections

How voting works

## Selection of Candidates for the Scottish Parliament

Could you represent the people in your area?

Are you good at debating?

Can you make decisions on behalf of other people?

Are you good at listening to different points of view?

**You could apply to your local political party or stand as an independent candidate and perhaps become a Member of the Scottish Parliament.**

The majority of people who want to be a representative in the Scottish Parliament have to participate in a selection process. This is a bit like applying for a job. They may be interviewed, possibly have to give talks and answer questions about their ideas and what they want to do in the Parliament, in the constituency or region.

Many will have to persuade the political party they belong to that they would make the best representative in the Parliament for the people in their area and that they would also be good party workers.

The different political parties all have their own way of selecting candidates.

### PROSPECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES

The people who stand in the election hoping to be chosen as Members of the Scottish Parliament are known as **Prospective Parliamentary Candidates**.

Most **candidates** belong to a political party and have been selected as the representative of that party. Once the party has chosen who they want as their candidate then that person will be given lots of support and help.

Not all candidates will be members of a political party. Some people choose to stand as Independent Candidates. They must find support for their campaign from people who feel they would make a good representative for the area. If they are successful they can become an Independent MSP in the Scottish Parliament.

Not all candidates who stand for election to the Parliament are successful. Indeed as there are only 129 seats in the Parliament the vast majority of candidates will be unsuccessful. They will have to wait for the next election before they compete for the opportunity to:

1. Be selected by their political parties.
2. Stand as a prospective parliamentary candidate.
3. Try to persuade enough constituents to vote for them and become an MSP.

## The Election campaign

When a person has been selected to stand in the election, the political parties and their candidates use a variety of methods during the election campaign to try and persuade the electorate to vote for them. There is a lot of hard work ahead! They may...

1. Put up posters all over the area.
2. Ask people who they are going to vote for and perhaps organise transport to take them to the polling station.
3. Talk to people on the streets or go around the houses in the area.
4. Try to persuade people right up to the very last minute at the doors of the polling stations.
5. Attend a debate with the other prospective candidates.
6. Be active on social media to tell people their views.
7. Visit local schools, hospitals, businesses, etc.
8. Deliver party leaflets to as many households and people as possible.
9. Be interviewed on the radio, television and in newspapers.
10. Hold public meetings to discuss their views and meet with voters.

The candidates are competing with each other to be chosen to become the MSP for their region or constituency.

Each candidate needs to get her/his political message across to as many people as they possibly can.

They try to persuade the electorate that they and their party's policies would be the best for their area and for Scotland.



## How do elections work?

Elections to the Scottish Parliament use a type of Proportional Representation (PR) to elect our representatives. This combines 2 systems of voting: the traditional system of elections in the United Kingdom called First Past the Post, and a system of voting called Additional Members System (AMS). In the election everybody has **two** votes.

### CONSTITUENCY vote

- This vote is for a **Constituency** representative
- Scotland is divided up into **73** electoral areas known as constituencies.
- The electorate is given the choice of different **people**, most of whom belong to a political party, to vote for to be their constituency representative.
- The person with the most votes in each constituency wins and becomes the MSP for that constituency.
- They are **first past the post** winners.

### REGIONAL vote

- This vote is for **Regional** representatives
- Scotland is divided into **8** electoral areas known as regions.
- People are given the choice of different **political parties** to vote for.
- Each Party has a **list** of prospective candidates.
- A particular mathematical formula is used to allocate **additional members** from the various **parties**, based on the **number of votes** each party receives.
- This system is used so that the **percentage of votes** a party receives in the Election is about the *same* as **the percentage of seats** they win in the Scottish Parliament.
- For more information about how the AMS works, please see our website [www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/Education/65978](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/Education/65978)

## Advantages and Disadvantages

By using the two methods of voting, First Past the Post and Additional Member System, it is hoped to combine the advantages of both systems.

### First Past the Post Advantages



First Past the Post is easy for voters to understand. The candidate who gets more votes than any other candidate wins the seat.

There can be a strong link between the voters and their representative. The voters have one representative to remember.

### First Past the Post disadvantages



First Past the Post has been described as being 'unfair', for example, what happens to the rest of the votes for the other candidates? Some people who voted for the other candidates may feel they have 'wasted' their vote. Also, parties can win elections with less than 50% of the total votes cast.

It can be argued that the voting system rewards political parties who have a lot of support in particular constituencies and penalises parties whose support may be more widely spread throughout the country.

### AMS Advantages



Using PR the number of votes a party receives more clearly reflects the number of seats it wins, hopefully ending the feeling of the 'wasted vote'.

It may help smaller political parties gain seats and representation in the Parliament.

PR will often result in a coalition government. This is when two or more parties work together to form the government. Some people suggest that coalition governments are more representative of the way people have voted.

### AMS Disadvantages



Proportional Representation may use a more complicated method of counting the votes and therefore can be more difficult for the voters to understand.

Proportional Representation may mean more than one representative for an area and people can be confused about who is responsible for what and who they can go and see if they have a problem.

Coalition governments may be less stable than a majority government. If the coalition parties disagree over too much the coalition can be torn apart and the government falls.

## Election Day 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Election Day is one of the most important days for Scotland. It is the day when all the people who have the right to vote can decide who they want to represent them in the Scottish Parliament as their MSPs; the people who will make the laws that govern and influence all of our lives.

### Can Everyone Vote?

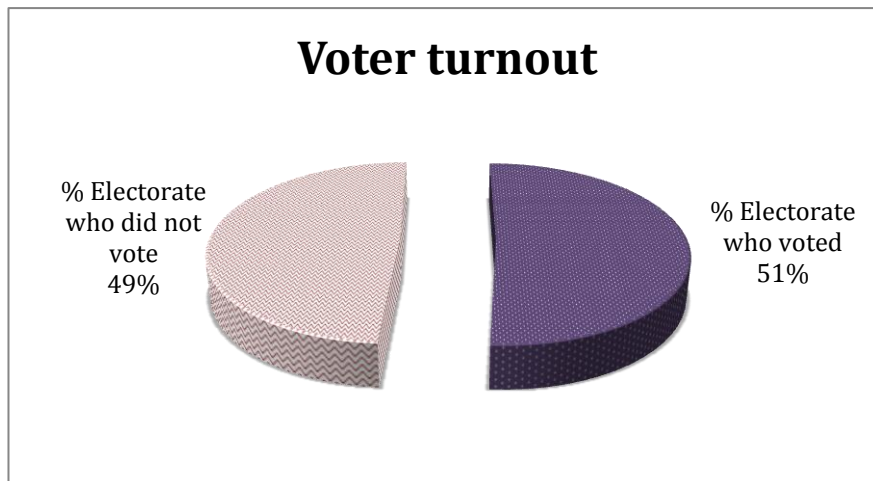
Not everyone has the right to vote, for example, people under 16 years old and prisoners do not have the right to vote.

In the 2011 election for the Scottish Parliament around 4 million people had the right to vote. Of all the people who had the right to vote, known as the **electorate**, around 51% used this **right** and **participated** in the elections to the new Scottish Parliament.

### Voter Turnout

This is the number of people from the electorate who actually vote in an election.

In a democracy it is expected that if you have the right to vote you should make the effort to vote.



The election of May 2011 was part of the democratic process in Scotland when the people of Scotland were given the opportunity to choose their representatives. Our MSPs therefore have their position and power to make laws because of the consent of the voters.

At the election the **electorate** gave MSPs the **right** to **represent** them by making laws and taking decisions on their behalf.

## Scottish Parliament Election Results 2011

The table below shows the results for the election to the Parliament in May 2011.

Political Party	Constituency MSPs	Regional MSPs	Total MSPs	% of votes*	% of seats
Conservative	3	12	15	<b>13.15</b>	<b>11.6</b>
Green	0	2	2	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.6</b>
Labour	15	22	37	<b>29</b>	<b>28.7</b>
Liberal Democrats	2	3	5	<b>6.55</b>	<b>3.9</b>
Scottish National Party	53	16	69	<b>44.7</b>	<b>53.5</b>
Margo MacDonald	-	1	1	<b>0.45</b>	<b>0.8</b>
Others	0	0	0	<b>3.95</b>	-

\*Average over both constituency and regional ballots. Note that the Green Party did not stand in any constituency – they only had regional candidates. Similarly, Margo Macdonald was a regional candidate only.

As you can see from the table above the **percentage of votes** is closely related to the **percentage of seats** each party received.

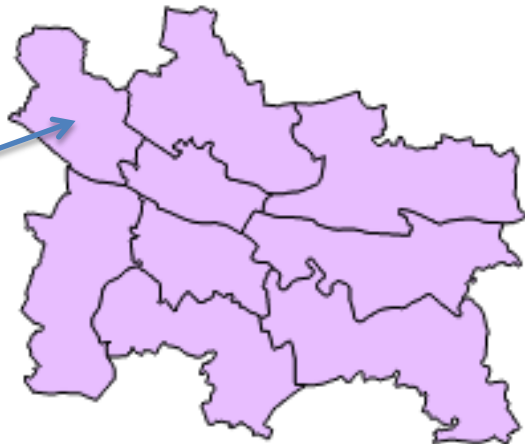
You can also see in the table that the SNP won a majority of seats in the Parliament. This is the first time in the Scottish Parliament that a single party has held a majority. After the 1999 and 2003 elections the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats formed a coalition in the Parliament. By joining forces they had a majority of MSPs and formed the Scottish Government. After the 2007 elections however, the SNP did not form a coalition with another party and formed a minority government instead. As they had less than half the MSPs the SNP had to seek the approval of the other parties over their policies in order to get them passed. This is sometimes called “consensus politics”.

Find out more about the [Scottish Government](http://www.scotland.gov.uk) at [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

## Voting in Practice – the results of a constituency and region

The Additional Member System used by the Scottish Parliament creates eight Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) to represent every person in Scotland. Here is how it worked for the constituency of Glasgow Anniesland in the region of Glasgow in the 2011 election.

Glasgow Anniesland Constituency and the 9 constituencies that make up the Glasgow region



### Constituency Vote

This vote was to elect the person who would represent the constituency of Glasgow Anniesland. The results in that election were as follows.

Candidate Name	Party	Votes Cast
Bill Butler	Scottish Labour	10, 322
Bill Kidd	Scottish National Party	<b>10, 329</b>
Marc Livingstone	Communist Party of Britain	256
Paul McGarry	Scottish Liberal Democrats	1,000
Matthew Taylor Smith	Scottish Conservative Party	2,011

As you can see in the above table Bill Kidd (SNP) won more votes than any other candidate in the constituency and therefore was elected as the constituency MSP for Glasgow Anniesland.





### **Regional Vote**

Glasgow Anniesland is a constituency in the region of Glasgow. Seven other MSPs were elected to represent the region. The second vote was for a political party and was counted from all the votes in the region using a mathematical formula that means the **total number of seats** a party receives in the election more accurately reflects the **percentage of votes** the party has received. Each political party draws up a list of candidates in order that they would like them to be elected. So if a person is number one on the list, they are more likely to be elected than someone who is number 7.

The **Labour Party** won 3 seats in the regional election.

Hanzala Malik, Drew Smith, Anne McTaggart were the first three people on the Labour Party's list.



The **Green Party** won 1 seat in the regional election. Patrick Harvie was the first person on the Green Party list.



The **Conservative Party** won 1 seat in the regional election. Ruth Davidson was the first person on the Conservative list.



The **SNP** won 2 seats. Humza Yousaf and Bob Doris were the first two people on the SNP list.



## **ONLINE ACTIVITY:**

### **Who represents you?**

Find out who was successful at the Scottish Parliament elections in your constituency and region by going to the Scottish Parliament's website [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk) click on the section MSPs and follow the instructions.

Copy the following table into your jotter and fill in the details from the information you find. This activity can also be done as a group activity to produce a wall chart of your constituency and regional MSPs who represent you. (You may want to add other information; such as the Committees they sit on, their addresses to write to them or any other interesting information.) What does your class feel is important to record about your MSPs?

### **THE CONSTITUENCY MSP**

The name of my constituency is:

The name of my constituency MSP is:

The Political Party my constituency MSP belongs to is:

The contact details for my constituency MSP are:

Parliament: \_\_\_\_\_ Constituency: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ .msp@scottish.parliament.uk

### **THE REGIONAL MSPs (you will need to do seven of these)**

The name of my region is:

The name of my regional MSP is:

The Political Party my regional MSP belongs to is:

The contact details for my regional MSP are:

Parliament: \_\_\_\_\_ Constituency: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ .msp@scottish.parliament.uk

## Key Points

- During the election campaign candidates employ a range of methods in order to try and influence as many people as they can to vote for them
- Elections allow people to choose who they want to represent them in the Parliament
- Not everyone has the right to vote, for example, people under 16 cannot vote
- Members of the Scottish Parliament are elected to represent the interests and concerns of all the people who live in their constituency or region.
- Elections to the Scottish Parliament use a system of voting called The Additional Member System.
- Voters have two votes, one for a constituency MSP and another to elect a list MSP to represent the region
- As a result of our voting system each person in Scotland has 8 people who represent them in the Scottish Parliament: 1 Constituency MSP and 7 Regional MSPs.
- Constituency and Regional MSPs have the same position and responsibilities in representing the people in their area.
- The Additional Member System is intended to provide a fairer share of seats in relation to votes.

## Summary of Election Results 1999-2011

	1999	2003	2007	2011
Turnout	58%	49%	52%	51%
<b>Result by Party</b>				
Conservative	18	18	17	15
Green	1	7	2	2
Labour	56	50	46	37
Liberal Democrats	17	17	16	5
SNP	35	27	47	69
Scottish Senior Citizens' Unity Party	0	1	0	0
Scottish Socialist Party	1	6	0	0
Independent	1	3	1	1