

Voting in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election

FAQ for New Scots

Can I vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election?

If you are a qualifying foreign citizen resident in Scotland and 16 or over, you can vote in the Scottish Parliament election. A qualifying foreign citizen is a citizen of another country who has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need such permission.

If you have questions about registering to vote you can contact your local electoral registration team. You can find their contact details by entering your postcode at electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information.

What does the Scottish Parliament do?

The Scottish Parliament makes laws in a number of areas, including health, education, training, housing, tourism and economic development. It also debates issues, conducts inquiries and holds the Scottish Government to account. It is made up of 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament or 'MSPs'.

Why should I register to vote?

If you want to have your say about the issues that matter to you and who you want to represent you in the Scottish Parliament, you need to register to vote.

How do I register to vote?

You can register online at gov.uk/register-to-vote. The deadline for registering to vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election is **midnight on Monday 19 April 2021**.

If you're unable to register online, you can register by post. Download a form at www.gov.uk/government/collections/register-to-vote-paper-forms.

If you don't have a National Insurance Number, you need to state this on your registration application then continue to submit it. Your Electoral Registration Officer will then contact you to ask you to provide documentary evidence to prove your identity.

Do I have to vote?

You do not have to vote if you don't want to. In all elections in Scotland, your vote belongs to you. You can decide whether or not you want to vote and who you want to vote for. It's illegal for anyone to influence you to vote a certain way against your will.

What happens when I go to vote?

When you arrive at the polling place a member of staff will ask for your name and address and then give you your ballot papers. You will then be directed to take your ballot papers into a polling booth where you can fill out your ballot paper.

On the first ballot paper you should mark the person you are voting for with an 'X'. On the second, you should mark the party or independent candidate you are voting for with an 'X'. Your ballot papers will look similar to these:

Constituency ballot paper

(Local area)

Election of Members of the Scottish Parliament for the [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX] Constituency	
Vote for only one candidate by putting a cross in the box next to your choice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Candidate A A Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate B B Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate C Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate D D Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate E Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>

Regional ballot paper

(Larger electoral area)

Election of Members of the Scottish Parliament for the [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX] Region	
Vote only once by putting a cross in the box next to your choice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
B Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
C Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate D Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate E Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>

You should then fold up your ballot papers and place them in the ballot box. If you need assistance at any point just ask a member of staff.

How do I decide who to vote for?

You should choose the candidate that you feel would be the best person to represent you. They might share your views or prioritise issues that you think are important.

The list of candidates standing at an election in each local area is usually available on your council's website a couple of weeks before the election.

Political parties publish a document outlining all of their policies and priorities before a Scottish Parliament election. This is called a manifesto. They will be available on political parties' websites. You can also ask candidates and their teams questions about issues that are important to you.

Where do I go to vote?

Everyone in your household who is registered to vote will receive a poll card before the election. Your poll card tells you where you need to go to vote.

Is my vote kept secret?

Yes. Your vote is yours alone and you do not have to tell anyone how you have voted. Once you have put your vote in the ballot box, or returned it by post, then it will be kept safe and secure until all the votes are ready to be counted.

All the ballot papers are mixed together at the count so no one will be able to tell how you have voted.

I am concerned about Covid-19, will it be safe to vote in person?

Polling places will be safe places to vote during Covid-19. A number of hygiene and distancing measures will be in place to help you stay safe at the polling place, including hand sanitiser, floor markings and face coverings.

If you would prefer to vote by post or for someone else to vote on your behalf, you need to be registered to vote first and then you can apply to vote by post or proxy. You should apply early in case your local electoral registration office needs to check any details with you. For more information or to get to a postal or proxy application form, go to electoralcommission.org.uk/voter or call our helpline on 0800 3 280 280.

Where can I find more information?

You can find more information about voting at electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

If you have questions about registering to vote you can contact your local Electoral Registration Officer. You can find their contact details entering your postcode here: electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information.