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The Information Centre

Scottish Parliament Fact sheet

Scottish Parliament Electoral System

8 June 2011

Parliamentary Business: Current Series

This fact sheet provides an overview of the electoral system used to elect Members of the Scottish Parliament. It includes an explanation of how the regional seats are allocated.



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Scottish Parliament general elections

The system used for Scottish Parliament general elections is a mixed member system comprising a first-past-the-post component, under which seats are allocated in single member constituencies, and a proportional representation (PR) component based on regional party lists. These two elements are then linked through a formula known as the d'Hondt method or system. This electoral system is known as the Additional Member System (AMS). Part 1 of the Scotland Act 1998 sets out the process by which Members are elected to the Scottish Parliament.

Under AMS, each voter has two votes. The first is used to vote for a named candidate for a geographically defined single member constituency. There are 73 constituencies (see the list at the end of this fact sheet) and candidates are elected via the same first-past-the-post system which is used for elections to Westminster. The second vote is used to elect an 'additional' member. This vote is cast for a political party or an independent candidate. There are 8 regions and 7 candidates are elected from each. In total, therefore, 56 'list' or 'regional' members are elected. Each person in Scotland, therefore, is represented by 1 constituency and 7 regional Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). The regional vote is intended to make representation in the Parliament more proportional in relation to share of the vote, taking into account the size of the regional vote for each party (or independent candidate) and the number of constituency seats won by each party (or independent candidate) in that region.

Regional lists

When casting their regional vote, voters choose between political parties rather than named individuals (except where individuals are standing on the regional list). Each registered political party standing in the regional ballot will have submitted a list of their candidates in order of the party's preference. The names on a list are in a fixed order. The first person on the list will take the first additional seat a party wins, the second person will take the second additional seat, and so on.

A candidate can stand both in a constituency and on a regional list. If they succeed in a constituency, this takes priority and their name is then removed from the regional list so they cannot be elected twice.

How the seats are allocated

The d'Hondt system allocates additional seats to political parties or independent candidates according to the number of regional votes cast for that party or independent candidate divided by the number of seats (constituency and regional) already gained in that region, plus one. The party with the highest total after this calculation gains one additional member. The divisor for that party, or individual, is then increased by one (because of the victory in the first round) and the calculation is repeated. Again, the party, or individual, with the highest total wins a seat. This process is repeated until all seven regional/list seats are allocated.

The example below shows how additional seats might be allocated in a region.

Party	Regional Votes	Constituency seats won	Divisor: constituency seats won +1	Step 1: regional votes divided by divisor	New divisor seats won (including additional seat) +1	Step 2: regional votes divided by new divisor	New divisor seats won (including additional seat) +1	Step 3: regional votes divided by new divisor	New divisor seats won (including additional seat) +1	Running total of seats won (constituency plus regional seats gained from steps 1-3)
A	62,000	2	3	20,666	3	20,666	3	20,666	3+1	3
B	64,000	4	5	12,800	5	12,800	5	12,800	5	4
C	60,000	1	2	30,000	2	30,000	2+1	20,000	3	2
D	38,000	0	1	38,000	1+1	19,000	2	19,000	2	1

Party	Regional Votes	New divisor seats won (including additional seats) +1	Step 4: regional votes divided by new divisor	New divisor seats won (including additional seat) +1	Step 5: regional votes divided by new divisor	New divisor seats won (including additional seat) +1	Step 6: regional votes divided by new divisor	New divisor seats won (including additional seat) +1	Final step: regional votes divided by new divisor	Total number of constituency and regional seats won
A	62,000	4	15,500	4	15,500	4	15,500	4+1	12,400	4
B	64,000	5	12,800	5	12,800	5	12,800	5	12,800	4
C	60,000	3	20,000	3+1	15,000	4	15,000	4	15,000	4
D	38,000	2	19,000	2	19,000	2+1	12,666	3	12,666	2

So the totals for the Parties after all seven additional regional seats have been allocated are:

	Party A	Party B	Party C	Party D
Votes on regional ballot	62,000	64,000	60,000	38,000
Constituencies won	2	4	1	0
Additional seats allocated	2	0	3	2
Total seats in the Parliament	4	4	4	2

In practice, political parties (or candidates standing as independents) will generally need to win at least 6-7% of the vote in a particular regional ballot in order to have a chance of gaining an additional seat.

The following table shows how this formula worked for the Lothian Region in the 2011 election. The results were taken from the [BBC website](#). N.B. the Green Party and the independent candidate Margo MacDonald stood only in the regional ballot so could not have won constituency seats.

	Labour	Conservative	SNP	Liberal Democrat	Green	Margo MacDonald
Votes on regional ballot	70,544	33,019	110,953	15,588	21,505	18,732
Constituencies won	1	0	8	0	0	0
Additional seats allocated	3	2	0	0	1	1
Total seats in the Parliament for Lothian	4	2	8	0	1	1

The following table shows how this formula worked for the North East Scotland Region in the 2011 election. The results were taken from the [BBC website](#).

	Labour	Conservative	SNP	Liberal Democrat
Votes on regional ballot	43,893	37,681	140,749	18,178
Constituencies won	0	0	10	0
Additional seats allocated	3	2	1	1
Total seats in the Parliament for North East Scotland	3	2	11	1

Filling vacancies

Part 1 of the Scotland Act 1998, sections 9 and 10, deals with the filling of vacancies in both constituency and regional seats.

If a vacancy occurs in a constituency seat, for example, through the death or resignation of the MSP, an election (known as a by-election) would be called to fill the vacancy. The presiding Officer fixes the date of the by-election.

If a vacancy occurs in a regional seat held by a political party, the vacancy will be filled by the next person in the party's list submitted at the time of the last general election. If there are no people left in the party's list, the vacancy will remain unfilled until the next Scottish Parliament general election.

If the vacancy occurs in the regional seat held by an independent candidate then the vacancy will remain unfilled until the next Scottish Parliament general election.

Scottish Parliament Regions and Constituencies

1. Central Scotland – 9 constituency seats

Airdrie and Shotts
Coatbridge and Chryston
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth
East Kilbride
Falkirk East
Falkirk West
Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse
Motherwell and Wishaw
Uddingston and Bellshill

2. Glasgow – 9 constituency seats

Glasgow Anniesland
Glasgow Cathcart
Glasgow Kelvin
Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn
Glasgow Pollok
Glasgow Provan
Glasgow Shettleston
Glasgow Southside
Rutherglen

3. Highlands and Islands – 8 constituency seats

Argyll and Bute
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross
Na h-Eileanan an Iar
Inverness and Nairn
Moray
Orkney Islands
Shetland Islands
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch

4. Lothian – 9 constituency seats

Almond Valley
Edinburgh Central
Edinburgh Eastern
Edinburgh Northern and Leith
Edinburgh Pentlands
Edinburgh Southern
Edinburgh Western
Linlithgow
Midlothian North and Musselburgh

5. Mid Scotland and Fife – 9 constituency seats

Clackmannanshire and Dunblane
Cowdenbeath
Dunfermline
Kirkcaldy
Mid Fife and Glenrothes
North East Fife
Perthshire North
Perthshire South and Kinross-shire
Stirling

6. North East Scotland – 10 constituency seats

Aberdeen Central
Aberdeen Donside
Aberdeen South and North Kincardine
Aberdeenshire East
Aberdeenshire West
Angus North and Mearns
Angus South
Banffshire and Buchan Coast
Dundee City East
Dundee City West

7. South Scotland – 9 constituency seats

Ayr
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley
Clydesdale
Dumfriesshire
East Lothian
Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire
Galloway and West Dumfries
Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley
Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale

8. West Scotland – 10 constituency seats

Clydebank and Milngavie
Cunninghame North
Cunninghame South
Dumbarton
Eastwood
Greenock and Inverclyde
Paisley
Renfrewshire North and West
Renfrewshire South
Strathkelvin and Bearsden

Constituencies, a-z

Aberdeen Central
Aberdeen Donside
Aberdeen South and North Kincardine
Aberdeenshire East
Aberdeenshire West
Airdrie and Shotts
Almond Valley
Angus North and Mearns
Angus South
Argyll and Bute
Ayr
Banffshire and Buchan Coast
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley
Clackmannanshire and Dunblane
Clydebank and Milngavie
Clydesdale
Coatbridge and Chryston
Cowdenbeath
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth
Cunninghame North
Cunninghame South
Dumbarton
Dumfriesshire
Dundee City East
Dundee City West
Dunfermline
East Kilbride
East Lothian
Eastwood
Edinburgh Central
Edinburgh Eastern
Edinburgh Northern and Leith
Edinburgh Pentlands
Edinburgh Southern
Edinburgh Western
Na h-Eileanan an Iar
Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire
Falkirk East
Falkirk West
Galloway and West Dumfries
Glasgow Anniesland
Glasgow Cathcart
Glasgow Kelvin
Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn
Glasgow Pollok
Glasgow Provan
Glasgow Shettleston
Glasgow Southside
Greenock and Inverclyde
Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse
Inverness and Nairn
Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley
Kirkcaldy
Linlithgow
Mid Fife and Glenrothes
Midlothian North and Musselburgh
Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale
Moray
Motherwell and Wishaw
North East Fife
Orkney Islands
Paisley
Perthshire North
Perthshire South and Kinross-shire
Renfrewshire North and West
Renfrewshire South
Rutherglen
Shetland Islands
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch
Stirling
Strathkelvin and Bearsden
Uddingston and Bellshill

Sources

About my vote: How do I vote?: Voting systems: *Scottish Parliament elections*. Available at: http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/how_do_i_vote/voting_systems/scottish_parliamentary_electio.aspx [Accessed 16 May 2011]

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Scotland Act 1998 [Latest version] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/46/contents> [Accessed 16 May 2011]

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RELATED FACT SHEETS

[State of the Parties: Session 4](#)

[MSPs by Constituency and Region \(233 KB pdf\)](#)

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