

Your Right to Vote in Scotland

A Simple Guide for Communities Ahead of
the May 2026 Elections



Why Voting Matters

Voting is one of the most powerful ways to have your voice heard.

It helps shape decisions about:

- Education and schools
- Housing and cost of living
- Healthcare services
- Jobs and opportunities
- Community safety

When you vote, you are helping decide the future of your community and Scotland.

Voting is a Human Right (CERD Perspective)

Under **the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)**, everyone has the right to participate in public life without discrimination.

This includes:

- The right to vote
- The right to be represented
- Equal access to decision-making

This means your vote should be:

- Accessible
- Fair
- Free from discrimination

CERD also recognises that governments and organisations must remove barriers so everyone can participate equally.

About the Scottish Parliament Election

- The Scottish Parliament election is on **Thursday 7 May 2026**
- There are **129 Members** of the **Scottish Parliament (MSPs)**
- Everyone in Scotland is represented by **8 MSPs**:
 - **1 constituency MSP** (represents your local area)
 - **7 regional MSPs** (represent your wider region)

MSPs make decisions on issues that affect your daily life, including health, education, and justice.

How Voting Works in Scotland

When you go to vote, you will receive two ballot papers:

1. Constituency Vote

You choose one person to represent your local area (your MSP)

2. Regional Vote

You choose a political party or independent candidate to represent your region

This system helps ensure both local representation and fair overall representation.

Who Can Vote in Scotland?

You can vote if you:

- Live in Scotland
- Are 16 years or older
- Are registered to vote
- Are:
 - A UK or Irish citizen
 - A Commonwealth citizen
 - An EU citizen or other foreign national with permission to live in the UK

Many people from ethnic minority communities are eligible but may not realise it.

Registering to Vote

You **must** be registered before you can vote.

- ✓ Takes about 5 minutes
- ✓ Done online
- ✓ You need your National Insurance number

Register here:

→ www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

Important Dates:

Register to vote by: **Monday, 20 April**

Election day: **Thursday, 7 May**

If you are not registered by the deadline, you cannot vote!

Ways to Vote

You can choose how to vote:

- In person at a polling station
- By post (postal vote)
- By proxy (someone votes for you)

Voting Routes

- *Go to Polling station* on **7 May 2026** =direct vote
- *Send Post* by **5pm Tuesday 21 April 2026**=**vote by mail by 10pm Thursday 2026**
- *Proxy application* by **5pm Tuesday 28 April 2026**. If you have an emergency and can't get to the polling station in person, apply **for proxy before 5pm on polling day, May 7**=someone votes for you.

Choose the option that works best for you.

Who Can I Vote For?

Each constituency and region will have different people and parties standing for election.

You can find out more about the different candidates in your area by entering your postcode here:

→ whocanivotefor.co.uk

Common Barriers - And What to Know

Some people may face challenges such as:

- Not knowing how the system works
- Language barriers
- Lack of information
- Feeling that their vote does not matter
- Previous negative experiences

These challenges are common, but they can be overcome with the right support.

Women and Voting

Women from ethnic minority communities may face additional barriers.

But:

- ❖ Your voice is important
- ❖ Your experiences matter
- ❖ Your participation strengthens democracy

When women vote and participate, communities become more inclusive and stronger.

Your Vote = Your Power

Voting is not just a process, it is:

Your voice

Your influence

Your opportunity to shape your future

If communities do not vote, their needs may not be reflected in decisions.

How Communities Can Support Each Other

- Share information about voting
- Help others register
- Encourage family and friends
- Create safe spaces for discussion
- Support first-time voters

Community support increases participation and inclusion.

Take Action Today

- ✓ Check if you are eligible
- ✓ Register to vote
- ✓ Encourage others
- ✓ Be ready for election day

→ www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Final Message

Your voice matters.

Your vote matters.

Your participation matters.

Do not miss your opportunity to be heard this May.