



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

SPICe

The Information Centre  
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

## SPICe Fact Sheet

## Duilleagan Fiosrachaidh SPICe

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### Scottish Parliament electoral system

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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.

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## Scottish Parliament general elections

There are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) - 73 constituency MSPs and 56 regional MSPs.

General elections to elect MSPs to the Parliament are held every five years, as provided for in the [Scottish Elections \(Reform\) Act 2020](#).

The system used for Scottish Parliament general elections is known as the Additional Member System (AMS). It is also sometimes referred to as a "mixed member system" or as "mixed member proportional representation". This means that electors (people eligible to vote) have two votes.

A voter's first vote is for their constituency MSP. A constituency MSP represents one constituency and is elected using the first past the post system. This means that the candidate with the most votes wins. A list of all constituencies can be found on the Scottish Parliament [website](#)

A person's second vote is for a party or independent candidate. Regional MSPs represent one of the eight regions. Each region elects seven regional MSPs, who are elected under the additional member system, which is explained in more detail below. A map is provided at the end of this fact sheet which shows the Scottish Parliament regions.

## Regional lists

When casting their regional vote, voters choose between political parties rather than named individuals (except where individuals are standing as independent candidates 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 seat won in the first round) and the calculation is repeated. The starting point for the

calculation is again the total number of regional votes. The party, or individual, with the highest total wins a seat. This process is repeated until all seven regional seats are allocated.

The example below shows how the calculation works. It shows how additional seats are allocated in a region for the first four rounds.

- In the first round, the total number of votes for each party or independent candidate on the regional list is divided by the number of constituency seats won by that party (if an independent candidate wins a constituency seat they are removed from the regional list) in the region plus one.
- The calculation is carried out for each party and the party with the highest number of votes after the calculation wins a regional seat.
- The process starts again for the second round, and this time the total number of regional votes for a party is divided by the total number of seats won by that party in the region (constituency and regional) plus one.
- The calculation is repeated until seven regional seats have been allocated. Each time the starting figure is the total regional votes for a party and the divisor is the total number of seats won by that party in the region plus one.

Party	Total Regional votes	Divisor the divisor is the total number of seats (constituency + any won in region from previous rounds) + 1				Who won? The winner in each round is the party with the highest number of votes after each calculation
		Constituency seats won	Regional seats won	Add 1 to the divisor	Total divisor	
Round 1						
A	62,000	2	-	1	3	20,666
B	64,000	4	-	1	5	12,800
C	60,000	1	-	1	2	30,000
D	38,000	0	-	1	1	<b>38,000</b> <b>Winner</b>
Round 2						
A	62,000	2	0	1	3	20,666
B	64,000	4	0	1	5	12,800
C	60,000	1	0	1	2	<b>30,000</b> <b>Winner</b>
D	38,000	0	1	1	2	19,000
Round 3						
A	62,000	2	0	1	3	<b>20,666</b> <b>Winner</b>
B	64,000	4	0	1	5	12,800
C	60,000	1	1	1	3	20,000
D	38,000	0	1	1	2	19,000
Round 4						
A	62,000	2	1	1	4	15,500
B	64,000	4	0	1	5	12,800
C	60,000	1	1	1	3	<b>20,000</b> <b>Winner</b>
D	38,000	0	1	1	2	19,000

**After 4 rounds the number of Regional seats won by each party are:**

Party A - 1    Party B - 0    Party C - 2    Party D - 1

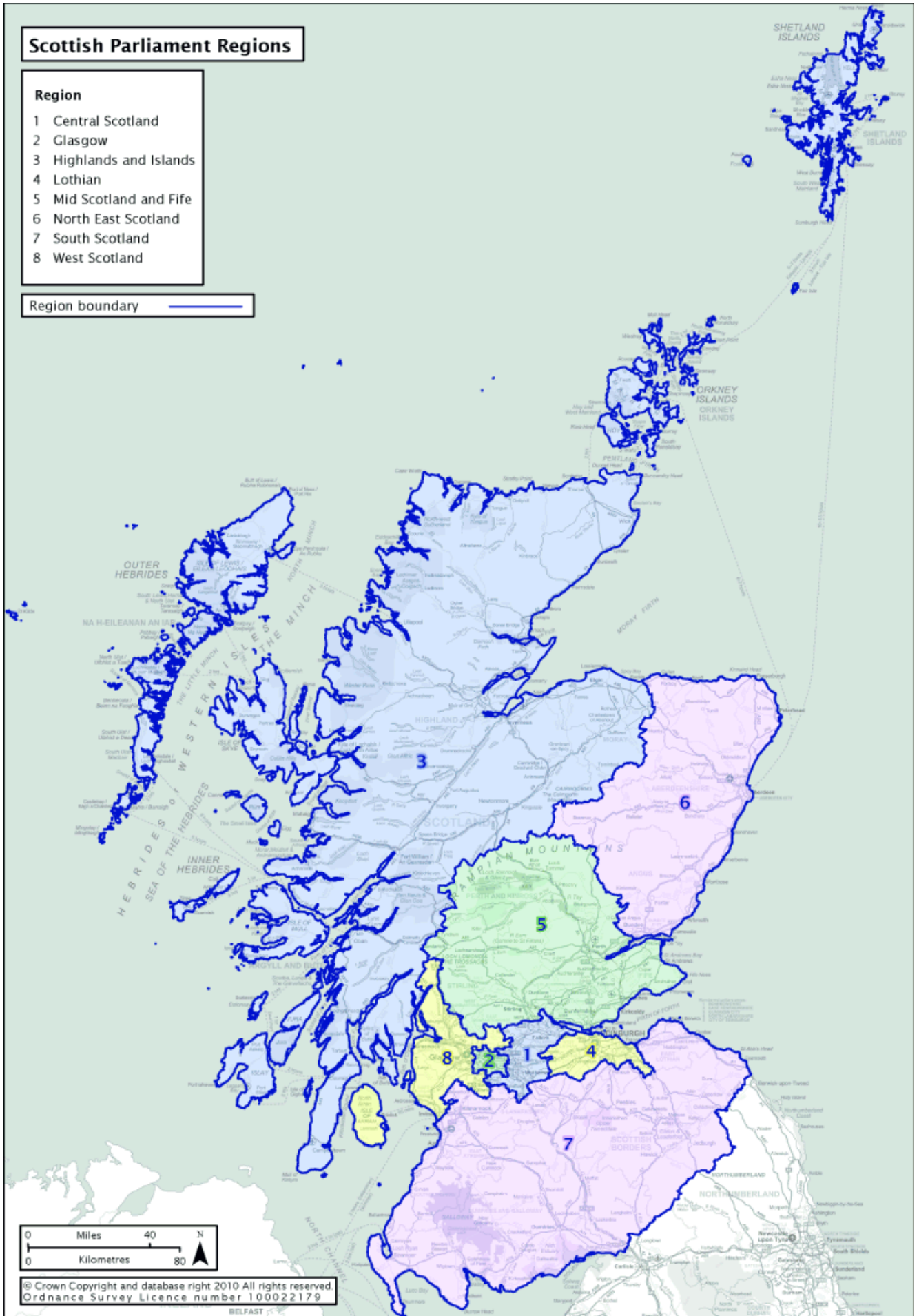
## Filling vacancies

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.



## About SPICe

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