Statistical bulletin

Electoral statistics, UK: December 2020

Electoral registrations for Parliamentary and local government elections as recorded in the electoral registers published on 1 December 2020 for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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1 . Main points

- The number of both Parliamentary and local government electoral registrations fell in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between December 2019 and December 2020, but increased in Scotland.
- The total number of UK Parliamentary electoral registrations fell by 652,128 (1.4%) between March 2020 and December 2020; the number in March 2020 was the highest number ever recorded.
- In December 2020, there were 46,906,270 Parliamentary electoral registrations and 49,063,707 local government electoral registrations.

Statistician's comment

"The number of electoral registrations in March 2020 were the highest ever recorded, showing the full uplift from the December 2019 General Election. But they fell by December 2020, with the local and mayoral elections due in 2020 postponed until 2021, because of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Oliver Dormon, Centre for Ageing and Demography, Office for National Statistics.

Follow the ONS Centre for Ageing and Demography on Twitter @RichPereira_ONS

2 . UK Parliamentary electoral registrations

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has previously published figures for electoral registrations for March 2020. This bulletin provides figures for December 2020.

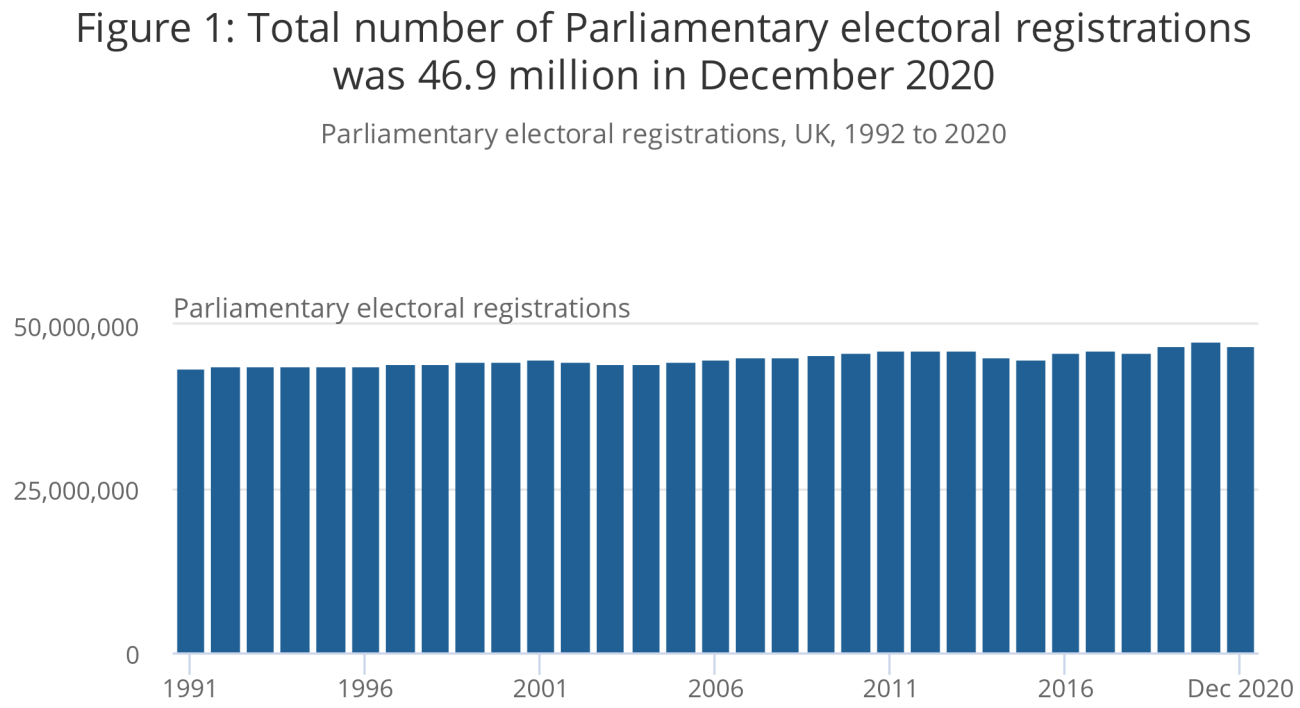
The total number of Parliamentary electoral registrations in December 2020, and the percentage change between 2019 and 2020 in the UK and constituent countries were:

- UK - 46,906,270, a decrease of 0.4%
- England - 39,298,264, a decrease of 0.5%
- Wales - 2,304,640, a decrease of 0.4%
- Scotland - 4,012,429, an increase of 0.6%
- Northern Ireland - 1,290,937, a decrease of 0.4%

The number of electoral registrations reached its highest level in March 2020 but fell between March 2020 and December 2020 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Total number of Parliamentary electoral registrations was 46.9 million in December 2020

Parliamentary electoral registrations, UK, 1992 to 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics, National Records of Scotland, Electoral Office for Northern Ireland – Electoral Statistics

Notes:

1. Electoral registrations at the time of general elections from 1955 to 2001 can be found in historical editions of the Annual Abstract of Statistics.

While there was an increase of 1% in the number of UK Parliamentary electoral registrations between December 2019 and March 2020, there was a fall of 1.4% between March 2020 and December 2020. The number of Parliamentary electoral registrations is usually higher at the time of general elections. The number of registrations in March 2020 shows the full uplift from December 2019. There were no elections in 2020, as the local elections due in May 2020 were postponed until 2021 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The interactive map in Figure 2 shows the annual percentage change in Parliamentary electoral registrations for the last five years across the UK.

Figure 2: 56% of parliamentary constituencies saw a decrease in electoral registrations across the UK in the year to December 2020

Interactive map showing annual change in Parliamentary electoral registrations across the UK

Download the data

3 . Local government electoral registrations

The total number of local government electoral registrations in December 2020 and percentage change between 2019 and 2020 in the UK and constituent countries were:

- UK - 49,063,707, a decrease of 0.2%
- England - 41,186,293, a decrease of 0.3%
- Wales - 2,342,478, a decrease of 0.3%
- Scotland - 4,208,923, an increase of 1.0%
- Northern Ireland - 1,326,013, a decrease of 0.3%

With the exception of Scotland, the decrease in electoral registrations in the year to December 2020 followed an increase in the previous year.

4 . Overseas electors

The total number of overseas electors on the electoral register in December 2020 was 170,196 in England, and 5,169 in Wales, a decrease of 8.3% and 25.8% since December 2019, respectively. The decrease in the number of overseas electors in 2020 follows the large increases in 2019, which were associated with the 2019 general election.

5 . Electors opted out of the open register

The number of electors opting out of the open register in England and Wales in the year to December 2020 was 27,689,071, an increase of 1.2% from the previous year. Further information on opting out of the open register is available.

6 . Anonymous electors

The number of anonymous electoral registrations in England and Wales decreased by 5.2% from 3,352 to 3,178 in the year to December 2020. The number of anonymous electoral registrations in England has almost doubled since December 2011. Further information on anonymous electors is available (PDF, 112KB).

7 . EU citizens

In the year to December 2020, there were 2,100,556 (non-UK) EU citizens on the electoral register for local government elections in England and Wales, or 4.8% of the total number of local government electors. The number of EU citizens increased both in England (2.1%) and in Wales (0.7%) in the year to December 2020.

8 . Electoral statistics data

Electoral statistics, UK
Dataset | Released 24 May 2021
Total number of local government and Parliamentary electoral registrations (including the number of attainers) registered to vote in the UK.

Overseas, anonymous, opted-out, EU citizens and Parliamentary electors by local authority
Dataset | Released 24 May 2021
Annual data on certain sectors of the electoral system in the UK, including overseas and anonymous electors, those who have opted out of the electoral system, EU citizens, and Parliamentary electors by their local authority.

9 . Glossary

Annual canvass

By law the register of electors is checked each year by sending a household enquiry form to every household in the council area. This is known as the annual canvass. The purpose of the canvass is to identify everyone who should be on the electoral register. This means identifying citizens who should be registered but are currently not, as well as identifying electors who are no longer at a property and should therefore be removed from the register. A revised version of the electoral register must be published by 1 December, following the conclusion of the annual canvass.

Electoral register

The electoral register is a list of all people who are registered to vote in elections and referendums. The creation and maintenance of the electoral register is the responsibility of local electoral registration officers.

Electoral registrations

The number of registrations on the electoral register. It should be noted that individuals who have more than one address may register in more than one place and that not everyone eligible to vote is registered to vote. Additionally, not everyone usually resident in the UK is entitled to vote.

Parliamentary electors

The total number of Parliamentary electors consists of residential qualifiers, attainers and overseas electors. Further information on who can vote in different UK elections can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Local government electors

The total number of local government electors consists of residential qualifiers and attainers, including peers and EU citizens. Local government areas are unitary authorities, London boroughs, and district councils in England; unitary authorities in Wales; and council areas in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Further information on who can vote in different UK elections can be found on GOV.UK.

Attainer

England and Northern Ireland

Attainer is the term used to describe a person who attains the age of 18 years during the normal currency of the register (for, example, after 1 December 2020 but before 1 December 2021), and is entitled to vote at an election held on or after their 18th birthday.

Wales

Following the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, which was passed by Welsh Parliament in 2020, 16- and 17-year-olds are now eligible to vote in Senedd Cymru and local government elections in Wales. Attainers, are therefore those who will reach the age of 16 years during the currency of the register.

Scotland

As a result of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill, which was passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2015, 16- and 17-year-olds are now eligible to vote in local government (and Scottish Parliament) elections in Scotland. The figures for attainers in the Scottish Parliamentary and local government electorate for 1 December 2015 to 1 December 2019 are therefore those who reached the age of 16 years during the currency of the register. From December 2020, attainers include anyone old enough to register, which would also include 14- and 15-year-olds.

Overseas electors

A UK citizen living abroad who applied for a vote, having been registered to vote as a resident in the UK in the last 15 years. To qualify as an overseas elector, the person should no longer be living in the UK but must previously have been resident here and included in the electoral register (unless they were too young to register). They are registered in the same Parliamentary constituency as before they went abroad.

Anonymous electors

Anonymous registration is available to people meeting certain statutory requirements where, if their name or address were listed on the electoral register, their safety would be at risk. Any other person in the same household as a person at risk is also qualified to register as an anonymous elector.

Opted-out electors

There are two versions of the electoral register - the full register and the "open register". The full register is used only for elections and for preventing and detecting crime. The open register is available to anyone who wants to buy a copy, for example, marketing companies. Electors can opt out of the open register.

EU citizens

EU citizens (excluding British, Irish, Cypriot, and Maltese citizens who are included in previous categories) are included in the "European and local government electorate" but are not eligible to vote in Westminster Parliamentary elections.

10 . Measuring the data

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the Electoral statistics QMI.

For England and Wales, electoral statistics are taken from data supplied to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by local electoral registration officers. Data for Scotland are similarly collected by National Records of Scotland (NRS). Data for Northern Ireland are collected by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI). The ONS collates these statistics for the UK using the data supplied by NRS and EONI. The RPF29 form that underpins this publication does not collect data on electoral registrations by age, sex, citizenship or any other characteristics.

There are at present 650 Westminster Parliamentary constituencies in the UK, made up of 533 in England, 59 in Scotland, 40 in Wales and 18 in Northern Ireland. These boundaries came into effect at the May 2010 General Election. The typical size of constituencies differs between the constituent countries of the UK. It is possible in certain circumstances for someone to be lawfully registered to vote at more than one address. This could include, for example, students who have different home and term-time addresses.

Electoral statistics are available for the two main groups of voters:

- Parliamentary electors - those entitled to vote in Westminster Parliamentary elections
- local government electors - those entitled to vote in local government elections

The difference in who is entitled to vote at Parliamentary and local elections depends largely on residence and citizenship conditions. Local government electors, for example, include those EU citizens resident in the UK who are not entitled to vote in Westminster Parliamentary elections, while Parliamentary electors include British citizens resident overseas who are not entitled to vote in local government elections.

The local government electorate in Scotland and Wales includes 16- and 17-year-olds who are ineligible to vote in European elections. Further information on who can vote in different UK elections can be found on GOV.UK.

Publication of data for 2 March 2020

The collection of Electoral Statistics for 2 March 2020 was published to support the 2023 Review of Parliamentary constituencies. Ordinarily, the boundary reviews would have used statistics relating to the regular December reference date, but in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill was amended to allow the independent boundary reviews to be based on verified versions of electoral registers from 2 March 2020 and not from 1 December 2020.

11 . Strengths and limitations

Quality

Electoral statistics represent the most accurate count possible of the number of people on electoral registers each year. They are subject to full quality assurance procedures, are reliable and provide comparable data across the UK constituent countries.

The electoral statistics we publish are used by Boundary Commissions, the Electoral Commission and central government to help with the improvement of electoral policies and for statutory reviews of Parliamentary constituency boundaries. The statistics are also of interest to Members of Parliament and the general public.

12 . Related links

The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission conducts research on voter registration, as well as providing information and guidance to both electoral registration officers and the general public. Reports and results relating to past elections are available on their website.

Other electoral statistics produced for areas in the UK are as follows.

England

Statistics for Parliamentary electors for electoral wards in England from 2010 to 2019are available from the Boundary Commission for England. These statistics are produced from data collected from electoral registration officers by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Wales

Statistics for Senedd Cymru for Wales electors by Assembly constituencies are published by the Welsh Government. Those electors who are eligible to vote in local government elections in Wales are eligible to vote in Senedd Cymru for Wales elections. These statistics are produced from data collected from electoral registration officers by the ONS.

The data are available from StatsWales (please note their explanation giving details of the impact of boundary changes in some areas).

Scotland

Electoral statistics for Scotland are produced and published by National Records of Scotland (NRS) and cover Scottish Parliamentary constituencies, Scottish regions, and electoral wards.

The data are available from the electoral statistics section of the NRS website.

Northern Ireland

Electoral statistics for Northern Ireland are produced and published by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) and cover Parliamentary and local government electorates at electoral ward level.

The data are available from the electoral statistics section of the EONI website