

Methodology Note on Electoral Statistics

April 2015

1. Introduction

Electoral statistics are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and published for the UK and its constituent countries, local government areas and parliamentary constituencies. They provide annual counts of the number of people who are registered on electoral rolls for the two main classifications of voters, the 'Parliamentary Electorate' and the 'European and Local Government Electorate'.

The [latest UK statistics](#) available are for 2014. The reference date is usually 1 December each year, however:

- owing to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in November 2012, the publication date of the 2012 electoral register was 16 October in England and Wales (excluding London);
- due to preparations for the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER), the publication date of the 2013 electoral register was 17 February 2014 in England and 10 March 2014 in Scotland and Wales. The register for Northern Ireland was published on the usual date of 1 December 2013.
- the publication date of the 2014 electoral register was 1 December 2014 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland but 2 March 2015 in Scotland (due to the introduction of IER being delayed until after the Scottish Independence Referendum in September 2014).

This paper provides information on the criteria required in order to be eligible to vote, the data collection procedures followed by local Electoral Registration Officers (ERO), the methods used by ONS to collate this data and quality assurance processes. ONS produces electoral statistics for England and Wales as well as national totals for the UK using statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland, produced by National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) respectively.

Electoral statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland are also available from the links below:

[Scotland](#)
[Northern Ireland](#)

2. Definitions

Electoral statistics show the number of people listed on the electoral registers published on 1 December of the reference year.

In general, to be included in the electoral registers in Great Britain a person must be:

- resident at an address in Great Britain on the date of application
- a British citizen, qualifying Commonwealth citizen¹, citizen of the Republic of Ireland or citizen of another member state of the European Union
- 18 years of age or older or attain voting age during the period of 12 months beginning next 1 December
- not subject to any legal incapacity to vote

In Northern Ireland a person must be:

- resident in Northern Ireland for at least 3 months before application
- a British citizen, qualifying Commonwealth citizen, citizen of the Republic of Ireland or citizen of another member state of the European Union
- 17 years of age or older
- not subject to any legal incapacity to vote

Statistics are produced for two main classifications of voters, the 'Parliamentary Electorate' and the 'European and Local Government Electorate'.

- Parliamentary electors are individuals who are entitled to vote in Westminster parliamentary elections
- European and local government electors are individuals who are entitled to vote in European and local government elections

2.1 Residence qualification

For England, Wales and Scotland the residence qualification requires a person to be normally living at a given address on the qualifying date, even if temporarily absent. People having more than one place of residence, such as students, may therefore be included on more than one register. However, they are only entitled to vote in one constituency in a general election.

¹ A qualifying Commonwealth citizen is a Commonwealth citizen who does not require leave to remain in the UK, or who currently has valid leave to remain.

Certain categories of electors have special provisions that entitle them to register to vote despite not meeting the residence requirement. This includes overseas electors (electors who are British citizens and were previously resident in the UK and included in the electoral register within the previous 15 years) who are only included in the 'Parliamentary Electorate'.

2.2 Citizenship qualification

British citizens, Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland are eligible to vote in any election if they also meet all other qualifying requirements. They are therefore included in both the 'Parliamentary Electorate' and the 'European and Local Government Electorate'.

European Union citizens (excluding British, Irish, Cypriot and Maltese citizens who are included above) are included in the 'European and Local Government Electorate' but are not eligible to vote in Westminster parliamentary elections.

2.3 Age qualification

A person who attains the age of 18 during the currency of the register, and is entitled to vote at an election on or after his or her eighteenth birthday is known as an 'Attainer'. Attainers are included in the electoral statistics.

2.4 Legal incapacity to vote

Legal incapacity to vote applies to those persons who are disqualified from voting by law. Categories include:

- members of the House of Lords (disqualified from the 'Parliamentary Electorate' only)
- detained convicted prisoners
- offenders detained in a mental hospital

3. Data collection procedures

Electoral statistics are based on data collected for the production and maintenance of the electoral registers in each local government area within the United Kingdom. The published annual register for the 1 December each year is held by local councils in England, Wales and Scotland and by the Electoral Office in Northern Ireland. The register provides information about electors within the UK.

Data is collected by the respective Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) of each local authority area using three main methods.

3.1 Annual canvass

In England, Wales and Scotland, EROs conduct an annual canvass of their local area to identify all people who are eligible to vote in elections in the UK. A form is sent to every domestic address each year to confirm who is living there and anyone who is not already registered to vote will be sent an invitation to do so.

In 2014, the annual canvass was temporarily replaced by a transition process to introduce a new voter registration system called Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

The last annual canvass was carried out in Northern Ireland in 2006.

3.2 Rolling registration

In England, Wales and Scotland a rolling registration system was introduced in 2001 whereby register alterations are made on a monthly basis outside the usual annual canvass period. Successful applications for registration received during the canvass period will be applied to the revised register published by 1 December.

3.3 Continuous registration

In Northern Ireland, a system of continuous registration was introduced in 2007 which provides monthly updates to the electoral register. A revised register, incorporating all the updates, is published each year on 1 December.

4. Methods and quality assurance

4.1 Methods

In England and Wales, ONS request data on the numbers of parliamentary and European and local government electors as at 1 December of the reference year from the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) of each local authority area.

Raw data counts supplied to ONS by each ERO are quality assured and any unusual or unexpected figures are queried with the ERO before the data are used in the compilation of the statistics. The counts of electors and attainers are aggregated to produce electoral statistics by the required geographies.

Missing or incomplete returns are followed up by ONS. If no return is received prior to publication, either data from the previous year are used or the data is compiled from data held by the relevant Boundary Commission. A footnote against the published table identifies these areas to users.

ONS produce UK level electoral statistics using data for Scotland and Northern Ireland, produced by National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Electoral Office for Northern

Ireland (EONI) respectively. NRS and EONI follow similar procedures and methods as those used by ONS for the England and Wales statistics.

Electoral statistics are usually published annually at the end of February each year, approximately three months after the reference date of 1 December. However, due to the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER), the 2014 electoral statistics for Scotland have a reference date of 2 March 2015.

4.2 Quality assurance

In addition to the quality assurance carried out during the compilation process, the statistics are reviewed by the boundary commissions for England, Wales and Scotland prior to publication. They provide quality assurance based on their expert knowledge and against data held by them at smaller geographical levels.

4.3 Statistical disclosure control

Statistical disclosure control methodology is not necessary as the counts of electors at Local Authority and parliamentary constituency level are large enough to ensure that information attributable to an individual can not be identified in the published outputs. The [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#) and specifically the Principle on Confidentiality set out practices for how we protect data from being disclosed.

4.4 Geography

Electoral statistics are published for local government areas and Westminster parliamentary constituencies in the UK. These geographic areas are subject to boundary change over time. The statistics are published using the geographic boundaries that were in place in the reference year. In some cases where boundary changes have occurred, electoral statistics have been published for both old and new boundary sets to aid users in comparing statistics across time.

5. Publication timing and history

The table below sets out the publication history of the Electoral Statistics, giving the dates and reasons for any revisions that have been made.

Table 1: Electoral Statistics publication history

Year	Reference Date	Release Edition	Published	Notes
1999	16 Feb	1	pre-Feb 2002	Included with 16 th Feb 2000 data
2000	16 Feb	1	pre-Feb 2002	
2001	16 Feb	1	pre-Feb 2002	Local government electors only
2001	1 Dec	1	Feb 2002	
2002	1 Dec	1	Feb 2003	
2003	1 Dec	1	Feb 2004	
2004	1 Dec	1	24 Feb 2005	
2005	1 Dec	1	23 Feb 2006	
2006	1 Dec	1	22 Feb 2007	Amended July 2009 – Welsh boundaries
2007	1 Dec	1	28 Feb 2008	Amended July 2009 – Welsh boundaries
2008	1 Dec	1	26 Feb 2009	Correction issued February 2012
2009	1 Dec	1	25 Feb 2010	Correction issued February 2012
2010	1 Dec	1	24 Feb 2011	Correction issued March 2011
2011	1 Dec	1	22 Feb 2012	
2012	16 Oct/1 Dec	1	28 Feb 2013	
2013	1 Dec 2013/ 17 Feb 2014/ 10 Mar 2014	1	1 May 2014	Later publication date due to delay in publication of electoral registers.
2014	1 Dec	1	26 Feb 2015	England, Wales and Northern Ireland only
2014	1 Dec 2014/ 2 Mar 2015	1	16 Apr 2015	

Electoral statistics for 1997 and 1998 are not published on the ONS website but are available on request. Please see the contact information in section 6 below.

6. Further information and contacts

Further information on electoral statistics is available on the ONS website at the following links:

[Electoral statistics – data tables](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Quality and Methodology Information](#)

For user feedback and further information, please contact the Population Estimates Unit:

Email: pop.info@ons.gov.uk

Telephone: 01329 444661

Related Links:

[Electoral Commission](#)

Boundary Commissions:

[England](#)

[Wales](#)

[Scotland](#)

[Northern Ireland](#)