Guide to Parliamentary Constituencies in the UK (September 2014)

This guide has been created to help users of parliamentary constituency statistics understand the UK electoral system, both in the UK parliament (Westminster) and the devolved parliaments (in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). It explains the geographic areas that are used to elect members, and for which data are produced. It also covers the boundary review process which can lead to significant changes to the boundaries of the areas used for voting. This is important for users of parliamentary statistics, especially when making comparisons over time.

Westminster

Westminster parliamentary constituencies are the areas used to elect Members of Parliament to the House of Commons, the primary legislative chamber of the UK, using a ‘first past the post’ system. At the last general election (May 2010) there were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Westminster parliamentary constituencies in the UK</th>
<th>link to map (GB only)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>650 in the UK, 533 in England, 40 in Wales, 59 in Scotland and 18 in Northern Ireland</td>
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The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 requires a general election to be held on the first Thursday in May every 5 years\(^1\). The next general election is scheduled to take place on 7 May 2015.

The Boundary Commissions for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are responsible for reporting to Parliament regularly on necessary changes to constituency boundaries. This can be due to population change (the aim is to maintain each constituency at broadly similar numbers of voters) or changes in local government boundaries.

The Boundary Review planned for completion in October 2013 was not completed\(^2\). As a result, the parliamentary constituency boundaries that will be used at the next general election will be the same as those used in 2010. The next Boundary Review will be held between 2016 and 2018 and is expected to make significant changes to the constituency boundaries ahead of the 2020 general election.

National Assembly for Wales

The National Assembly for Wales was created by the Government of Wales Act 1998, with the first elections taking place the following year. Elections normally take place every four years but the date of the next election (5 May 2016) will be five years after the last one to avoid a clash with the date of the next UK general election. At the last election (May 2011) there were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Assembly for Wales Constituencies and Electoral Regions</th>
<th>link to maps</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40 in Wales and 5 Electoral Regions</td>
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There are 60 Assembly Members (AMs). 40 are elected directly from single member constituencies, while the remaining 20 are elected from the electoral regions using a proportional system. The voting system is explained in more detail [here](#).

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\(^1\) There are two exceptions: the first is if the Prime Minister loses the support of the House of Commons (a vote of no confidence); the second is if two thirds of the House of Commons vote for an early election.

\(^2\) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21235169](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21235169)
The boundaries of the National Assembly for Wales constituencies were originally aligned to the Westminster parliamentary constituencies in Wales. However, in December 2011 the Parliamentary Constituencies and Assembly Electoral Regions (Wales) (Amendment) Order made changes to some Assembly constituencies and regions but not Westminster parliamentary constituencies. The differences between the two boundaries sets are minor and affect 7 constituencies.

The Boundary Commission for Wales is responsible for reviewing Assembly constituencies and regions.

**Scottish Parliament**

The first election to the Scottish Parliament was in 6 May 1999. Elections normally take place every four years but the date of the next election (5 May 2016) will be five years after the last one to avoid a clash with the date of the next UK general election. At the last election (May 2011) there were:

- 73 Scottish Parliamentary Constituencies and 8 Electoral Regions - [link to maps]

There are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). 73 are elected directly from single member constituencies, while the remaining 56 are elected from the 8 electoral regions using a proportional system. The voting system is described in more detail [here](#).

The boundaries of the Scottish Parliament constituencies were originally aligned to the Westminster parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, with the exception of Orkney and Shetland which are separate constituencies in the Scottish Parliament. However, the Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004 paved the way for the link to be broken in 2005, when the number of Westminster parliamentary constituencies in Scotland reduced from 72 to 59.

The Boundary Commission for Scotland is responsible for reviewing constituencies and regions for the Scottish Parliament. The first boundary review recommendations in July 2007 were implemented for the May 2011 Scottish Parliament election.

**Northern Ireland Assembly**

The new Northern Ireland Assembly was elected on 25 June 1998 under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Elections) Act 1998. The date of the next election for the Northern Ireland Assembly is 5 May 2016, a change to a five year fixed term to avoid a clash with the date of the next UK general election and to align with Westminster parliamentary elections. At the last election (May 2011) there were:

- 18 Northern Ireland Assembly Areas - [link to map]

The Assembly currently has 108 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), with six members elected from each constituency. The Single Transferable Vote system used to elect members is described in more detail [here](#).

The 18 Assembly Areas are identical to the boundaries used for Westminster parliamentary elections in Northern Ireland. The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland is responsible for reviewing Northern Ireland parliamentary constituencies.