

Elections: who does what

This document is for people who want to know the basics about elections, the roles of different organisations involved in elections and where to find more information.

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Translations and other formats

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What is an election?

The UK is a democracy in which MPs, councillors, MEPs and other elected representatives are chosen in free and fair elections.

An election is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office by voting.

Voting is your chance to help to choose the people who run the country, represent us in Europe and your local area. You can register to vote if you are:

- 16 years old or over (you can vote once you are 18) and
- a British citizen or
- an Irish, Commonwealth or European Union citizen who is resident in the UK

Voting is not compulsory. Some of the elections that happen regularly in this country are:

- the UK Parliament
- Scottish Parliament
- National Assembly for Wales
- Northern Ireland Assembly
- European Parliament
- Local elections
- Mayoral elections in England
- Elections to the Greater London Authority (GLA)
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections

To find out whether there are elections in your area this year, see this link:

[Forthcoming elections](#)

Who gets involved at elections?

Voters

Voters choose by casting their vote at elections, a candidate, a selection of candidates, or a political party. To vote in any UK elections, voters have to be on the electoral register. An electoral register is the list of everyone who is registered to vote in a local area. Voting gives individuals a say on who represents them on their local council, in the UK Parliament and in Europe and on important issues that affect them.

For more information about voting see: <http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/>

Political parties

A political party is an organisation that seeks to influence, or control government policy, usually by nominating candidates and trying to win elections and hold public office. Parties choose candidates to represent them at elections.

The Commission registers political parties in the UK. For more information on setting up a political party, see this document:

[Introduction to registering a political party](#)

Independent candidates

An independent candidate is a person who wishes to stand for election and is not chosen by a political party.

The Returning Officer

Elections are run by the Returning Officer, who works for the local authority. The Returning Officer is the official who is responsible for how the election is run and declares the result.

The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. We regulate political funding and spending and set standards for well-run elections. We:

- register political parties
- make sure people understand and follow the rules on party and election finance
- publish details of where parties and candidates get money from and how they spend it
- set the standards for electoral registration and running elections and report on how well this is done
- make sure people understand that it is important to register to vote, and know how to vote

The Electoral Commission produces guidance for candidates and parties standing for election.

Election Rules

There are legal rules governing elections, how they are run and counting votes.

There are also rules about standing for elections and raising and spending money on your campaign.

We provide guidance for political parties, candidates and other organisations on how to comply with the rules. If you want to know more, visit us at www.electoralcommission.org.uk