



# MEMO+<sup>+</sup>



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## Minority Ethnic Matters Overview

*MEMO+ is an occasional series of briefing papers on topics of interest to minority ethnic communities in Scotland. It is produced by the [Scottish Council of Jewish Communities](#) in partnership with [BEMIS - empowering Scotland's ethnic and cultural minority communities](#), and is supported by the Scottish Government.*

# Voting in the Scottish Parliamentary Election and the referendum on the voting system used to elect MPs to the UK Parliament

**Scottish Parliament elections will take place on 5 May 2011.**

It is important that as many people as possible vote so that the Scottish Parliament and Government will reflect the views of people in Scotland.

**A referendum will also take place on 5 May 2011 to decide whether to change the voting system used to elect MPs to the UK Parliament.**

If your name is on the Electoral Register you will automatically receive a polling card and be able to vote in both the Scottish Parliament election and UK Parliament referendum. If your name is not on the Register you should contact the local Electoral Registration Officer in your area as soon as possible.

If you are unable to go to the polling station on 5 May you can either vote by post or name another person to vote on your behalf at the polling station (voting by proxy). Contact your local Electoral Registration Officer for details of how to register for either of these options.

You can find contact details for your local Electoral Registration Officer in the phone book, or by typing your postcode into the relevant page of the [Electoral Commission](#) website.

### **Important dates for these elections**

**14 April 2011**      Deadline for applying for a new postal vote

**15 April 2011**      Deadline for registering to vote.

**21 April 2011**      Deadline for applying for a new proxy vote.

**Note:** *if you are prevented from voting by a medical emergency you may apply for a proxy vote any time until 5pm on polling day.*

**5 May 2011**      Polling day – vote between 7am and 10pm

# 1) Scottish Parliament election

The election for the Scottish Parliament uses a system called the **Additional Member System**. This means that the majority of MSPs are elected to represent individual constituencies, and additional members are then elected to make the overall distribution of seats correspond more closely to the proportion of votes cast for each party.

Scotland is divided into **73 constituencies**, each of which elects an MSP using the 'first past the post' system – each voter has just one vote, and the candidate who receives the most votes wins the seat. Candidates for constituency seats may represent a political party or may stand as Independents.

The constituencies are grouped together into **8 regions**, each of which elects 7 MSPs using the **Additional Member System**. Candidates for regional seats may stand as an Independent or may be included on the regional list of one of the political parties. The Additional Member System enables small parties that receive a significant proportion of the vote to gain seats in the Scottish Parliament even if they do not receive enough votes to win by 'first past the post'.

## The Ballot Papers

There will be two ballot papers for the Scottish Parliament election.

1) The ballot paper to vote for your **constituency MSP** will be purple, and will list the names of all candidates standing in your local area, and which, if any, political party they belong to.

Vote by writing one **X** on the paper, beside the name of the one candidate that you want to support.

Ballot paper to elect the member of the Scottish Parliament for the xxxxxx Constituency	
	Vote once only in the box opposite the candidate of your choice using an <b>X</b>
<b>Candidate A</b> A Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Candidate B</b> B Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Candidate C</b> C Party	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Candidate D</b> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Candidate E</b> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>

2) The ballot paper to vote for your **regional MSP** will be orange, and will list the names of all political parties and independent candidates standing in your region. It will not list the names of individual candidates on each party list.

Vote by writing one **X** on the paper, beside the name of the one party or independent candidate that you want to support.

Ballot paper to elect members of the Scottish Parliament for xxxxxx Region	
	Vote once only in the box opposite the party or candidate of your choice using an <b>X</b>
<b>A Party</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>B Party</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>C Party</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Candidate D</b> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Candidate E</b> Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Note:** You do not have to vote for the same political party in both Constituency and Region, but you may do so if you wish.

## How are votes counted?

Votes for constituency MSPs are counted first, and in each constituency the person with the most votes is elected. The number of seats won by each party in each Region is noted and used in the calculation of Regional seats.

The formula for working out Regional seats is complex. The principle is that in each region the proportion of the seats won by each party corresponds approximately to the proportion of votes they receive in the regional ballot.

This is best illustrated by an example:

*Region X is made up of 8 constituencies grouped together and 4 parties have put up candidates for election.*

*Party A has won 4 constituency seats,  
Party B has won 3 constituency seats,  
Party C has won 1 constituency seat, and  
Party D has not won any constituency seats.*

- **To find the winner of the first regional seat:**  
*work out the average number of votes per seat each Party would have if they won the additional seat, by dividing the number of regional votes they receive by the number of seats they have already won plus 1:*

*Regional votes for Party A divided by 5  
Regional votes for Party B divided by 4  
Regional votes for Party C divided by 2  
Regional votes for Party D divided by 1*

*The party with the highest average has thus fewest seats per vote, and so to counter this wins the first regional seat.*

- **To find the winner of the second and subsequent regional seats:**  
*repeat the above calculation using the new distribution of seats (i.e. including this new seat). So, if the first Regional seat was won by Party D, the first three sums remain the same, but the fourth becomes*

*Regional votes for Party D divided by 2*

*The Party that now has the highest average wins the next seat, and the calculation is then repeated again using the new number. This process continues until all the additional Regional seats are allocated.*

- *Each political party fills the Regional seats it has won with its candidates, in the order in which they appeared on the party list published before the election.*

## Scottish Parliament Election Results

Scottish Parliament ballot papers can be opened and the count can begin immediately after polling stations close at 10pm, but some Returning Officers may choose to delay starting the count until the following day, so it is not certain how early the results will be announced.

## **2) Referendum on the voting system for electing MPs to the UK Parliament**

The referendum will ask whether voters want to replace the current **First Past the Post** system for electing MPs to the UK Parliament with the **Alternative Vote** system.

### **What is the First Past the Post system?**

In the First Past the Post system every voter marks a cross beside the name of their preferred candidate, and the person who receives the most votes wins the seat even if he or she receives fewer than half the total number of votes cast.

### **What is the Alternative Vote system?**

The **Alternative Vote** system is intended to make sure that the winner has some measure of support from more than half the voters. Voters rank candidates in order of preference, "1" for the candidate they most want to win the seat, "2" for their second choice, "3" for their third, and so on.

The formula for working out the winning candidate is complex and usually involves several rounds of counting:

In round one, all the first preference or number "1" votes are counted. If any candidate wins more than half of all the first preference votes cast, he or she wins the seat.

However, if no candidate receives more than half of the first preference votes counting continues as in the following example:

*of 100,000 votes cast*

*Candidate A has won 43,000 first preference votes,*

*Candidate B has won 6,000 first preference votes.*

*Candidate C has won 10,000 first preference votes, and*

*Candidate D has won 41,000 first preference votes,*

*The candidate with the fewest first preference votes is eliminated from the contest, and his or her ballot papers are redistributed among the other candidates according to the second preference, or number "2" votes, on each of these ballots. So, for example, if an elector had ranked candidate B as "1" and C as "2", that vote would now be added to candidate C's total. If no candidate has been ranked as "2" the ballot paper is discarded.*

*In this example suppose that 2,000 of B's original supporters ranked candidate A in second place, 1000 voters ranked candidate C in second place, 2,500 voters ranked candidate D second, and 500 voters did not express a second preference. These votes are added to the original totals, so*

*Candidate A now has 45,000 votes,*

*Candidate C now has 11,000 votes, and*

*Candidate D now has 43,500 votes.*

*Since there is still no candidate with more than half of the votes, there is another round of counting. This time candidate C is eliminated from the contest, and*

*his or her ballot papers are redistributed among the other candidates according to the next available preference on each of these ballots.*

*In this example suppose that 3,500 of those whose vote went to C in the second count ranked candidate A as their next preference, 6,000 ranked candidate D in next place, and another 1,500 expressed no further preference. When these votes are added to the totals*

*Candidate A now has 48,500 votes, and  
Candidate D now has 49,500 votes.*

*Candidate D now has more than half of the votes that are still in play and therefore wins the seat. (However, note that D wins the seat with fewer than half of the original 100,000 votes, because some voters did not indicate enough preferences.)*

## **What are the advantages of the Alternative Vote system?**

Supporters of the Alternative Vote system say it means that more people have contributed to choosing the winning candidate, produces parliaments that are more representative of public opinion, and makes it harder for people with extremist views to be elected.

For more information see the “Yes” campaign website at <http://www.yestofairervotes.org/>

## **What are the disadvantages of the Alternative Vote system?**

Opponents of the Alternative Vote system say that it costs more to count the ballots, that winning candidates may not have been the first choice of the majority of voters, and that it would make it more likely that no party has an overall majority in Parliament.

For more information see the “No” campaign website at <http://www.no2av.org/>

## **The Ballot Paper**

The ballot paper to vote in the referendum on the voting system for electing MPs to the UK Parliament will be white. It simply asks whether the voting system should be changed from the First Past the Post to the Alternative Vote system.

If you support the introduction of the Alternative Vote system, vote by writing **X** in the “yes” box .

If you want to keep the First Past the Post system, vote by writing **X** in the “no” box .

Referendum on the voting system for United Kingdom parliamentary elections	
At present, the UK uses the “first past the post” system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the “alternative vote” system be used instead?	
Vote (X) in one box only	
YES	
NO	

## **Referendum Election Results**

In order not to delay the announcement of Scottish Parliament election results, it has been decided that the count of referendum ballot papers in Scotland will not begin until 4pm on 6 May. It is expected that the result of the referendum will be announced the same evening.

## Useful Links

- **About My Vote**  
[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/5\\_may\\_scotland.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/5_may_scotland.aspx)  
Electoral Commission website with step-by-step directions for registering to vote.
- **MEMO+ The Electoral Register**  
Information about who can vote in elections and how to register to vote.  
[http://www.scojec.org/memo+/2010/10ix\\_electoral\\_register.pdf](http://www.scojec.org/memo+/2010/10ix_electoral_register.pdf)
- **Scottish Parliamentary election and Referendum on the voting system used to elect MPs to the House of Commons**  
Electoral Commission booklet explaining the election and referendum.  
[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/referendum\\_2011/PDF/Scotland-accessible.pdf](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/referendum_2011/PDF/Scotland-accessible.pdf)
- **ScotlandVotes**  
<http://www.scotlandvotes.com/>  
Information about the Scottish Parliamentary election, including background information about candidates and constituencies.
- **About the Additional Member System**  
<http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/article.php?id=53>
- **About the First past the Post and Alternative Vote Systems**  
Cartoon video  
[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/5\\_may/referendum\\_2011.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/5_may/referendum_2011.aspx)

**Please circulate this issue of MEMO+ among your membership and encourage people to register and to vote in the elections on 5 May!**



*The **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)** is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. It advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, and also works in partnership with other organisations to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality. (Scottish Charity SC029438) <http://www.scojec.org/>*



***BEMIS** is the Scottish national Ethnic Minorities led umbrella body, supporting, empowering, and building the capacity of minority third sector community organisations. As a strategic partner with Government, it is proactive in influencing the development of race equality policy in Scotland, and helps develop and progress multicultural Scotland, active citizenship, democracy, and Human Rights Education at the Scottish, UK, and European levels. <http://www.bemis.org.uk/index.html>*



*The **Scottish Government** is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and social justice for all those who live in Scotland. **One Scotland** is the Scottish Government campaign designed to tackle racism. It aims to raise awareness of racist attitudes, highlight its negative impact and recognise the valuable contributions that other cultures have made to our society – and make Scotland no place for racism. <http://www.scotlandagainstracism.com/>*