

NdC ORIGINAL RESOURCES

General Election 2024: A Simplified Guide to Voting

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Summary

Elections in Great Britain and Northern Ireland can be complicated to navigate. Not knowing when or how to vote can stop people from exercising their right to choose who they want to see elected to represent them in parliament, and which party forms a government. This guide takes all the information needed to register to vote and outlines it in easy to understand language.

This guide sets out the different way to vote and how to register in all areas of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as the different deadlines for doing so. There is also a Frequently Asked Questions section at the bottom of the document answering core questions about voting and registering to vote.

What is a General Election and how does it work?

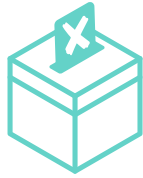
The 4th July 2024 election is a General Election. This is the election for Members of Parliament (MPs) in the UK Parliament. There are 650 Members of Parliament for different constituencies (areas).

In the UK, we do not vote directly for the Prime Minister, we vote for the MP for our constituency.

Our electoral system is called First Past the Post. This means you cast your vote and the person with the highest number of votes wins.

If a party wins enough MPs (referred to as 'seats'), they will then form the government. Sometimes no party will win enough seats and will have to work with another party to create a 'coalition' to form a government.

Key deadlines



REGISTER TO VOTE

In England, Scotland and Wales
and Northern Ireland:

Tuesday 18th June, 11:59pm



REGISTER FOR A PROXY VOTE

In England, Scotland and Wales:
Wednesday 26th June, 5pm

In Northern Ireland:
Friday 14th June, 5pm



REGISTER FOR A POSTAL VOTE

In England, Scotland and Wales:
Wednesday 19th June, 5pm

In Northern Ireland:
Friday 14th June, 5pm



APPLY FOR A VOTER AUTHORITY CERTIFICATE

In England, Scotland and Wales:
Wednesday 26th June, 5pm

In Northern Ireland:
Friday 21st June, 12am (midnight)

How to register to vote

→ [Register to vote at gov.uk](#)

The link above lets you register online, or you can download a paper form. You can also update your details.

You will be asked for these details:

- Where you live
- Your nationality
- Your date of birth
- Your names (and if you have ever changed your name)
- Your national insurance number¹
- Your postcode and address
- If you live in more than one place

¹ If you cannot give your national insurance number, you can still register, but you will have to explain why you can't give it and provide other information to verify your identity.

- If you have recently moved address (to remove your details from a previous home)
- If you want to opt out of the open register¹
- A phone number or email address for if there is an issue

The deadline to register to vote in the General Election on the 4th July 2024 is 18th June 2024 at 11:59pm. If you are not registered by this time, you will not be able to vote in this particular election.

Registering in your region

The rules for registering to vote are slightly different for different parts of the UK. Make sure you are following the rules for your country.

NOTE

You can register to vote when you are younger than 18, but in a General Election, you have to be 18 or over to vote. In some parts of the UK, you can vote in some elections when you are 16, but that is not the case for this election.

Registering to vote in England or Northern Ireland

You can register to vote:

- when you are 16 or over.
- if you are a British or Irish citizen.

You can also register if you have the right to remain in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man (or you do not need permission to remain) and you're a:

- Commonwealth citizen
- citizen of Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal or Spain
- citizen of another EU country, if you have the right to remain and/or have not needed permission—since 31 December 2020, and this has continued without a break

Registering to vote in Scotland

You can register to vote:

- when you are 14 or over
- if you are a British or Irish citizen.

You can also register if you have permission to enter or stay in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man, or you do not need permission.

¹ The open register (called the edited register) is a part of the full electoral register that businesses and organisations can buy and use to confirm your details or identity. If you want to not be on the open register and have already registered to vote you need to contact the electoral services team at your local council.

Registering to vote in Wales

You can register to vote:

- when you are 14 or over
- if you're a British citizen, Irish citizen or a citizen of an EU country

You can also register if you have permission to enter or stay in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man, or you do not need permission.

What if I can't vote in person?

You can still vote in the election if you cannot go to your polling station on the day. There are two alternative methods to vote that you can register for:



REGISTER FOR A POSTAL VOTE

You will be sent a voting form to fill in and post back.

Deadlines:

In England, Scotland and Wales:

Wednesday 19th June, 5pm

In Northern Ireland:

Friday 14th June, 5pm



REGISTER FOR A PROXY VOTE

You register a specific person who will go to the polling station and cast your vote in person for you. This must be someone who you trust to cast your vote as instructed, and who will keep your vote private.

Deadlines:

In England, Scotland and Wales:

Wednesday 26th June, 5pm

In Northern Ireland:

Friday 14th June, 5pm

Both of these methods have deadlines that are before the election day. Make sure you have checked these.

The following sections of this document contain full details of how to register for these alternative methods.



How to vote by post

The deadline to apply for a postal vote in England, Scotland and Wales is Wednesday 19th June, 5pm. The deadline to apply for a postal vote in Northern Ireland is Friday 14th June, 5pm.

You must be registered to vote before you can apply for a postal vote. If you are not registered, go back to the registering to vote section of this resource.

→ [Register to vote by post \(England, Scotland, Wales\)](#)

→ [Register to vote by post \(Northern Ireland\)](#)

If you're using the gov.uk form, you will be asked for these details:

- If you are registered to vote
- If you have changed your name since you last registered to vote (if this is the case you must reregister with your new name)
- Where you are registered and at what address
- If you want your postal vote to be sent to your registered address
- If the answer is no, you must explain why, and then will be asked where you want it sent instead
- How long you want a postal vote for¹
- Your name
- Any previous names
- Your date of birth
- Your national insurance number²

You must then upload a picture of your signature if you can write and upload it. The picture must be clear, in focus, and in black ink and on white, plain paper.

NOTE:

If you have a disability/neurodivergence that means you can't write a signature, you can get a 'signature waiver' that means you don't have to give a signature. You will be asked for more details about your disability and asked for details about yourself or someone who is helping you with your application.

¹ There are a couple of different options for this. You can ask for a postal vote for all elections in the next 3 years, or you can give a specific date or timeframe instead. If you just want to postal vote in this election, the date you will need to give is 04/07/2024.

² If you cannot give your national insurance number, you can still register, but you will have to explain why you can't give it and provide other information to verify your identity.

How to send back your postal vote

Your postal vote needs to be with the elections team by 10pm on the day of the election (Thursday 4th July 2024) to be counted.

It is important you complete your postal vote as soon as possible.

The first thing to do when you have received your postal vote, is to fill it in.

Check the contents to make sure everything is there. There should be:

- Instructions on how to vote and how to send back the postal vote.
- A postal voting statement
- An envelope (envelope A) for your completed ballot paper
- A return envelope (envelope B)
- The ballot paper (this is what you use to make your choice on who you are voting for)

You need to fill in the documents and the ballot. Follow the instructions in the postal vote carefully. You need to ensure you follow all the steps or your vote may not count. Make sure you are alone when you fill in your ballot. Do not write anything else on the ballot paper as your vote may not be counted.

Follow the instructions with your postal vote on which envelopes to put your ballot and postal voting statement in and seal them. Make sure the return address is clear and visible.

Once you have filled in your postal vote, it is important to post it as soon as possible. If you are able to take it to the post box yourself. If you cannot post it yourself, ask someone you know and trust to post it (a friend or family member).

You cannot ask a candidate or party worker to post it for you as this is against the law, unless they are a close relative or help care for you.



How to vote by proxy

The deadline to register for a proxy vote in England, Scotland and Wales is Wednesday 26th June 2024, 5pm. The deadline to register for a proxy vote in Northern Ireland is Friday 14th June, 5pm

You must be registered to vote before you can apply for a postal vote. If you are not registered, go back to the registering to vote section of this resource.

→ [Register to vote by proxy \(England, Scotland, Wales\)](#)

→ [Register to vote by proxy \(Northern Ireland\)](#)

You need to have asked permission from the person you want to proxy vote for you before you apply. They also must be registered to vote, so if they are not registered, ask them to do so before you fill in this form.

If you're using the gov.uk form, you will be asked for these details:

- If you are registered to vote
- If you have changed your name since you last registered to vote (if this is the case you must reregister with your new name)
- Where you are registered to vote
- Why you are applying for a proxy vote (if there is not a reason listed that matches for you, you can write in another reason)
- How long you need the proxy vote for¹
- The address you are registered to vote at
- Your name and any previous names
- Your date of birth
- Your national insurance number²

You must then upload a picture of your signature if you can write and upload it. The picture must be clear, in focus, and in black ink and on white, plain paper.

¹ There are a couple of different options for this. You can ask for a proxy vote for all elections for the maximum time allowed, until you cancel it, or you can give a specific date or timeframe instead. If you just want to proxy vote in this election, the date you will need to give is 04/07/2024

² If you cannot give your national insurance number, you can still register, but you will have to explain why you can't give it and provide other information to verify your identity.

NOTE:

If you have a disability/neurodivergence that means you can't write a signature, you can get a 'signature waiver' that means you don't have to give a signature. You will be asked for more details about your disability and asked for details about yourself or someone who is helping you with your application.

You will be then asked for further details:

- Your contact information by email or phone for if there are any issues (you do not have to give these, but your application might be delayed or rejected if there is an issue)
- Has your proxy confirmed if they are eligible? (They must be registered to vote and must be a proxy to no more than 4 people)
- If your proxy has agreed to vote for you
- Your proxy's full name
- Your proxy's UK address
- Your proxy's email or phone number to be contacted (to confirm they agree to be your proxy and to give them details on how to do this)



Understanding voter ID

In many elections in the UK you must now show a piece of photo ID in order to vote in person. If you are in Northern Ireland, there are different rules, which [can be found here](#).

There are many forms of photo ID that can be used for this that you might already have. For example:

- A driving license (full or provisional)
- A UK passport
- A Blue Badge
- A PASS card (National Proof of Age Standards Scheme)
- Some bus passes and travel cards

This is not all of the options for Voter ID. There is a [full list on the government website](#).

NOTE:

You can use these even if they are expired (out of date), as long as the photo still looks like you.

What if I do not have any of these forms of identification?

If you do not have any of these, it does not mean you cannot vote. You can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate instead.

You must already be registered to vote to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. If you haven't done this already, go back to the section of this document about registering to vote.

You do not need a Voter Authority Certificate to vote by post or by proxy.

You will first be asked some questions so the system can work out if you need a Voter Authority Certificate:

- If you are registered to vote
- Where you are registered to vote
- How you plan to vote (in person, by post, by proxy, or not sure)
- If you have a driving license, passport or other form of ID you could bring

If you do not have any of the forms of ID, the system will take you through to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. It will ask you:

- The address you are registered at (normally your home or university address)
- A recent digital photo of yourself
- Your national insurance number¹

¹ Like registering to vote, you can still get a Voter Authority Certificate if you don't have a national insurance number, but you will have to provide other information to verify your identity.

Anonymous registration and voter ID

For some people having your name and address on the electoral register can be dangerous. If you think that you or someone in your household may be at risk if someone could find your name and address you can register as an anonymous voter.

The way to register and vote changes depending on which region you are in. Within England, Wales and Scotland you can vote in person using an Anonymous Elector's Document. In Northern Ireland you can only vote by proxy or postal vote if you register as an anonymous voter.

Registering to vote anonymously

There are three steps to registering to vote anonymously:

- Download and fill in the [application form](#).
- You need to explain why either your safety or someone in your household's safety would be put at risk.
- You need to submit evidence to support your registration. This evidence can be a court document or an attestation from an approved person stating that your safety or a member of your household's safety would be in danger.

Voter ID

Once you are registered as an anonymous voter, your local council will invite you to apply for an Anonymous Elector's Document. This will enable you to vote without needing to use the standard forms of ID discussed above.

When you apply, you will be asked for these details:

- Your name
- Your address
- Your date of birth
- Your National Insurance number—if you do not know your National Insurance number you will be asked for other documents such as a birth certificate.
- A passport style photo

The document you will receive will have Elector's Document written at the top. It includes:

- The date it was issued
- Your photograph
- Your electoral number - this is the number that will appear on the electoral register instead of your name and address
- An identifier which is a combination of software generated 20 letters and numbers.

FAQs

Q. Do I have to vote in person?

You do not have to vote in person, however you will need to register for a proxy or a postal vote before the day of the election.

Q. What if I was planning to vote in person but now cannot?

There are a few reasons that you may be allowed an emergency proxy vote. If you are unable to go to the polling station on the day you can apply for an emergency proxy vote if:

- You have a medical emergency
- You are working away (and did not know this would be the case in advance)
- Your voter ID was lost, stolen or destroyed.
- You wish to change the person who holds your proxy vote (Scotland Only)

Emergency proxy votes may be made up to 5pm on the day of the election. Please note that in Northern Ireland you cannot apply for an emergency proxy vote.

Q. How do I know where to vote?

The [Electoral Commission website](#) gives details of all polling stations. If you type your postcode into the website it will give you the polling station you need to go to.

Q. What will I need to take with me to vote?

You will need to have proof of identity (ID—full list of accepted forms of ID is outlined above) and you will need to know your address. You do not need to bring your polling card with you to be able to vote.

Q. I applied for a postal vote but I never sent it back, what do I do?

If you have completed your postal vote but not sent it back, you can hand your completed vote into your polling station on the day of the election. You will need to complete a form explaining why you are handing in postal votes, how many votes you are handing in and your name and address. If you cannot go to the polling station yourself you can get a trusted friend or family member to take in your postal vote. You cannot ask a political candidate or campaigner to take in your vote as this is against the rules.

Q. What if I live abroad?

You can register as an overseas voter if you're either a British citizen or an eligible Irish citizen registering to vote in Northern Ireland. If you are voting from overseas you can apply for a postal vote or proxy vote. If you are registering to vote in Northern Ireland you need to apply with a [paper form](#).

There is no longer a limit on eligibility to vote due to living abroad - you can vote in UK elections and referendums no matter how long you have been living in another country.

Q. What do I do if I am a student?

You are able to register to vote at both your home and term time addresses. You do not need to tell anyone where you will be voting on election day. You can only vote once—so if you vote at your home address you cannot vote a second time at your term time address.

If you are at home and would like to vote in your university town or are at university and would like to vote in your hometown, you can apply for a proxy or postal vote—again, you can only vote once.

Q. Do I need to register again if I have voted before?

If you are still living at the address you registered with before you should not need to re-register. If you are concerned that you may have accidentally been taken off the register you can check your voter registration. To check this you need to contact your local council. You can find details of registering to vote and how to contact your local council [here](#).

Q. Where can I find candidate information?

For information about candidates in your area, you can put your postcode into the [electoral commission website](#). This will give you information about all the candidates standing in your area.

Q. How do I find out what my constituency is and if it has changed?

Some people's constituency (the area represented by your MP) has recently changed, because the 'boundaries' for these has moved. There are a number of websites that let you see if your constituency has changed. This interactive map on the [Guardian website](#) lets you see simple information.

If you would like more detailed information about your constituency, [Electoral Calculus](#) offers more information.

Q. My friends/family are pressuring me to vote a certain way, they say I have to vote for a specific candidate, do I have to vote how my friends/family tell me to?

No, you do not have to vote for anyone because friends or family tell you that you have to. Your vote is personal and you can vote for whichever candidate you would like to be represented by.

Q. Do I have to tell anyone who I voted for?

You are allowed to tell people who you voted for but you do not have to tell people. Who you voted for is a private thing and no one can force you to tell them who you voted for.

Q. What is tactical voting and do I have to do it?

'Tactical voting' refers to when people vote in a specific way to try and achieve a win by a certain party or person instead of the one that normally wins, for example, voting for the party that comes in second place rather than their preferred party. This is often particularly done when people want to change which party is forming the government. You do not have to do this if you don't want to, but some people find it useful to research this when making their decisions.