

# ELECTIONS IN WALES 2021 – A HANDY GUIDE



On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2021, the Welsh electorate will be greeted by two separate elections, three different electoral systems, and three different electoral boundaries. In some areas, there may also be by-elections to elect local councillors, postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Here's a quick guide of what to expect.

## Registering to Vote

In order to vote in May's elections, it is important to make sure that you have registered to vote. **If you have not registered to vote, you won't be able to vote.** Each person has to register individually (rather than through family, University Halls, and so on, as happened prior to 2016). If you have registered to vote, you should receive an email from your Local Authority noting this, otherwise it is quick and easy to register either online or through the post - note that you will need your National Insurance number to do this. Whilst registering to vote you will also get the option to apply for a postal vote. If you have registered to vote, you should receive a Polling Card a few weeks before the election which will note the polling station where you will be able to vote on polling day. You do not have to take this card with you to the station.

The minimum age for voting is 16 for the Senedd elections, but 18 for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and local by-elections. All foreign nationals legally resident in Wales are eligible to vote in the Senedd elections, but only British, Irish and EU citizens and [qualifying Commonwealth citizens](#) may vote in the Police and Crime Commissioner election and in any local by-elections (although all foreign nationals legally resident, and those aged 16 and 17, will be able to vote in local elections from May 2022). For any further queries in regards to registering to vote, go to [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) or contact your Local Authority. The deadline to register to vote in these elections is **Monday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2021**.

## Election for the Senedd (Welsh Parliament)

Since its establishment in 1999, the Senedd or Welsh Parliament (formerly the National Assembly for Wales) has developed significantly, now holding law-making powers in a variety of fields - including Health, Education, the Environment and Housing. Since 2011, elections are held every 5 years. 60 members are elected to the Senedd, through a mixed member proportional representation electoral system. 40 constituency members are elected through a first past the post system, and 20 regional members are elected through the Additional Member electoral system. Voters will therefore receive two ballot papers for the Senedd elections on polling day.

### First past the post

This is the same electoral system that is used for Westminster elections. Elections are held in each of the 40 Welsh constituencies, with the voter expected to place a cross next to their **single** preferred candidate. The candidate in the constituency who has received the most votes will be elected to the Senedd. The majority of a successful candidate can vary significantly under the first past the post system. For example, in 2011, Labour won the Cardiff Central seat by only 38 votes, but in Blaenau Gwent the party boasted a healthy majority of over 9,000 votes.

### Additional Member system

Wales has 5 electoral regions - North Wales, Mid & West Wales, South Wales West, South Wales East and South Wales Central. 4 Members of the Senedd (MSs) are elected for each region.

The Additional Member system is used for Senedd elections in an attempt to achieve an element of proportionality. It rewards political parties which have won a significant number of votes, but not enough to win many constituency seats. For example, in 2011 the Liberal Democrats won only 1 constituency seat, but won 4 regional seats through the Additional Member System. The vote is often referred to as the 'party list', as voters usually vote for a party rather than an individual. If a voter wishes, it is possible to 'split' their ballots - thus voting for a different party on the constituency and regional ballot papers. Or they can vote for the same party twice. Traditionally, more parties contest the regional election than the constituency elections.

The regional vote is not a 'second preference' vote - constituency and regional votes are counted separately, with both votes contributing towards the final election result. The regional seats are awarded according to the d'Hondt system (See notes at the end for details). This system tends to result in parties that have won a number of constituency seats in a region being less likely to win many regional seats. For example, in 2011 Labour won 5 constituency seats within the North Wales Region, but none of the regional seats.

Each party will have their own list of candidates, who are elected to the Senedd according to their position on the list. There is an exception to this, as candidates can stand in both a constituency and a regional seat. If the candidate wins the constituency seat, the regional seat is passed down the party list. For example, in 1999, Cynog Dafis (who was in second place on Plaid Cymru's Mid & West Regional list) was elected to the Assembly, as Plaid Cymru's first placed regional candidate (Helen Mary Jones) had won the Llanelli constituency seat.

### **Police and Crime Commissioners**

The third ballot paper for most electors will be for the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner. However, some electors who can vote in the Senedd election will not be eligible to vote in the Police and Crime Commissioner election. This includes those aged 16 and 17 on election day and foreign nationals, other than EU citizens and qualifying Commonwealth citizens.

Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in England and Wales in 2012, replacing local police authorities. The Police and Crime Commissioner is responsible for holding the Chief Constable and police force to account on the public's behalf, for budget management and for appointing the Chief Constable.

Wales has 4 Police and Crime Commissioners: North Wales, Dyfed-Powys, South Wales and Gwent. The boundaries of these regions are different from the Senedd regional areas.

Police and Crime Commissioners are elected through a Supplementary Vote system. Under this system, there are two columns on the ballot paper - one for the voter to mark their first choice and one in which to mark a second choice. Voters are not required to make a second choice vote if they do not wish to do so. All of the first choice votes are counted first. If a candidate has over half the votes, he or she is elected. If no candidate has a majority, the top two candidates go through to the second round, while the other candidates are eliminated. The second-choice votes of every voter whose first choice has been eliminated are then counted. Any votes for the remaining candidates are added to their first-round totals. Whichever candidate has the most votes after these second-preferences have been counted is declared the winner.

## Local authority by-elections

Due to Covid-19, by-elections needed to fill vacancies in local authorities have been postponed since March 2020. Some of these by-elections may be held alongside the other elections on May 6th 2021. Only those categories of people who were eligible to vote in the last full local authority elections in Wales in 2017 will be eligible to vote in these by-elections - the same people as can vote in the Police and Crime Commissioner election. (From May 2022, all those eligible to vote in Senedd elections will also be eligible to vote in local authority elections and by-elections).

Local by-elections are held under the first past the post system - see page 1 above.

### More Information

[www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

<http://www.apccs.police.uk/role-of-the-pcc/>

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#### Note: d'Hondt Electoral System (for the Senedd Regional Seats)

Firstly the votes are counted, and the numbers of votes each party received on the regional ballot is recorded. This figure is then divided by the number of constituency seats the party has won in the region, whilst also adding one seat to the equation. The party with the highest total of votes after the equation wins the first regional seat, with the process repeated (adding the regional seat to the equation) until all 4 seats have been awarded.

See the diagram below for a detailed break-down of one example of the process.

#### Additional Member System (North Wales Region: Welsh Assembly [now Senedd] Election 2011)

*(For simplicity, the vote totals of parties which did not win a seat have been omitted)*

	Con	PC	LD	Lab	Elected
Constituency seats won in Region	2	2	0	5	
Regional Votes	52,201	41,701	11,507	62,677	
1 <sup>st</sup> Round: Equation	2+1= 3	2+1= 3	0+1= 1	5+1 = 6	
1 <sup>st</sup> Round: Result	17,400	13,900	11,507	10,446	Con
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round: Equation	3+1= 4	2+1= 3	0+1 = 1	5+1 = 6	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round: Result	13,050	13,900	11,507	10,446	PC
3 <sup>rd</sup> Round: Equation	3+1= 4	3+1 = 4	0+1 = 1	5+1 = 6	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Round: Result	13,050	10,425	11,507	10,446	Con
4 <sup>th</sup> Round: Equation	4+1= 5	3+1 = 4	0+1= 1	5+1 = 6	
4 <sup>th</sup> Round: Result	10,440	10,425	11,507	10,446	LD

**North Wales Regional Result 2011: 2 Conservatives; 1 Plaid Cymru; 1 Liberal Democrat**

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