



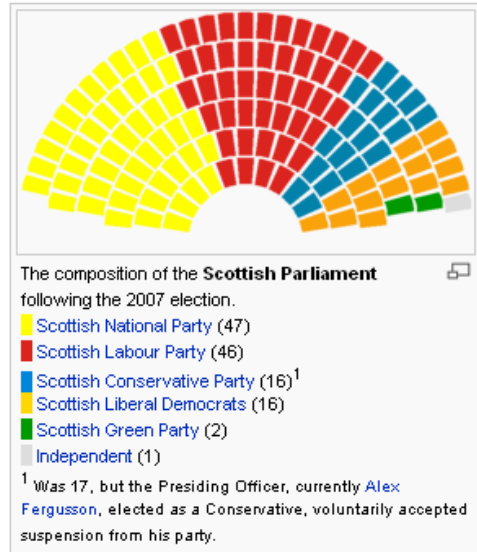
## Scotland's Parliament

The **Scottish Parliament** is the national, unicameral legislature of Scotland, located in the Holyrood area of the capital Edinburgh. The Parliament, informally referred to as "**Holyrood**" is a democratically elected body comprising 129 members who are known as Members of the Scottish Parliament, or MSPs. Members are elected for four-year terms under the mixed member proportional representation system.

The original Parliament of Scotland (or "Estates of Scotland") was the national legislature of the independent Kingdom of Scotland, and existed from the early 13th century until the Kingdom of Scotland merged with the Kingdom of England under the Acts of Union 1707 to form the Kingdom of Great Britain. As a consequence, the Parliament of Scotland merged with the Parliament of England to form the Parliament of Great Britain, which sat at Westminster in London.

Following a referendum in 1997 in which the Scottish people gave their consent, the current Parliament was established by the Scotland Act 1998, which sets out its powers as a devolved legislature. The Act delineates the legislative competence of the Parliament — the areas in which it can make laws — by explicitly specifying powers that are "reserved" to the Parliament of the United Kingdom: all matters that are not explicitly reserved are automatically the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. The UK Parliament retains the ability to amend the terms of reference of the Scottish Parliament, and can extend or reduce the areas in which it can make laws. The first meeting of the new Parliament took place on 12 May 1999.

Unlike Westminster, the debating chamber of the Scottish Parliament has seating arranged in a hemicycle, which reflects the desire to encourage consensus amongst elected members. There are 131 seats in the debating chamber. Of the total 131 seats, 129 are occupied by the Parliament's elected MSPs and 2 are seats for the Scottish Law Officers - the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General for Scotland, who are not elected members of the Parliament but are members of the Scottish Government. As such the Law Officers may attend and speak in the plenary meetings of the Parliament, but as they are not elected MSPs they cannot vote. Members are able to sit anywhere in the debating chamber, but typically sit in their party groupings.



Parliament sits from Monday through to Thursday from early January through to late June and from early September through to mid December, with 2-week recesses in April and October. Full plenary meetings in the debating chamber usually take place on Wednesday afternoons from 2pm to 6pm and on Thursday from 9.15am to 6pm. Chamber debates and committee meetings are open to the public. Entry is free, but booking in advance is recommended due to limited space. Meetings are broadcast on the Parliament's own channel Holyrood.tv and on the BBC's parliamentary channel BBC Parliament.