

Scotland^[6] is a [country](#) that is part of the [United Kingdom](#). It contains nearly one-third of the United Kingdom's land area, consisting of the northern part of the island of [Great Britain](#) and more than 790 adjacent [islands](#), principally in the archipelagos of the [Hebrides](#) and the [Northern Isles](#). To the south-east, Scotland has its [only land border](#), which is 96 miles (154 km) long and shared with [England](#); the country is surrounded by the [Atlantic Ocean](#) to the north and west, the [North Sea](#) to the north-east and east, and the [Irish Sea](#) to the south. The population in 2022 was 5,439,842.^[10] [Edinburgh](#) is the capital and [Glasgow](#) is the most populous of the [cities of Scotland](#).

The [Kingdom of Scotland](#) emerged as an independent [sovereign state](#) in the 9th century. In 1603, [James VI](#) succeeded to the thrones of [England](#) and [Ireland](#), forming a [personal union](#) of the [three kingdoms](#). On 1 May 1707, Scotland and England combined to create the new [Kingdom of Great Britain](#),^{[11][12]} with the [Parliament of Scotland](#) subsumed into the [Parliament of Great Britain](#). In 1999, a [Scottish Parliament](#) was re-established, and has [devolved](#) authority over many areas of [domestic policy](#).^[13] The [Scottish Government](#) is the [executive arm](#) of the devolved government, headed by the [first minister](#) who chairs the [cabinet](#) and responsible for government policy and [international engagement](#).^{[14][15]} Further powers are devolved to [local government](#) from the Scottish Government to the country's 32 [subdivisions](#) (known as "council areas").^{[16][17]}

The country has its own distinct [legal system](#), [education system](#) and [religious history](#), which have all contributed to the continuation of [Scottish culture](#) and [national identity](#).^[18] [Scottish English](#) and [Scots](#) are the most widely spoken [languages in the country](#), existing on a [dialect continuum](#) with each other.^[19] [Scottish Gaelic](#) speakers can be found all over Scotland, but the language is largely spoken natively by communities within the [Hebrides](#);^[20] Gaelic speakers now constitute less than 2% of the total population, though state-sponsored [revitalisation](#) attempts have led to a growing community of [second language](#) speakers.^[21]

The mainland of Scotland is broadly divided into three regions: the [Highlands](#), a mountainous region in the north and north-west; the [Lowlands](#), a flatter plain across the centre of the country; and the [Southern Uplands](#), a hilly region along the southern border. The Highlands are the most mountainous region of the British Isles and contain its highest peak, [Ben Nevis](#), at 4,413 feet (1,345 m).^[10] The region also contains many lakes, called [lochs](#); the term is also applied to the many saltwater inlets along the country's deeply indented western coastline. The geography of the many islands is varied. Some, such as [Mull](#) and [Skye](#), are noted for their mountainous terrain, while the likes of [Tiree](#) and [Coll](#) are much flatter.

Etymology

Main article: [Etymology of Scotland](#)

Scotland comes from *Scoti*, the Latin name for the [Gael](#)s.^[22] [Philip Freeman](#) has speculated on the likelihood of a group of raiders adopting a name from an [Indo-European root](#), **skot*, citing the parallel in Greek *skotos* (σκότος), meaning 'darkness, gloom'.^[23] The [Late Latin](#) word *Scotia* ("land of the Gaels") was initially used to refer to Ireland,^[24] and likewise in early [Old English](#) *Scotland* was used for Ireland.^[25] By the 11th century at the latest, *Scotia* was being used to refer to (Gaelic-speaking) Scotland north of the [River Forth](#), alongside *Albania* or *Albany*, both derived from the Gaelic *Alba*.^[26] The use of the words *Scots* and *Scotland* to encompass all of what is now Scotland became common in the [Late Middle Ages](#).^[11]

History

Main article: [History of Scotland](#)

For a chronological guide, see [Timeline of Scottish history](#).

Prehistory

The earliest known evidence of human presence in Scotland is [Hamburgian culture](#) stone tools produced by late [Upper Paleolithic hunter gatherers](#) who arrived in Scotland during the [Bølling–Allerød Interstadial](#) warm period at the end of the [last ice age](#), around 14,500 to 14,000 years ago, shortly following the retreat of the ice sheet that had previously covered Scotland.^{[27][28]} [Neolithic farmers](#) arrived in Scotland around 6000 years ago.^[29] The well-preserved village of [Skara Brae](#) on the mainland of [Orkney](#) dates from this period. Neolithic habitation, burial, and ritual sites are particularly common and well preserved in the [Northern Isles](#) and [Western Isles](#), where a lack of trees led to most structures being built of local stone.^[30] Evidence of sophisticated pre-Christian belief systems is demonstrated by sites such as the [Callanish Stones](#) on [Lewis](#) and the [Maes Howe](#) on [Orkney](#), which were built in the third millennium BC.^{[31]:38}

Early history

Main articles: [Scotland during the Roman Empire](#), [Roman Britain](#), and [Pictland](#)



[Skara Brae](#), Europe's most complete [Neolithic](#) village, occupied from roughly 3180 BC – 2500 BC

The first written reference to Scotland was in 320 BC by Greek sailor [Pytheas](#), who called the northern tip of Britain "Orcas", the source of the name of the Orkney islands.^{[32]:10}

Most of modern Scotland was not [incorporated](#) into the [Roman Empire](#), and Roman control over parts of the area fluctuated over a rather short period. The first Roman incursion into Scotland was in 79 AD, when [Agricola](#) invaded Scotland; he defeated a Caledonian army at the [Battle of Mons Graupius](#) in 83 AD.^{[32]:12} After the Roman victory, Roman forts were briefly set along the [Gask Ridge](#) close to the [Highland line](#), but by three years after the battle, the Roman armies had withdrawn to the [Southern Uplands](#).^[33] Remains of Roman forts established in the 1st century have been found as far north as the [Moray Firth](#).^[34] By the reign of the [Roman emperor Trajan](#) (r. 98–117), Roman control had lapsed to Britain south of a line between the [River Tyne](#) and the [Solway Firth](#).^[35] Along this line, Trajan's successor [Hadrian](#) (r. 117–138) erected [Hadrian's Wall](#) in northern England^{[32]:12} and the [Limes Britannicus](#) became the northern border of the Roman Empire.^{[36][37]} The Roman influence on the southern part of the country was considerable, and they introduced [Christianity](#) to Scotland.^{[32]:13–14[31]:38}

The [Antonine Wall](#) was built from 142 at the order of Hadrian's successor [Antoninus Pius](#) (r. 138–161), defending the Roman part of Scotland from the unadministered part of the island, north of a line between the [Firth of Clyde](#) and the [Firth of Forth](#).^[38] The [Roman invasion of Caledonia 208–210](#) was undertaken by emperors of the imperial [Severan dynasty](#) in response to the breaking of a treaty by the Caledonians in 197,^[34] but permanent conquest of the whole of Great Britain was forestalled by Roman forces becoming bogged down in punishing [guerrilla warfare](#) and the death of the senior emperor [Septimius Severus](#) (r. 193–211) at [Eboracum](#) ([York](#)) after he was taken ill while on campaign. Although forts erected by the [Roman army](#) in the Severan campaign were placed near those established by Agricola and were clustered at the mouths of the [glens](#) in the Highlands, the Caledonians were again in revolt in 210–211 and these were overrun.^[34]



[Callanish Stones](#), erected in the late [Neolithic](#) era

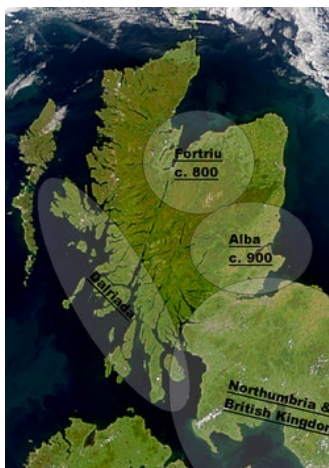
To the Roman historians [Tacitus](#) and [Cassius Dio](#), the [Scottish Highlands](#) and the area north of the [River Forth](#) was called [Caledonia](#).^[34] According to Cassius Dio, the inhabitants of Caledonia were the [Caledonians](#) and the [Maeatae](#).^[34] Other ancient authors used the adjective "Caledonian" to mean anywhere in northern or inland

Britain, often mentioning the region's people and animals, its cold climate, its pearls, and a noteworthy region of wooded hills ([Latin](#): *saltus*) which the 2nd century AD Roman philosopher [Ptolemy](#), in his *Geography*, described as being south-west of the [Beaulieu Firth](#).^[34] The name Caledonia is echoed in the place names of [Dunkeld](#), [Rohallion](#), and [Schiehallion](#).^[34]

The [Great Conspiracy](#) constituted a seemingly coordinated invasion against Roman rule in Britain in the later 4th century, which included the participation of the Gaelic [Scoti](#) and the Caledonians, who were then known as [Picts](#) by the Romans. This was defeated by the [comes Theodosius](#); but Roman military government was withdrawn from the island altogether by the early 5th century, resulting in the [Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain](#) and the immigration of the [Saxons](#) to southeastern Scotland and the rest of eastern Great Britain.^[35]

Kingdom of Scotland

Main articles: [Kingdom of Scotland](#), [Scotland in the Early Middle Ages](#), [Scotland in the High Middle Ages](#), and [Scotland in the Late Middle Ages](#)



Political divisions in early medieval Scotland



Norse kingdoms at the end of the eleventh century

Beginning in the sixth century, the area that is now Scotland was divided into four areas: [Pictland](#), a patchwork of small lordships in central Scotland;^{[32]: 25–26} the [Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Northumbria](#), which had conquered southeastern Scotland;^{[32]: 18–}

²⁰ Northern Brittonic territory likely centred on [Alt Clut](#) (Dumbarton Rock) and the Clyde valley;^[39] and [Dál Riata](#), which included territory in western Scotland and northern Ireland, and spread Gaelic language and culture into Scotland.^[40] These societies were based on the family unit and had sharp divisions in wealth, although the vast majority were poor and worked full-time in [subsistence agriculture](#). The Picts kept slaves (mostly captured in war) through the ninth century.^{[32]: 26–27}

Gaelic influence over Pictland and Northumbria was facilitated by the large number of [Gaelic-speaking clerics](#) working as missionaries.^{[32]: 23–24} Operating in the sixth century on the island of [Iona](#), [Saint Columba](#) was one of the earliest and best-known missionaries.^{[31]: 39} The [Vikings](#) began to raid Scotland in the eighth century. Although the raiders sought slaves and luxury items, their main motivation was to acquire land. The oldest [Norse](#) settlements were in northwest Scotland, but they eventually conquered many areas along the coast. [Old Norse](#) entirely displaced [Pictish](#) in the [Northern Isles](#).^[41]

In the ninth century, the Norse threat allowed a Gael named [Kenneth I](#) (Cináed mac Ailpín) to seize power over Pictland, establishing a royal dynasty to which the modern monarchs trace their lineage, and marking the beginning of the end of Pictish culture.^{[32]: 31–32 [42]} The kingdom of Cináed and his descendants, called Alba, was Gaelic in character but existed on the same area as Pictland. By the end of the tenth century, the Pictish language went extinct as its speakers shifted to Gaelic.^{[32]: 32–33} From a base in eastern Scotland north of the [River Forth](#) and south of the [River Spey](#), the kingdom expanded first southwards, into the former Northumbrian lands, and northwards into [Moray](#).^{[32]: 34–35} Around the turn of the millennium, there was a centralization in agricultural lands and the first towns began to be established.^{[32]: 36–37}



[James V of Scotland](#) at the [Court of Session](#) in 1532, at [Parliament House, Edinburgh](#), the [Parliament of Scotland](#) until 1707

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, much of Scotland was under the control of a single ruler. Initially, Gaelic culture predominated, but immigrants from France, England and Flanders steadily created a more diverse society, with the Gaelic language starting to be replaced by Scots; and a modern nation-state emerged from this. At the end of

this period, war against England started the growth of a [Scottish national consciousness](#).^{[43][44]: ch 1} [David I](#) (1124–1153) and his successors centralised royal power^{[43]: 41–42} and united mainland Scotland, capturing regions such as Moray, [Galloway](#), and [Caithness](#), although he could not extend his power over the [Hebrides](#), which had been ruled by various [Scottish clans](#) following the death of [Somerled](#) in 1164.^{[43]: 48–49} In 1266, Scotland fought the short but consequential [Scottish-Norwegian War](#) which saw the reclamation of the [Hebrides](#) after the strong defeat of King [Haakon IV](#) and his forces at the [Battle of Largs](#).^[45] Up until that point, the Hebrides had been under Norwegian Viking control for roughly 400 years and had developed a distinctive [Norse–Gaelic](#) culture that saw many [Old Norse](#) loanwords enter the [Scottish Gaelic](#) spoken by islanders, and through successive generations the Norse would become almost completely assimilated into [Gaelic culture](#) and the [Scottish clan](#) system. After the conflict, Scotland had to affirm Norwegian sovereignty of the [Northern Isles](#), but they were later integrated into Scotland in the 15th century. Scandinavian culture in the form of the [Norn language](#) survived for a lot longer than in the Hebrides, and would strongly influence the local [Scots](#) dialect on [Shetland](#) and [Orkney](#).^[46] Later, a system of [feudalism](#) was consolidated, with both Anglo-Norman incomers and native Gaelic chieftains being granted land in exchange for serving the king.^{[43]: 53–54} The relationship with [England](#) was complex during this period: Scottish kings tried several times, sometimes with success, to exploit English political turmoil, followed by the longest period of peace between Scotland and England in the mediaeval period: from 1217–1296.^{[43]: 45–46}

Wars of Scottish Independence

Main articles: [Wars of Scottish Independence](#), [First War of Scottish Independence](#), and [Second War of Scottish Independence](#)



The [Wallace Monument](#) in [Stirling](#), commemorates Sir [William Wallace](#), a Scottish independence leader^[47]

The death of [Alexander III](#) in March 1286 broke the succession line of Scotland's kings. [Edward I of England](#) arbitrated between various claimants for the Scottish crown. In return for surrendering Scotland's nominal independence, [John Balliol](#) was pronounced king in 1292.^{[43]: 47}^[48] In 1294, Balliol and other Scottish lords refused Edward's demands to serve in his army against the French. Scotland and France sealed a treaty on 23 October 1295, known as the [Auld Alliance](#). War ensued, and John was

deposed by Edward who took personal control of Scotland. [Andrew Moray](#) and [William Wallace](#) initially emerged as the principal leaders of the resistance to English rule in the [Wars of Scottish Independence](#),^[49] until [Robert the Bruce](#) was crowned king of Scotland in 1306.^[50] Victory at the [Battle of Bannockburn](#) in 1314 proved the Scots had regained control of their kingdom. In 1320 the world's first documented declaration of independence, the [Declaration of Arbroath](#), won the support of [Pope John XXII](#), leading to the legal recognition of Scottish sovereignty by the English Crown.^{[51]: 70, 72}

A civil war between the [Bruce dynasty](#) and their long-term rivals of the [House of Comyn](#) and [House of Balliol](#) lasted until the middle of the 14th century. Although the Bruce faction was successful, [David II](#)'s lack of an heir allowed his half-nephew [Robert II](#), the [Lord High Steward of Scotland](#), to come to the throne and establish the [House of Stewart](#).^{[51]: 77} The Stewarts ruled Scotland for the remainder of the [Middle Ages](#). The country they ruled experienced greater prosperity from the end of the 14th century through the Scottish Renaissance to the [Reformation](#),^{[52]: 93} despite the effects of the [Black Death](#) in 1349^{[51]: 76} and increasing division between [Highlands](#) and [Lowlands](#).^{[51]: 78} Multiple truces reduced warfare on the southern border.^{[51]: 76, 83}

Union of the Crowns

Main articles: [Scotland in the early modern period](#) and [Union of the Crowns](#)



[James VI](#), [King of Scotland](#), succeeded to the English and Irish thrones in 1603.

The [Treaty of Perpetual Peace](#) was signed in 1502 by [James IV of Scotland](#) and [Henry VII of England](#). James married Henry's daughter, [Margaret Tudor](#).^[53] James invaded England in support of France under the terms of the [Auld Alliance](#) and became the last monarch

in [Great Britain](#) to die in battle, at [Flodden](#) in 1513.^[54] The war with England during the minority years of [Mary, Queen of Scots](#) between 1543 and 1551 is known as the [Rough Wooing](#).^[55] In 1560, the [Treaty of Edinburgh](#) brought an end to the [Siege of Leith](#) and recognized the Protestant [Elizabeth I](#) as Queen of England.^{[52]:112} The [Parliament of Scotland](#) met and immediately adopted the [Scots Confession](#), which signalled the [Scottish Reformation](#)'s sharp break from papal authority and Roman Catholic teaching.^{[31]:44} The Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, was forced to [abdicate in 1567](#).^[56]

In 1603, [James VI, King of Scots](#) inherited the thrones of the [Kingdom of England](#) and the [Kingdom of Ireland](#) in the [Union of the Crowns](#), and moved to London.^[57] This was a [personal union](#) as despite having the same monarch the kingdoms retained their separate parliaments, laws and other institutions. The first [Union Jack](#) was designed at James's behest, to be flown in addition to the [St Andrew's Cross](#) on Scots vessels at sea. James VI and I intended to create a single kingdom of Great Britain, but was thwarted in his attempt to do so by the [Parliament of England](#), which supported the wrecking proposal that a full legal union be sought instead, a proposal to which the Scots Parliament would not assent, causing the king to withdraw the plan.^[58]

Except for a short period under [the Protectorate](#), Scotland remained a separate state in the 17th century, but there was considerable conflict between the crown and the [Covenanters](#) over the form of [church government](#).^{[59]:124} The military was strengthened, allowing the imposition of royal authority on the western Highland clans. The 1609 [Statutes of Iona](#) compelled the cultural integration of Hebridean clan leaders.^{[60]:37–40} In 1641 and again in 1643, the Parliament of Scotland unsuccessfully sought a union with England which was "federative" and not "incorporating", in which Scotland would retain a separate parliament.^[61] The issue of union split the parliament in 1648.^[61]

After the execution of the Scottish king at [Whitehall](#) in 1649, amid the [Wars of the Three Kingdoms](#) and [its events in Scotland](#), [Oliver Cromwell](#), the victorious [Lord Protector](#), imposed the British Isles' first written constitution – the [Instrument of Government](#) – on Scotland in 1652 as part of the republican [Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland](#).^[61] The Protectorate Parliament was the first Westminster parliament to include representatives nominally from Scotland. The monarchy of the [House of Stuart](#) was resumed with the [Restoration in Scotland](#) in 1660. The Parliament of Scotland sought a commercial union with England in 1664; the proposal was rejected in 1668.^[61] In 1670 the Parliament of England rejected a proposed political union with Scotland.^[61] English proposals along the same lines were abandoned in 1674 and in 1685.^[61] The Scots Parliament rejected proposals for a political union with England in 1689.^[61] [Jacobitism](#), the political support for the exiled Catholic Stuart dynasty, remained a threat to the security of the British state under the Protestant [House of Orange](#) and the succeeding [House of Hanover](#) until the defeat of the [Jacobite rising of 1745](#).^[61] In 1698,

the [Company of Scotland](#) attempted a project to secure a trading colony on the [Isthmus of Panama](#). Almost every Scottish landowner who had money to spare is said to have invested in the [Darien scheme](#).^{[62][63]}

Treaty of Union

Main article: [Treaty of Union](#)

Further information: [Kingdom of Great Britain](#)



Scottish Exemplification (official copy) of the Treaty of Union of 1707

After another proposal from the English House of Lords was rejected in 1695, and a further Lords motion was voted down in the House of Commons in 1700, the Parliament of Scotland again rejected union in 1702.^[61] The failure of the Darien Scheme bankrupted the landowners who had invested, though not the burghs. Nevertheless, the nobles' bankruptcy, along with the threat of an English invasion, played a leading role in convincing the Scots elite to back a union with England.^{[62][63]} On 22 July 1706, the [Treaty of Union](#) was agreed between representatives of the [Scots Parliament](#) and the [Parliament of England](#). The following year, twin [Acts of Union](#) were passed by both parliaments to create the united [Kingdom of Great Britain](#) with effect from 1 May 1707^[64] with popular opposition and anti-union riots in [Edinburgh](#), [Glasgow](#), and elsewhere.^{[65][66]} The union also created the [Parliament of Great Britain](#), which succeeded both the [Parliament of Scotland](#) and the [Parliament of England](#), which rejected proposals from the [Parliament of Ireland](#) that the third kingdom be incorporated in the union.^[61]



[James Ogilvy](#), former [Lord Chancellor](#) (1702–1708), initially supported union but by 1713 advocated for its reversal

[Andrew Fletcher](#), a prominent Scottish patriot, argued that the ratification of the treaty would see Scotland "more like a conquered province",^[67] and by 1713, the former [Lord Chancellor of Scotland](#), [James Ogilvy, 4th Earl of Findlater](#), who was a prominent supporter for the Treaty of Union between Scotland and England had changed his position on the treaty, and unsuccessfully advocated for the treaty to be reversed.^[68] The deposed [Jacobite Stuart](#) claimants had remained popular in the Highlands and north-east, particularly among non-[Presbyterians](#), including Roman Catholics and [Episcopalian Protestants](#). Two major Jacobite risings launched in [1715](#) and [1745](#) failed to remove the [House of Hanover](#) from the British throne. The threat of the Jacobite movement to the United Kingdom and its monarchs effectively ended at the [Battle of Culloden](#), Great Britain's last [pitched battle](#).

The passing of the Treaty of Union did not bring about immediate economic prosperity to Scotland as was widely speculated by the [pamphleteer](#) as a result of the little consideration given to prospects of the Scottish economy.^[69] Campaigners for the union between Scotland and England believed that there would be economic advantages to Scotland as a result of the failed [Darien scheme](#) which left the Kingdom of Scotland bankrupt.^[67] Eventually however, with trade tariffs with England abolished, trade blossomed, especially with [Colonial America](#). The clippers belonging to the Glasgow [Tobacco Lords](#) were the fastest ships on the route to [Virginia](#). Until the [American War of Independence](#) in 1776, Glasgow was the world's premier tobacco port, dominating world trade.^[70] The disparity between the wealth of the merchant classes of the Scottish Lowlands and the ancient clans of the Scottish Highlands grew, amplifying centuries of division.

In the Highlands, clan chiefs gradually started to think of themselves more as commercial landlords than leaders of their people. These social and economic changes included the first phase of the [Highland Clearances](#) and, ultimately, the demise of clanship.^{[71]: 32–53, *passim*}

Industrial age and the Scottish Enlightenment

Main article: [Scotland in the modern era](#)



[Walter Scott](#), whose [Waverley Novels](#) helped define Scottish identity in the 19th century

The [Scottish Enlightenment](#) and the [Industrial Revolution](#) turned Scotland into an intellectual, commercial and industrial powerhouse^[72] — so much so [Voltaire](#) said "We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation."^[73] With the demise of Jacobitism and the advent of the Union, thousands of Scots, mainly Lowlanders, took up numerous positions of power in politics, civil service, the army and navy, trade, economics, colonial enterprises and other areas across the nascent [British Empire](#). Historian Neil Davidson notes "after 1746 there was an entirely new level of participation by Scots in political life, particularly outside Scotland." Davidson also states "far from being 'peripheral' to the British economy, Scotland – or more precisely, the Lowlands – lay at its core."^[74]

The [Scottish Reform Act 1832](#) increased the number of Scottish MPs and widened the franchise to include more of the middle classes.^[75] From the mid-century, there were increasing calls for Home Rule for Scotland and the post of [Secretary of State for Scotland](#) was revived.^[76] Towards the end of the century prime ministers of Scottish descent included [William Gladstone](#),^[77] and [the Earl of Rosebery](#).^[78] In the late 19th century the growing importance of the working classes was marked by [Keir Hardie](#)'s success in the [Mid Lanarkshire by-election, 1888](#), leading to the foundation of the [Scottish Labour Party](#), which was absorbed into the [Independent Labour Party](#) in 1895, with Hardie as its first leader.^[79] Glasgow became one of the largest cities in the world and known as "the [Second City of the Empire](#)" after London.^[80] After 1860, the Clydeside shipyards specialised in steamships made of iron (after 1870, made of steel), which rapidly replaced the wooden sailing vessels of both the merchant fleets and the

battle fleets of the world. It became the world's pre-eminent shipbuilding centre.^[81] The industrial developments, while they brought work and wealth, were so rapid that housing, town planning, and provision for public health did not keep pace with them, and for a time living conditions in some of the towns and cities were notoriously bad, with overcrowding, high infant mortality, and growing rates of tuberculosis.^[82]

While the Scottish Enlightenment is traditionally considered to have concluded toward the end of the 18th century,^[83] disproportionately large Scottish contributions to British science and letters continued for another 50 years or more, thanks to such figures as the physicists [James Clerk Maxwell](#) and [Lord Kelvin](#), and the engineers and inventors [James Watt](#) and [William Murdoch](#), whose work was critical to the technological developments of the Industrial Revolution throughout Britain.^[84] In literature, the most successful figure of the mid-19th century was [Walter Scott](#). His first prose work, [Waverley](#) in 1814, is often called the first historical novel.^[85] It launched a highly successful career that probably more than any other helped define and popularise Scottish cultural identity.^[86] In the late 19th century, a number of Scottish-born authors achieved international reputations, such as [Robert Louis Stevenson](#), [Arthur Conan Doyle](#), [J. M. Barrie](#) and [George MacDonald](#).^[87] Scotland also played a major part in the development of art and architecture. The [Glasgow School](#), which developed in the late 19th century, and flourished in the early 20th century, produced a distinctive blend of influences including the [Celtic Revival](#) the [Arts and Crafts movement](#), and [Japonism](#), which found favour throughout the [modern art](#) world of continental Europe and helped define the [Art Nouveau](#) style. Proponents included architect and artist [Charles Rennie Mackintosh](#).^[88]

World wars and Scotland Act 1998



A piper of the [Seaforth Highlanders](#) leads the [26th Brigade](#) back from the trenches during the [Battle of Bazentin Ridge](#), July 1916

Scotland played a major role in the [British effort](#) in the [First World War](#). It especially provided manpower, ships, machinery, fish and money.^[89] With a population of 4.8 million in 1911, Scotland sent over half a million men to the war, of whom over a quarter died in combat or from disease, and 150,000 were seriously wounded.^[90] [Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig](#) was Britain's commander on the Western Front. The war saw

the emergence of a radical movement called "[Red Clydeside](#)" led by militant trades unionists. Formerly a [Liberal](#) stronghold, the industrial districts switched to [Labour](#) by 1922, with a base among the [Irish Catholic](#) working-class districts. Women were especially active in building neighbourhood solidarity on housing issues. The "Reds" operated within the Labour Party with little influence in Parliament and the mood changed to passive despair by the late 1920s.^[91]

During the Second World War, Scotland was targeted by [Nazi Germany](#) largely due to its factories, shipyards, and coal mines.^[92] Cities such as [Glasgow](#) and [Edinburgh](#) were targeted by German bombers, as were smaller towns mostly located in the central belt of the country.^[92] Perhaps the most significant air raid in Scotland was the [Clydebank Blitz](#) of March 1941, which intended to destroy naval shipbuilding in the area.^[93] 528 people were killed and 4,000 homes destroyed.^[93] Perhaps Scotland's most unusual wartime episode occurred in 1941 when [Rudolf Hess](#) flew to Renfrewshire, possibly intending to broker a peace deal through the [Duke of Hamilton](#).^[94] Before his departure from Germany, Hess had given his adjutant, [Karlheinz Pintsch](#), a letter addressed to [Adolf Hitler](#) that detailed his intentions to open peace negotiations with the British. Pintsch delivered the letter to Hitler at the Berghof around noon on 11 May.^[95] [Albert Speer](#) later said Hitler described Hess's departure as one of the worst personal blows of his life, as he considered it a personal betrayal.^[96] Hitler worried that his allies, Italy and Japan, would perceive Hess's act as an attempt by Hitler to secretly open peace negotiations with the British.



The explosion of [Pan Am Flight 103](#) over Lockerbie remains the deadliest act of terror in the United Kingdom

After 1945, Scotland's economic situation worsened due to overseas competition, inefficient industry, and industrial disputes.^[97] Only in recent decades has the country enjoyed something of a cultural and economic renaissance. Economic factors contributing to this recovery included a resurgent financial services industry, [electronics manufacturing](#), (see [Silicon Glen](#)),^[98] and the [North Sea oil](#) and gas industry.^[99] The introduction in 1989 by Margaret Thatcher's government of the [Community Charge](#) (widely known as the Poll Tax) one year before the rest of Great Britain,^[100] contributed to a growing movement for Scottish control over domestic affairs.^[101] On 21 December 1988, [Pan Am Flight 103](#) exploded mid-air over the town

of [Lockerbie](#), killing all on board as well as eleven Lockerbie residents. It remains the deadliest [terrorist attack in the United Kingdom](#).^[102]

Following a [referendum on devolution proposals in 1997](#), the [Scotland Act 1998](#)^[103] was passed by the British Parliament, which established a devolved [Scottish Parliament](#) and [Scottish Government](#) with responsibility for most laws specific to Scotland.^[104] The Scottish Parliament was reconvened in [Edinburgh](#) on 4 July 1999.^[105] The first to hold the office of [first minister of Scotland](#) was [Donald Dewar](#), who served until his sudden death in 2000.^[106]

21st century



The official reconvening of the [Scottish Parliament](#) in July 1999 with [Donald Dewar](#), then [first minister of Scotland](#) (left) with [Queen Elizabeth II](#) (centre)

The [Scottish Parliament Building](#) at Holyrood opened in October 2004 after lengthy construction delays and running over budget.^[107] The Scottish Parliament's form of [proportional representation](#) (the [additional member system](#)) resulted in no one party having an overall majority for the first three Scottish parliament elections.

The pro-[independence Scottish National Party](#) led by [Alex Salmond](#) achieved an overall majority in the [2011 election](#), winning 69 of the 129 seats available.^[108] The success of the SNP in achieving a majority in the Scottish Parliament paved the way for the [September 2014 referendum on Scottish independence](#). The majority voted against the proposition, with 55% voting no to independence.^[109] More powers, particularly concerning taxation, were devolved to the Scottish Parliament after the referendum, following cross-party talks in the [Smith Commission](#).

Since the 2014 referendum, events such as the UK leaving the European Union, despite a majority of voters in Scotland voting to remain a member, have led to calls for a [second independence referendum](#). In 2022, the [Lord Advocate Dorothy Bain](#) argued the case for the Scottish Government to hold another referendum on the issue, with the [Supreme Court](#) later ruling against the argument.^[110] Following the Supreme Court decision, the Scottish Government stated that it wished to make amendments to the [Scotland Act 1998](#) that would allow a referendum to be held.^{[111][112]}

Geography and natural history

Main article: [Geography of Scotland](#)



At 4,413 feet (1,345 m), [Ben Nevis](#) is the highest peak in Scotland and the [British Isles](#)

The mainland of Scotland comprises the northern third of the land mass of the island of Great Britain, which lies off the northwest coast of [Continental Europe](#). The total area is 30,977 square miles (80,231 km²) with a land area of 30,078 square miles (77,901 km²),^[4] comparable to the size of the [Czech Republic](#). Scotland's only land border is with England, and runs for 96 miles (154 km) between the basin of the [River Tweed](#) on the east coast and the [Solway Firth](#) in the west. The Atlantic Ocean borders the west coast and the [North Sea](#) is to the east. The island of Ireland lies only 13 miles (21 km) from the south-western peninsula of [Kintyre](#),^[113] Norway is 190 miles (305 km) to the northeast and the [Faroe Islands](#), 168 miles (270 km) to the north.

The territorial extent of Scotland is generally that established by the 1237 [Treaty of York](#) between Scotland and the Kingdom of England^[114] and the 1266 [Treaty of Perth](#) between Scotland and Norway.^[12] Important exceptions include the [Isle of Man](#), which having been lost to England in the 14th century is now a [crown dependency](#) outside of the United Kingdom; the island groups [Orkney](#) and [Shetland](#), which were acquired from Norway in 1472;^[115] and [Berwick-upon-Tweed](#) (after changing ownership several times) was ceded to England in 1482.^[116]

The geographical [centre of Scotland](#) lies a few miles from the village of [Newtonmore](#) in [Badenoch](#).^[117] Rising to 4,413 feet (1,345 m) above sea level, Scotland's highest point is the summit of [Ben Nevis](#), in [Lochaber](#), while Scotland's longest river, the [River Tay](#), flows for a distance of 117 miles (188 km).^[10]

Geology and geomorphology

Main article: [Geology of Scotland](#)



[Arthur's Seat](#), Edinburgh

The whole of Scotland was covered by ice sheets during the [Pleistocene ice ages](#) and the landscape is much affected by glaciation. From a geological perspective, the country has three main sub-divisions: the Highlands and Islands, the Central Lowlands, and the Southern Uplands.

The [Highlands and Islands](#) lie to the north and west of the [Highland Boundary Fault](#), which runs from [Arran](#) to [Stonehaven](#). This part of Scotland largely comprises ancient rocks from the [Cambrian](#) and [Precambrian](#), which were uplifted during the later [Caledonian orogeny](#). It is interspersed with [igneous](#) intrusions of a more recent age, remnants of which formed mountain massifs such as the [Cairngorms](#) and the [Cuillin](#).^[118] In north-eastern mainland Scotland [weathering](#) of rock that occurred before the [Last Ice Age](#) has shaped much of the landscape.^[119]

A significant exception to the above are the fossil-bearing beds of [Old Red Sandstones](#) found principally along the [Moray Firth](#) coast. The [Highlands](#) are generally mountainous and the highest elevations in the British Isles are found here. Scotland has over 790 islands divided into four main groups: [Shetland](#), [Orkney](#), and the [Inner Hebrides](#) and [Outer Hebrides](#). There are numerous bodies of freshwater including [Loch Lomond](#) and [Loch Ness](#). Some parts of the coastline consist of [machair](#), a low-lying dune pasture land.



[Loch Lomond](#), a freshwater [loch](#), often considered the boundary between the lowlands and Highlands^[120]

The [Central Lowlands](#) is a [rift valley](#) mainly comprising [Paleozoic](#) formations. Many of these sediments have economic significance for it is here that the coal and iron-bearing rocks that fuelled Scotland's [industrial revolution](#) are found. This area has also experienced intense volcanism, [Arthur's Seat](#) in Edinburgh being the remnant of a once

much larger volcano. This area is relatively low-lying, although even here hills such as the [Ochils](#) and [Campsie Fells](#) are rarely far from view.

The [Southern Uplands](#) is a range of hills almost 125 miles (200 km) long, interspersed with broad valleys. They lie south of a second [fault line](#) (the Southern Uplands fault) that runs from [Girvan](#) to [Dunbar](#).^{[121][122][123]} The geological foundations largely comprise [Silurian](#) deposits laid down some 400 to 500 million years ago. The high point of the Southern Uplands is [Merrick](#) with an elevation of 843 m (2,766 ft).^{[11][124][125][126]} The Southern Uplands is home to Scotland's highest village, [Wanlockhead](#) (430 m or 1,411 ft above sea level).^[123]

Climate

Main article: [Climate of Scotland](#)



[Tiree](#) in the [Inner Hebrides](#) is one of the sunniest locations in Scotland.

The climate of most of Scotland is [temperate](#) and [oceanic](#), and tends to be very changeable. As it is warmed by the [Gulf Stream](#) from the Atlantic, it has much milder winters (but cooler, wetter summers) than areas on similar latitudes, such as [Labrador](#), southern [Scandinavia](#), the [Moscow region](#) in [Russia](#), and the [Kamchatka Peninsula](#) on the opposite side of [Eurasia](#). Temperatures are generally lower than in the rest of the UK, with the temperature of −27.2 °C (−17.0 °F) recorded at [Braemar](#) in the [Grampian Mountains](#), on 11 February 1895, the coldest ever recorded anywhere in the UK.^[127] Winter maxima average 6 °C (43 °F) in the Lowlands, with summer maxima averaging 18 °C (64 °F). The highest temperature recorded was 34.8 °C (94.6 °F) at [Charterhall](#), [Scottish Borders](#) on 19 July 2022.^[128]

The west of Scotland is usually warmer than the east, owing to the influence of Atlantic [ocean currents](#) and the colder surface temperatures of the [North Sea](#). [Tiree](#), in the Inner Hebrides, is one of the sunniest places in the country: it had more than 300 hours of sunshine in May 1975.^[129] Rainfall varies widely across Scotland. The western highlands of Scotland are the wettest, with annual rainfall in a few places exceeding 3,000 mm (120 in).^[130] In comparison, much of lowland Scotland receives less than 800 mm (31 in) annually.^[131] Heavy snowfall is not common in the lowlands, but

becomes more common with altitude. Braemar has an average of 59 snow days per year,^[132] while many coastal areas average fewer than 10 days of lying snow per year.^[131]

Flora and fauna

Main articles: [Fauna of Scotland](#) and [Flora of Scotland](#)



[White-tailed sea eagle](#)

Scotland's wildlife is typical of the north-west of Europe, although several of the larger mammals such as the lynx, brown bear, wolf, elk and walrus were hunted to extinction in historic times. There are important populations of seals and internationally significant nesting grounds for a variety of seabirds such as [gannets](#).^[133] The [golden eagle](#) is something of a national icon.^[134]

On the high mountain tops, species including [ptarmigan](#), [mountain hare](#) and [stoat](#) can be seen in their white colour phase during winter months.^[135] Remnants of the native [Scots pine](#) forest exist^[136] and within these areas the [Scottish crossbill](#), the UK's only [endemic](#) bird species and [vertebrate](#), can be found alongside [capercaillie](#), [Scottish wildcat](#), [red squirrel](#) and [pine marten](#).^{[137][138][139]} Various animals have been re-introduced, including the [white-tailed eagle](#) in 1975, the [red kite](#) in the 1980s,^{[140][141]} and there have been experimental projects involving the [beaver](#) and [wild boar](#), which are both now relatively widespread. Today, much of the remaining native [Caledonian Forest](#) lies within the [Cairngorms National Park](#) and remnants of the forest remain at 84 locations across Scotland. On the west coast, remnants of ancient Celtic Rainforest remain, particularly on the Taynish peninsula in [Argyll](#), these forests are particularly rare due to high rates of deforestation throughout Scottish history.^{[142][143]} Scotland now ranks in the lowest 15% of countries in the Biodiversity Intactness Index.^{[144][145]}

The flora of the country is varied incorporating both [deciduous](#) and [coniferous](#) woodland as well as [moorland](#) and [tundra](#) species. Large-scale commercial tree planting and management of upland moorland habitat for the grazing of sheep and [field sport](#) activities like [deer stalking](#) and [driven grouse shooting](#) impacts the distribution of [indigenous](#) plants and animals.^[146] The UK's tallest tree is a [grand fir](#) planted beside [Loch Fyne](#), Argyll in the 1870s, and the [Fortingall Yew](#) may be 5,000 years old and is probably the oldest living thing in

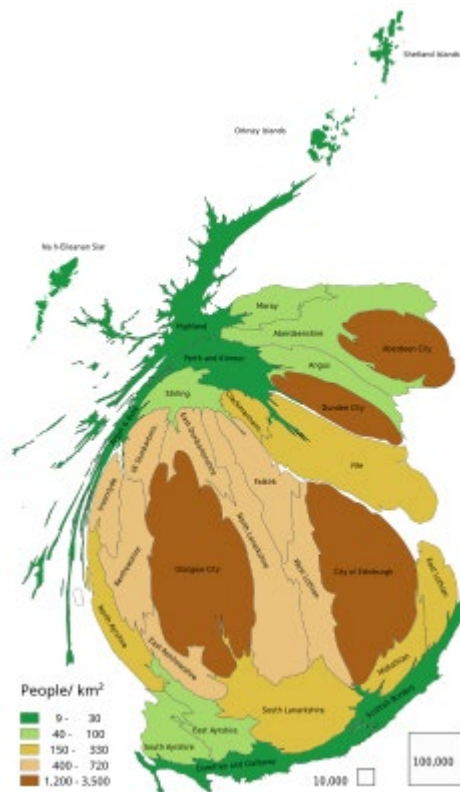
Europe. ^{[147][148][149]} Although the number of native [vascular plants](#) is low by world standards, Scotland's substantial [bryophyte](#) flora is of global importance. ^{[150][151]}

Demographics

Main article: [Demographics of Scotland](#)

See also: [Languages of Scotland](#), [Religion in Scotland](#), and [Scottish people](#)

Population



Scotland population [cartogram](#). The size of councils is in proportion to their population.

During the 1820s, many Scots migrated from Scotland to countries such as [Australia](#), the [United States](#) and [Canada](#), principally from the Highlands which remained poor in comparison to elsewhere in Scotland. ^[152] The Highlands was the only part of mainland Britain with a recurrent famine. ^[153] A small range of products were exported from the region, which had negligible industrial production and a continued population growth that tested the subsistence agriculture. These problems, and the desire to improve agriculture and profits were the driving forces of the ongoing [Highland Clearances](#), in which many of the population of the Highlands suffered eviction as lands were enclosed, principally so that they could be used for sheep farming. The first phase of the clearances followed patterns of agricultural change throughout Britain. The second phase was driven by overpopulation, the [Highland Potato Famine](#) and the collapse of industries that had relied on the wartime economy of the Napoleonic Wars. ^[154]

The population of Scotland grew steadily in the 19th century, from 1,608,000 in the census of 1801 to 2,889,000 in 1851 and 4,472,000 in 1901.^[155] Even with the development of industry, there were not enough good jobs. As a result, during the period 1841–1931, about 2 million Scots migrated to North America and Australia, and another 750,000 Scots relocated to England.^[156] Caused by the advent of [refrigeration](#) and imports of lamb, mutton and wool from overseas, the 1870s brought with them a collapse of sheep prices and an abrupt halt in the previous sheep farming boom.^[157]

Scotland is the [most sparsely populated country](#) of the United Kingdom.^{[158][159]} In August 2012, the Scottish population reached an all-time high of 5.25 million people.^[160] The reasons given were that, in Scotland, births were outnumbering the number of deaths, and immigrants were moving to Scotland from overseas. In 2011, 43,700 people moved from Wales, Northern Ireland or England to live in Scotland.^[160] The [most recent census in Scotland](#) was conducted by the Scottish Government and the [National Records of Scotland](#) in March 2022.^[161] The population of Scotland at the 2022 Census was 5,436,600, the highest ever,^[161] beating the previous record of 5,295,400 at the 2011 Census. It was 5,062,011 at the 2001 Census.^[162] An ONS estimate for mid-2021 was 5,480,000.^[163] In the 2011 Census, 62% of Scotland's population stated their [national identity](#) as 'Scottish only', 18% as 'Scottish and British', 8% as 'British only', and 4% chose 'other identity only'.^[164]

Throughout its history, Scotland has long had a tradition of migration from Scotland and immigration into Scotland. In 2021, the Scottish Government released figures showing that an estimated 41,000 people had immigrated from other international countries into Scotland, while an average of 22,100 people had migrated from Scotland.^[165] Scottish Government data from 2002 shows that by 2021, there had been a sharp increase in immigration to Scotland, with 2002 estimates standing at 27,800 immigrants. While immigration had increased from 2002, migration from Scotland had dropped, with 2002 estimates standing at 26,200 people migrating from Scotland.^[166]

Urbanisation

See also: [Cities of Scotland](#) and [List of towns and cities in Scotland by population](#)

Although [Edinburgh](#) is the capital of Scotland, the largest city is Glasgow, which has just over 584,000 inhabitants. The [Greater Glasgow](#) conurbation, with a population of almost 1.2 million, is home to nearly a quarter of Scotland's population.^[167] The [Central Belt](#) is where most of the main towns and cities of Scotland are located, including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Perth. Scotland's only major city outside the Central Belt is Aberdeen. The [Scottish Lowlands](#) host 80% of the total population, where the [Central Belt](#) accounts for 3.5 million people.

In general, only the more accessible and larger islands remain inhabited. Currently, fewer than 90 remain inhabited. The Southern Uplands is essentially rural and

dominated by agriculture and forestry.^{[168][169]} Because of housing problems in Glasgow and Edinburgh, [five new towns](#) were designated between 1947 and 1966. They are [East Kilbride](#), [Glenrothes](#), [Cumbernauld](#), [Livingston](#), and [Irvine](#).^[170]

The largest council area by population is [Glasgow City](#), with [Highland](#) being the largest in terms of geographical area.

Largest cities or towns in Scotland							
Scotland's Census 2022 ^[171]							
Rank	Name	Council area	Pop.	Rank	Name	Council area	Pop.
1	Glasgow	Glasgow City	632,350	11	Kirkcaldy	Fife	50,370
2	Edinburgh	City of Edinburgh	506,520	12	Inverness	Highland	47,790
3	Aberdeen	Aberdeen	198,590	13	Perth	Perth and Kinross	47,350
4	Dundee	Dundee City	148,210	14	Kilmarnock	East Ayrshire	46,970
5	Paisley	Renfrewshire	77,270	15	Ayr	South Ayrshire	46,260
6	East Kilbride	South Lanarkshire	75,310	16	Coatbridge	North Lanarkshire	43,950
7	Livingston	West Lothian	56,840	17	Greenock	Inverclyde	41,280
8	Dunfermline	Fife	54,990	18	Glenrothes	Fife	38,360
9	Hamilton	South Lanarkshire	54,480	19	Stirling	Stirling	37,910
10	Cumbernauld	North Lanarkshire	50,530	20	Airdrie	North Lanarkshire	36,390

Languages

Main article: [Languages of Scotland](#)



The [Anglo-Scottish border](#), welcoming travellers in both English and [Scottish Gaelic](#)

Scotland has three [indigenous languages](#): English, [Scots](#), and [Scottish Gaelic](#).^{[172][173]} Scottish Standard English, a variety of English as spoken in Scotland, is at one end of a bipolar [linguistic continuum](#), with broad [Scots](#) at the other.^[174] Scottish Standard English may have been influenced to varying degrees by Scots.^{[175][176]} [Highland English](#) is spoken in that region, while Gaelic is mostly spoken in the [Western Isles](#), where it continues to be used by a large proportion of residents.

Overall, the use of Scotland's indigenous languages other than English has declined since the 19th century. The 2011 census indicated that 63% of the population had "no skills in Scots".^[177] The use of Gaelic is confined to 1% of the population.^[178] The number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland dropped from 250,000 in 1881 to 60,000 in 2008.^[179] Across the whole of Scotland, the 2011 census showed that 25,000 people (0.49% of the population) used Gaelic at home. The most common language spoken at home in Scotland after English and Scots is Polish, with about 1.1% of the population, or 54,000 people.^{[180][181]}

Immigration since World War II has given Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Dundee small South Asian communities.^[182] In 2011, there were an estimated 49,000 ethnically Pakistani people living in Scotland, making them the largest non-White ethnic group.^[183] The 2004 [enlargement of the European Union](#) spurred an increase in migration from [Central](#) and [Eastern Europe](#) to Scotland, and the 2011 census indicated that 61,000 [Poles](#) lived there.^{[183][184]}

There are many more people with Scottish ancestry living abroad than the total population of Scotland. In the 2000 Census, 9.2 million Americans self-reported some degree of [Scottish](#) descent.^[185] [Ulster](#)'s Protestant population is mainly of lowland Scottish descent,^[186] and it is estimated that there are more than 27 million descendants of the [Scots-Irish](#) migration now living in the US.^{[187][188]} In Canada, the [Scottish-Canadian](#) community accounts for 4.7 million people.^[189] About 20% of the original European settler population of New Zealand came from Scotland.^[190]

Religion

Main article: [Religion in Scotland](#)



[High Kirk of Edinburgh](#)

As per the 2022 Census, a majority of Scots (51.12%) reported not following any religion. The most practiced religion is Christianity (38.79%), mostly the [Church of Scotland](#) (20.36%) and [Roman Catholicism](#) (13.3%).^[191] In almost every council area, the most common response to the census question was "No religion," except in [Na h-Eileanan Siar](#) and [Inverclyde](#), where the Church of Scotland (35.3%) and Catholicism (33.4%) were the most common responses, respectively.^[191]

Forms of [Christianity](#) have dominated religious life in what is now Scotland for more than 1,400 years.^{[192][193]} Since the [Scottish Reformation](#) of 1560, the [national church](#) (the [Church of Scotland](#), also known as [The Kirk](#)) has been [Protestant](#) in orientation and [Reformed](#) in theology. Since 1689 it has had a [Presbyterian](#) system of church government independent from the state.^[11] Its membership dropped just below 300,000 in 2020 (5% of the total population)^{[194][195][196]} The Church operates a territorial parish structure, with every community in Scotland having a local congregation.

Scotland also has a significant [Roman Catholic](#) population with 13.3% professing that faith, particularly in Greater Glasgow and the north-west.^{[197][191]} After the Reformation, Roman Catholicism in Scotland continued in the Highlands and some western islands like [Uist](#) and [Barra](#), and it was strengthened during the 19th century by immigration from Ireland. Other Christian denominations in Scotland include the [Free Church of Scotland](#), and various other Presbyterian offshoots. Scotland's third largest church is the [Scottish Episcopal Church](#).^[198]

Other minority faiths include [Islam](#) (2.2%), [Hinduism](#) (0.55%), Sikhism and Buddhism.^{[191][199][200]} The [Samyé Ling](#) monastery near [Eskdalemuir](#), which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2007, is the oldest [Buddhist](#) monastery in Western Europe.^[201]

Education

Main article: [Education in Scotland](#)



Founded in 1413, the [University of St. Andrews](#) is the oldest in Scotland and one of the oldest worldwide.^[202]

The [Scottish education system](#) has always had a characteristic emphasis on a [broad education](#).^[203] In the 15th century, the Humanist emphasis on education cumulated with the passing of the [Education Act 1496](#), which decreed that all sons of barons and freeholders of substance should attend grammar schools to learn "perfycyt Latyne", resulting in an increase in literacy among a male and wealthy elite.^[204] In the Reformation, the 1560 [First Book of Discipline](#) set out a plan for a school in every parish, but this proved financially impossible.^[205] In 1616 an [act in Privy council](#) commanded every parish to establish a school.^[206] By the late seventeenth century there was a largely complete network of parish schools in the lowlands, but in the Highlands basic education was still lacking in many areas.^[207] Education remained a matter for the church rather than the state until the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1872](#).^[208]

Education in Scotland is the responsibility of the [Scottish Government](#) and is overseen by its executive agency [Education Scotland](#).^[209] The [Curriculum for Excellence](#), Scotland's national school curriculum, presently provides the curricular framework for children and young people from age 3 to 18.^[210] All 3- and 4-year-old children in Scotland are entitled to a free nursery place. Formal primary education begins at approximately 5 years old and lasts for 7 years (P1–P7); children in Scotland study National Qualifications of the [Curriculum for Excellence](#) between the ages of 14 and 18. The school leaving age is 16, after which students may choose to remain at school and study further qualifications. A small number of students at certain [private schools](#) may follow the [English system](#) and study towards [GCSEs](#) and [A](#) and [AS-Levels](#) instead.^[211]

There are fifteen [Scottish universities](#), some of which are among the [oldest in the world](#).^{[212][213]} The four universities founded before the end of the 16th century – the [University of St Andrews](#), the [University of Glasgow](#), the [University of Aberdeen](#) and the [University of Edinburgh](#) – are collectively known as the [ancient universities of Scotland](#), all of which rank among the 200 best universities in the world in the [THE rankings](#), with Edinburgh placing in the top 50.^[214] Scotland had more universities per capita in [QS' World University Rankings'](#) top 100 in 2012 than any other nation.^[215] The country produces 1% of the world's [published research](#) with less than 0.1% of the world's population, and higher education institutions account for 9% of Scotland's service sector exports.^{[216][217]} Scotland's University Courts are the only bodies in Scotland authorised to award degrees.

Health

Main articles: [Health in Scotland](#) and [Healthcare in Scotland](#)

Further information: [List of hospitals in Scotland](#) and [Social care in Scotland](#)



[NHS Scotland's Queen Elizabeth University Hospital](#), Glasgow. It is the largest hospital campus in Europe.^[218]

Health care in Scotland is mainly provided by [NHS Scotland](#), Scotland's public health care system. This was founded by the [National Health Service \(Scotland\) Act 1947](#) (later repealed by the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978) that took effect on 5 July 1948 to coincide with the launch of the NHS in England and Wales. Prior to 1948, half of Scotland's landmass was already covered by state-funded health care, provided by the [Highlands and Islands Medical Service](#).^[219] Healthcare policy and funding is the responsibility of the Scottish Government's [Health Directorates](#). In 2014, the NHS in Scotland had around 140,000 staff.^[220]

The [total fertility rate](#) (TFR) in Scotland is below the replacement rate of 2.1 (the TFR was 1.73 in 2011^[221]). The majority of births are to unmarried women (51.3% of births were outside of marriage in 2012^[222]).

Life expectancy for those born in Scotland between 2012 and 2014 is 77.1 years for males and 81.1 years for females.^[223] This is the lowest of any of the four countries of the UK.^[223] The number of hospital admissions in Scotland for diseases such as cancer was 2,528 in 2002. Over the next ten years, by 2012, this had increased to 2,669.^[224] Hospital admissions for other diseases, such as coronary heart disease (CHD) were lower, with 727 admissions in 2002, and decreasing to 489 in 2012.^[224]

Government and politics

Main articles: [Politics of Scotland](#), [Scottish Parliament](#), and [Scottish Government](#)

Further information: [Political parties in Scotland](#), [Elections in Scotland](#), and [Electoral system of Scotland](#)



[King Charles III](#)

[Monarch](#)

since 2022



[John Swinney](#)

[First Minister](#)

since 2024

Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, a [constitutional monarchy](#) whose current sovereign is [Charles III](#).^[225] The monarchy uses a variety of styles, titles and other symbols specific to Scotland, most of which originated in the pre-union [Kingdom of Scotland](#). These include the [Royal Standard of Scotland](#), the [royal coat of arms](#), and the title [Duke of Rothesay](#), which is traditionally given to the heir apparent. There are also distinct Scottish [Officers of State](#) and Officers of the Crown, and the [Order of the Thistle](#), a [chivalric order](#), is specific to the country.^[226]

The [Parliament of the United Kingdom](#) and the [Parliament of Scotland](#) are the country's primary legislative bodies. The UK Parliament is [sovereign](#) and therefore has supremacy over the Scottish Parliament,^[227] but generally restricts itself to legislating over reserved matters: primarily some taxes, some aspects of social security, defence, international relations, and broadcasting.^[228] There is a [convention](#) the UK Parliament will not legislate over devolved matters without the Scottish Parliament's consent.^[229] Scotland is represented in the [House of Commons](#), the [lower chamber](#) of the UK Parliament, by

57 [Members of Parliament](#) (out of a total of 650).^[230] They are elected to single-member [constituencies](#) under the [first-past-the-post](#) system of voting. The [Scotland Office](#) represents the British government in Scotland and represents Scottish interests within the government.^[231] The Scotland Office is led by the [secretary of state for Scotland](#), who sits in the [Cabinet of the United Kingdom](#).^[232] The Labour MP [Ian Murray](#) has held the position since July 2024.^[233]



The [Scottish Parliament Building](#) in Edinburgh is the seat of the [Scottish Parliament](#) and its [committees](#)

The Scottish Parliament is a [unicameral](#) legislature with 129 members (MSPs): 73 of them represent individual constituencies and are elected on a [first-past-the-post](#) system, and the other 56 are elected in eight different electoral regions by the [additional member system](#). MSPs normally serve for a five-year period.^[234] The Scottish Parliament has the most extensive [devolved powers](#) amongst the [devolved parliaments](#) in the United Kingdom,^[235] and considered one of the most powerful devolved parliaments internationally.^[236] The largest party since the [2021 Scottish Parliament election](#), has been the [Scottish National Party](#) (SNP), which won 64 of the 129 seats.^[237] The [Scottish Conservatives](#), [Scottish Labour](#), the [Scottish Liberal Democrats](#) and the [Scottish Greens](#) also have representation in the current Parliament.^[237] The [next Scottish Parliament election](#) is due to be held on 7 May 2026.^[238]

The [Scottish Government](#), which has been described as one of the most powerful devolved governments globally,^[239] is led by the [first minister](#), who is nominated by MSPs and is typically the leader of the largest party in the Parliament. Other ministers are appointed by the first minister and serve at their discretion.^[240] As the head of the Scottish Government, the first minister is responsible for the comprehensive development, implementation and presentation of government policy, and is responsible for promoting the interests of the country at home and internationally.^[241] [John Swinney](#), leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), has served as the first minister since 8 May 2024.^[242]

Diplomacy and relations

Main articles: [International relations of Scotland](#) and [List of consular missions in Scotland](#)

Further information: [Intergovernmental relations in the United Kingdom](#)



First Minister [John Swinney](#) meets with [President of Zambia Hakainde Hichilema](#) at [Bute House](#), 2024

As leader of the Scottish Government, the first minister is a member of the [Heads of Government Council](#) and the [Council of the Nations and Regions](#), the bodies which facilitate intergovernmental relations.^[243] Foreign policy is a reserved matter and primarily the responsibility of the [Foreign Office](#), a department of the UK Government.^[244] Nevertheless, the Scottish Government may promote Scottish interests abroad and encourage foreign investment in Scotland.^[245] The first minister and the [constitution secretary](#)^[246] have portfolios which include foreign affairs.^{[247][248]} Scotland's international network consists of two Scotland Houses, one in [Brussels](#) and the other in [London](#), seven Scottish Government international offices, and over thirty Scottish Development International offices in other countries globally. Both Scotland Houses are independent Scottish Government establishments, whilst the seven Scottish Government international offices are based in [British embassies](#) or British High Commission offices.^[249] The Scottish Government has a network of offices in Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Dublin, London, Ottawa, Paris, and Washington, D.C., which promote Scottish interests in their respective areas.^[250] Additionally, the country has a number of [foreign diplomatic missions](#), most of which are located in the capital city, Edinburgh.^[251]



First Minister [Henry McLeish](#) meets with U.S. president [George W. Bush](#) at the [White House](#), 2001

The nation has historic ties to France as a result of the '[Auld Alliance](#)', a treaty signed between the Kingdom of Scotland and [Kingdom of France](#) in 1295 to discourage an English invasion of either country.^[252] The alliance effectively ended in the sixteenth century, but the two countries continue to have a close relationship, with a Statement of Intent being signed in 2013 between the Scottish Government and the [Government of France](#).^[253] In 2004 the [Scotland Malawi Partnership](#) was established, which co-

ordinates Scottish activities to strengthen existing links with [Malawi](#), and in 2021, the Scottish Government and [Government of Ireland](#) signed the Ireland-Scotland Bilateral Review, committing both governments to increased levels of co-operation on areas such as diplomacy, economy and business.^{[249][254][255]} Scotland also has [historical and cultural](#) ties with the [Scandinavian countries](#).^{[256][257]} Scottish Government policy advocates for stronger political relations with the [Nordic](#) and [Baltic](#) countries, which has resulted in some Nordic-inspired policies being adopted such as baby boxes.^{[258][259]} Representatives from the Scottish Parliament attended the [Nordic Council](#) for the first time in 2022.^[260]

Scotland is a member of the [British–Irish Council](#), the [Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power](#) (REGLEG), the [British–Irish Parliamentary Assembly](#), the [Council of European Municipalities and Regions](#),^[261] the [Inter-Parliamentary Forum](#), the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#),^[262] the [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association](#)^{[263][264][265]} and the [Parliamentary Partnership Assembly with the European Union](#).^[266] Scotland held the Presidency of Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power from November 2003 until November 2004 during the [premiership of Jack McConnell](#).^[267]

Devolution and independence

Main articles: [Scottish devolution](#) and [Scottish independence](#)



[Donald Dewar](#), the inaugural [first minister](#) and was referred to as the "[Father of the Nation](#)".^[268]

[Devolution](#)—the granting of central government powers to a regional government^[269]—gained increasing popularity as a policy in the United Kingdom the late twentieth century; it was described by [John Smith](#), then [Leader of the Labour Party](#), as the "settled will of the Scottish people".^[270] The Scottish Parliament and [Scottish Government](#) were subsequently established under the [Scotland Act 1998](#); the Act followed a successful [referendum in 1997](#) which found majority support for both creating the Parliament and granting it limited powers to [vary income tax](#).^[271] The Act enabled the new institutions to legislate in all areas not explicitly reserved by the UK Parliament.^[272]

Two more pieces of legislation, the Scotland Acts of [2012](#) and [2016](#), gave the Scottish Parliament further powers to legislate on taxation and social security;^[273] the 2016 Act also gave the Scottish Government powers to manage the affairs of the [Crown Estate in Scotland](#).^[274] Conversely, the [United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020](#) constrains the Scottish Parliament's autonomy to regulate goods and services,^{[275][276]} and the academic view is that this undermines devolution.^[282]

The [2007 Scottish Parliament elections](#) led to the [Scottish National Party](#) (SNP), which supports [Scottish independence](#), forming a [minority government](#). The new government established a "[National Conversation](#)" on constitutional issues, proposing a number of options such as increasing the powers of the Scottish Parliament, [federalism](#), or a referendum on Scottish independence from the United Kingdom. The three main unionist opposition parties—[Scottish Labour](#), the [Scottish Conservatives](#), and the [Scottish Liberal Democrats](#)—created a separate [commission](#) to investigate the distribution of powers between devolved Scottish and UK-wide bodies while not considering independence.^[283] In August 2009 the SNP proposed a bill to hold a referendum on independence in November 2010, but was defeated by opposition from all other major parties.^{[284][285][286]}



Signing of the [Edinburgh Agreement](#) in 2012 to hold a referendum on independence

The [2011 Scottish Parliament election](#) resulted in an SNP overall majority in the Scottish Parliament, and on 18 September 2014 a [referendum on Scottish independence](#) was held.^[287] The referendum resulted in a rejection of independence, by 55.3% to 44.7%.^{[288][289]} During the campaign, the three main parties in the British Parliament—the [Conservatives](#), [Labour](#), and the [Liberal Democrats](#)—pledged to extend the powers of the Scottish Parliament.^{[290][291]} An all-party [commission](#) chaired by [Robert Smith, Baron Smith of Kelvin](#) was formed,^[291] which led to the Scotland Act 2016.^[292]

Following the [European Union Referendum Act 2015](#), the [2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum](#) was held on 23 June 2016 on Britain's membership of the [European Union](#). A majority in the United Kingdom voted to withdraw from the EU, while a majority within Scotland voted to remain a member.^[293] The first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced the following day that as a result a [new](#)

[independence referendum](#) was "highly likely".^{[294][293]} On 31 January 2020, the United Kingdom formally withdrew from the European Union. Because constitutional affairs are reserved matters under the Scotland Act, the Scottish Parliament would again have to be granted temporary additional powers under Section 30 to hold a legally binding vote.^{[295][296][297]}

Local government

Main articles: [Local government in Scotland](#) and [Subdivisions of Scotland](#)



[Lanark County Buildings](#) in [Hamilton](#), seat of [South Lanarkshire Council](#)

For [local government](#) purposes Scotland is subdivided into 32 single-tier council areas.^[298] The areas were established in 1996, and their councils are responsible for the provision of all local government services. Decisions are made by councillors, who are elected at [local elections](#) every five years. The leader of the council is typically a councillor from the party with the most seats; councils also have a civic head, typically called the [provost](#) or [lord provost](#), who represents the council on ceremonial occasions and chairs council meetings.^[299] [Community Councils](#) are informal organisations that represent smaller subdivisions within each council area.^[300]

[Police Scotland](#) and the [Scottish Fire and Rescue Service](#) cover the entire country. For healthcare and postal districts, and a number of other governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the churches, there are other long-standing methods of subdividing Scotland for the purposes of administration.

There are [eight cities in Scotland](#): [Aberdeen](#), [Dundee](#), [Dunfermline](#), [Edinburgh](#), [Glasgow](#), [Inverness](#), [Perth](#) and [Stirling](#).^[301] [City status in the United Kingdom](#) is conferred by the monarch through [letters patent](#).^[302]

Military

Main article: [Armed forces in Scotland](#)

Further information: [Scots Army](#), [Royal Scots Navy](#), and [Military history of Scotland](#)



A [Typhoon FGR4](#) in [No. 6 Squadron](#) markings at [RAF Lossiemouth](#)

As one of the countries of the United Kingdom, the [British Armed Forces](#) are the armed forces of Scotland. Of the money spent on UK defence, about £3.3 billion can be attributed to Scotland as of 2018/2019.^[303] Scotland had a long military tradition predating the [Treaty of Union](#) with England. Following the Treaty of Union in 1707, the [Scots Army](#) and [Royal Scots Navy](#) merged with their English counterparts to form the [Royal Navy](#) and the [British Army](#), which together form part of the [British Armed Forces](#).^{[304][305]} The [Atholl Highlanders](#), Europe's only remaining legal [private army](#), did not join the Scots Army or Royal Scots Navy in merging with English armed forces, remaining a private army not under the command of the British Armed Forces.^[306]

Numerous [Scottish regiments](#) have at various times existed in the British Army. Distinctively Scottish regiments in the British Army include the [Scots Guards](#), the [Royal Scots Dragoon Guards](#) and the [154 \(Scottish\) Regiment RLC](#), an [Army Reserve](#) regiment of the [Royal Logistic Corps](#). In 2006, as a result of the [Delivering Security in a Changing World white paper](#), the Scottish infantry regiments in the [Scottish Division](#) were amalgamated to form the [Royal Regiment of Scotland](#).^[307] As a result of the [Cameron–Clegg coalition's Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010](#), the Scottish regiments of the line in the [British Army infantry](#), having previously formed the Scottish Division, were reorganised into the [Scottish, Welsh and Irish Division](#) in 2017. Before the formation of the Scottish Division, the Scottish infantry was organised into a [Lowland Brigade](#) and [Highland Brigade](#).^[308]

Because of their topography and perceived remoteness, parts of Scotland have housed many sensitive defence establishments.^{[309][310][311]} Between 1960 and 1991, the [Holy Loch](#) was a base for the US fleet of [Polaris](#)-equipped [ballistic missile submarines](#).^[312] Today, [His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde](#), 25 miles (40 kilometres) north-west of Glasgow, is the base for the four [Trident](#)-armed [Vanguard-class ballistic missile submarines](#) that comprise the Britain's [nuclear deterrent](#).



A [Challenger 2 main battle tank](#) of the [Royal Scots Dragoon Guards](#)

Scotland's [Scapa Flow](#) was the main base for the [Royal Navy](#) in the 20th century.^[313] As the [Cold War](#) intensified in 1961, the United States deployed [Polaris ballistic missiles](#), and submarines, in the [Firth of Clyde's Holy Loch](#). Public protests from [CND](#) campaigners proved futile. The Royal Navy successfully convinced the government to allow the base because it wanted its own Polaris submarines, and it obtained them in 1963. The RN's nuclear submarine base opened with four [Resolution-class](#) Polaris submarines at the expanded [Faslane Naval Base](#) on the [Gare Loch](#). The first patrol of a [Trident](#)-armed submarine occurred in 1994, although the US base was closed at the end of the Cold War.^[314]

A single front-line [Royal Air Force](#) base is located in Scotland. [RAF Lossiemouth](#), located in [Moray](#), is the most northerly [air defence fighter](#) base in the United Kingdom and is home to four [Eurofighter Typhoon](#) combat aircraft squadrons, three [Poseidon MRA1](#) squadrons, and a full-time, permanently based RAF Regiment squadron.^[315] An additional four RAF Reserve Squadrons are based in Scotland – 612 Squadron, 2622 (Highland) Squadron and 602 Squadron in Glasgow, and 603 Squadron in Edinburgh.^[316]