

# Time for Change

## The 2022 Welsh Local Elections and the Case for STV

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Jess Blair  
and Nia Thomas  
*November 2022*

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# Introduction



Jess Blair,  
Director  
ERS Cymru

On May 5th 2022 voters went to the polls in Wales to elect councillors for all 22 local authorities. These were not the only elections held that day; Northern Ireland held an Assembly election and there were other local elections in parts of England and across all of Scotland's local authorities.

A mix of electoral systems were used in these elections, with both the Northern Ireland Assembly election and the Scottish local elections using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system, while Wales and England used First Past the Post (FPTP) in their local elections.

Yet the picture in Wales could now change. Following the passing of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 a new provision has come into force allowing councils to vote to move to STV on an individual basis. To do this a council needs two thirds of its members to agree a resolution before the 15th November three years before the next election (in 2027). We publish this report on the 15th November 2022, two years to the day before councils must have taken a vote if they intend to move to STV.

The 2022 Welsh local elections showed yet again why change is needed. These elections were rife with disproportional results, uncontested seats and saw a lower turnout than in 2017.

Photo: Rocco the dog by  
Jamie Matthews

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The Scottish local elections, which use STV, give us a glimpse of what a different system could offer; fairer results, increased voter choice and more people feeling that their vote matters.

This report will look at the picture in Wales and Scotland and demonstrate why Welsh councils should follow Scotland's lead before the next elections in 2027.

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# Welsh local elections 2022

## Overview of results

The 2022 Welsh local election results, summarised in Table 1, saw a mixed picture for political parties, with the main stories being gains for Labour and losses for the Conservatives compared with their 2017 election results.

The results showed a similarly strong level of support for Welsh Labour as they achieved in the Senedd elections back in May 2021, with an increase of 54 councillors from the 2017 results, taking their overall tally to 526 councillors. They also gained overall control of both Blaenau Gwent and Bridgend councils and became the largest group in Monmouthshire, though they lost Neath Port Talbot to no overall control. While Welsh Labour achieved the greatest increase in councillors, Plaid Cymru took overall control of three extra councils despite making a net loss of two councillors across the country. These councils, Ynys Môn, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, had previously been under no overall control, and were coalitions run by Plaid Cymru and independent councillors.

There were losses for the Welsh Conservatives, losing Monmouthshire council, and down 73 councillors overall.

Independents across Wales again won solid representation across the country. A quarter of all councillors (25%) in Wales are independent following these elections.

**Table 1: Welsh local election results 2022**

Party	Seats <sup>1</sup>	Change (from 2017 election) <sup>2</sup>
Welsh Labour	526	+54
Independent <sup>3</sup>	310	-12
Plaid Cymru	200	-2
Welsh Conservative Party	111	-73
Welsh Liberal Democrats	69	+7
Wales Green Party	8	+7
Other <sup>4</sup>	8	+2
Total	1,232 <sup>5</sup>	N/A

1 ERS analysis of election results

2 2017 election results for comparison were taken from the Senedd Research Local Elections 2017 Results: <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/local-elections-2017-results/>

3 Includes seats won by candidates standing under the following affiliations: Independent, Llantwit First Independents, Newport Independent Party and The Official Independents

4 Includes seats won by candidates standing under Common Ground, Gwlad, Propel and Uplands

5 The election of the two seats in the Port Talbot ward of Neath Port Talbot Council was delayed due to the death of a candidate, both have subsequently been won by Labour candidates but are not included in this table

6 <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/wales-local-council-elections/report-may-2022-elections-wales>

7 Ibid

8 <https://gov.wales/electoral-administration-and-reform-white-paper>

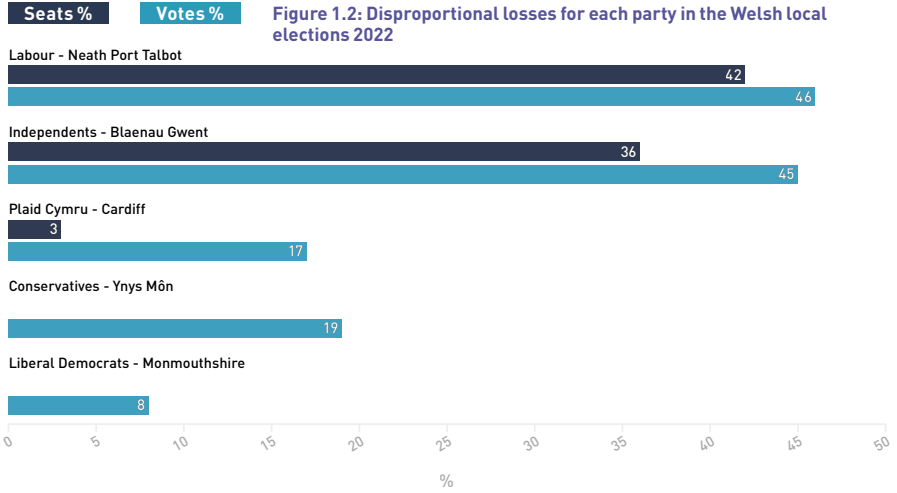
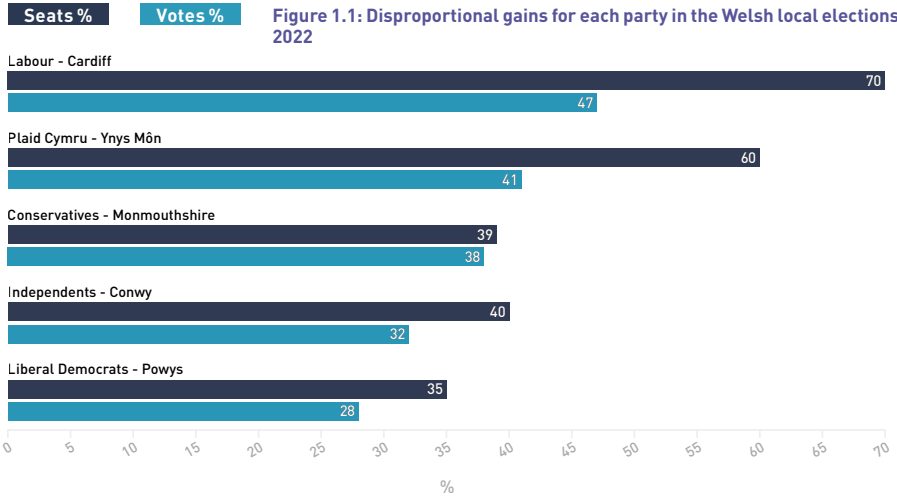
The Electoral Commission cites overall turnout as 38.7%, 3.6% down on the local elections in 2017.<sup>6</sup> This is disappointing in light of concerted efforts by the Welsh Government and others to improve engagement. The Electoral Commission's report of the 2022 elections highlights the age disparity in turnout which is lower in those aged under the age of 35 compared with all other age groups.<sup>7</sup> Since these elections the Welsh Government has published a white paper consulting on a number of measures, which aim to remove the barriers to participation.<sup>8</sup> Some of these measures could be piloted or introduced at the next local elections in 2027.

### Proportionality

The First Past the Post system used for these elections means we continue to have a 19th century voting system in 21<sup>st</sup> century Wales.

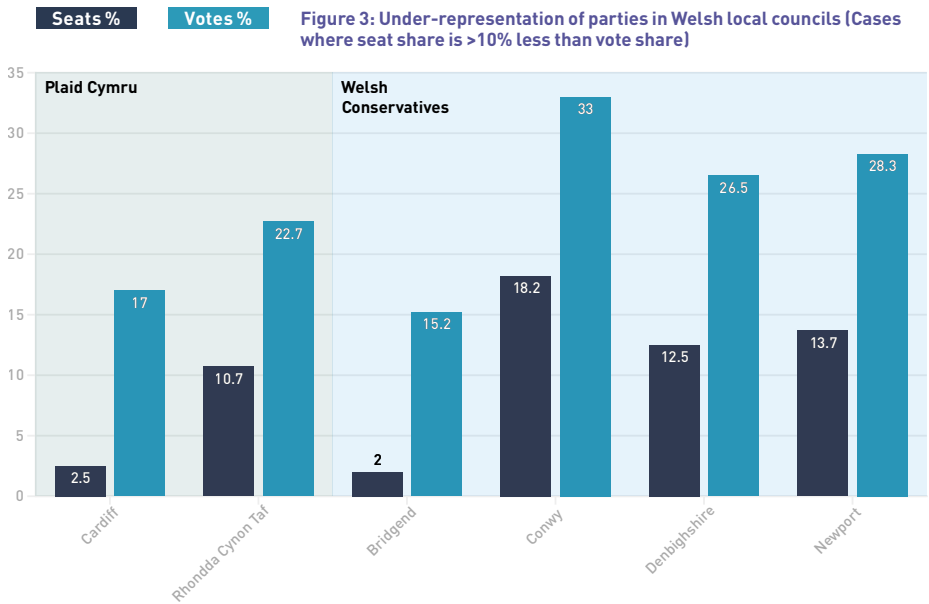
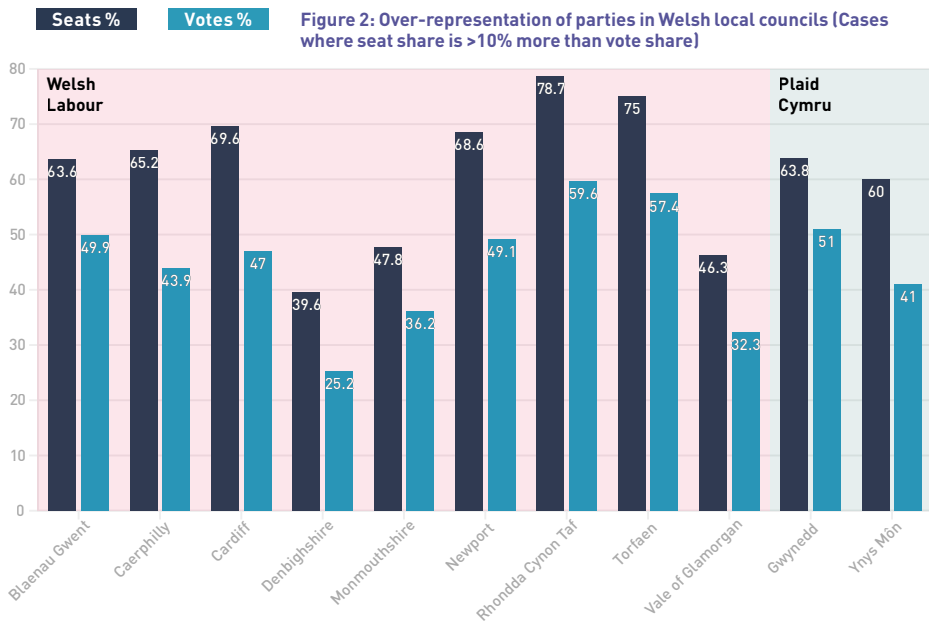
FPTP is a voting system of disproportionate wins, but also disproportionate losses for parties (Figure 1). The, often large, differences between vote share and seat share mean that not only do constituents lose out on fair representation, so do candidates and political parties.

The 2022 election was no exception to the traditional disproportionality of FPTP.



\*Plaid Cymru stood under the Common Ground banner in Cardiff

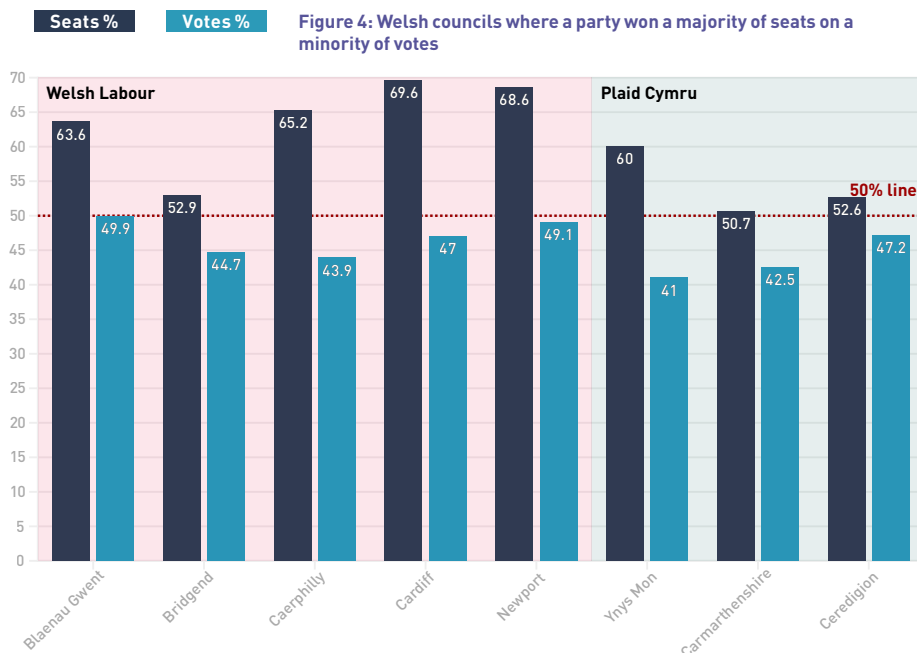
There were 17 incidents of a greater than 10 percentage points difference between party vote share and seat share across councils in Wales. Eleven of these are over-representation, where a party holds over 10% more seats than votes (Figure 2) and six of these are under-representation, where a party holds over 10% less seats than votes (Figure 3), highlighting the deep unfairness of FPTP elections.



\*Plaid Cymru stood under the Common Ground banner in Cardiff

There are eight councils in Wales where a party holds the majority of seats on a minority (i.e. less than 50%) of the votes, this represents over a third of all councils

(Figure 4). This sort of over-representation is typical of FPTP, which is designed specifically to give majorities on a minority of the vote. While some of these examples are more marginal in terms of the difference between vote and seat share, the majority (five councils) see the party in question also over-represented by more than 10%.



## Uncontested seats

Nine of the 22 council areas in Wales had one or more uncontested seats (Table 2), with a staggering 41% of seats uncontested in Gwynedd and nearly one third of all seats uncontested in Pembrokeshire. When six percent of all seats across Wales are uncontested our FPTP voting system is failing. Locking over 100,000 electors out of the opportunity to choose who represents them at a local level is a sign of a major problem in our democracy and the considerable regional differences in number of uncontested seats results in a postcode lottery for voter choice (Figure 5).<sup>9</sup>

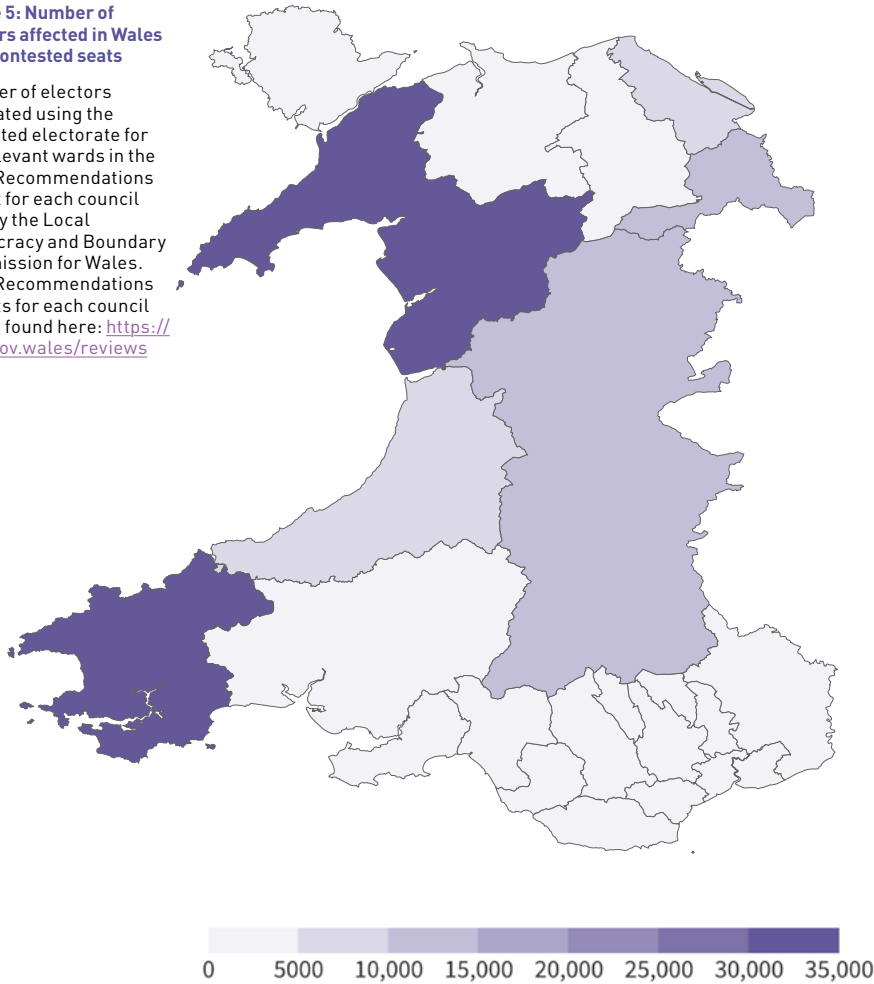
<sup>9</sup> Number of electors estimated using the projected electorate for the relevant wards in the Final Recommendations report for each council area by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales. Final Recommendations reports for each council can be found here: <https://ldbc.gov.wales/reviews>

**Table 2: Uncontested seats in Welsh local elections 2022 - ERS Analysis**

Council	Uncontested seats	% Uncontested seats
Gwynedd	28	41%
Pembrokeshire	19	32%
Wrexham	8	14%
Ceredigion	5	13%
Powys	7	10%
Neath Port Talbot	3	5%
Flintshire	2	3%
Denbighshire	1	2%
Carmarthenshire	1	1%
Total	74	6%

**Figure 5: Number of electors affected in Wales by uncontested seats**

Number of electors estimated using the projected electorate for the relevant wards in the Final Recommendations report for each council area by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales. Final Recommendations reports for each council can be found here: <https://ldbc.gov.wales/reviews>



10 ERS Cymru worked with others to gather this data using anecdotal methods and assumptions, which are unlikely to be 100% accurate and highlights the importance of the enactment of section 106 of the Equality Act, which would allow for the proper collation and publication of data.

11 <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/2021/06/monmouthshire-first-council-in-wales-to-commit-to-gender-parity/>

12 <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/23066889.welsh-conservative-rachel-buckler-wins-devauden-by-election/>

## Diversity

Using the best available data,<sup>10</sup> the gender balance of candidates increased from 29.7% female candidates in 2017 to 33.6% female candidates in 2022. While this shows progress, our estimates indicated that, at this rate, gender parity for council candidates won't be reached until the middle of the century. Of those candidates then elected, we estimated that 36% were female councillors, up from 28% in 2017.

For the first time, two councils in Wales, Monmouthshire and Vale of Glamorgan, reached gender balance with a 50:50 gender split in elected councillors. Positive action was key in Monmouthshire, in particular. Prior to the election, Monmouthshire set a target to reach gender parity, with the then leader working with all other parties to ensure a cross party commitment.<sup>11</sup> This meant all parties sought to ensure much greater numbers of female candidates in the run up to the election and the success of this target demonstrates that this kind of positive action can be really effective. The first by-election in Monmouthshire has now seen the number of women councillors increase again to be the first local authority in Wales with a majority of female councillors.<sup>12</sup>

One other factor that led to gender parity in these to local authorities was the success of the Labour party in both areas, however this is more pertinent for the Vale of Glamorgan where no formal motion to agree a cross party target had occurred. Overall in Wales, the Labour party had the highest number of female candidates (41%) of all of the larger parties (parties fielding over 250 candidates). In Monmouthshire, following the election there are 21 Welsh Labour councillors within the council's 46 seats and approximately 11 of these Labour seats are held by women (52%). In the Vale of Glamorgan Welsh Labour hold 25 of the 54 seats and approximately 18 of these Labour seats are held by women (72%).

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The number of elected councillors with other protected characteristics such as race, disability and representation from the LGBTQ+ community is likely to be low, although we lack the data to be able to accurately highlight any disparities.

ERS Cymru has long been campaigning for the enactment of section 106 of the Equality Act, which mandates the collection and publication of diversity data for candidates, however, this has never been implemented by the UK Government.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, in the 2022 report of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform a recommendation was made to place a legislative requirement on a “devolved Welsh Authority to collect and prominently publish anonymised candidate diversity data”.<sup>14</sup> We are keen to see how this develops as it is vital to have accurate data to be able to improve diversity within local democracy.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/106>

<sup>14</sup> <https://senedd.wales/media/5mta1oyk/cr-ld15130-e.pdf>

## Scottish local elections 2022

The Scottish local election results, summarised in Table 3, shared some similarities with those of the Welsh local elections, with gains for Labour and losses for the Conservatives compared with their 2017 election results.

However, the biggest winners were the Scottish National Party (SNP) who gained 22 seats and remained the largest party with 453 councillors and overall control of one council.

Scottish Labour gained 20 seats increasing their number of councillors to 282, and took control of one council.

Similar gains were made by both the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Greens. The Scottish Liberal Democrats gained 20 seats for a total of 87 councillors and the Scottish Greens gained 16 seats almost doubling their representation to 35 councillors.

In contrast, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party lost 62 seats reducing their number of councillors to 214.

Independent councillors lost a total of 19 seats across the country with 149 councillors remaining, but maintained control of their three councils.

27 councils across Scotland remain under no overall control.

**Table 3: Scottish local election results 2022**

15 <https://www.emb.scot/downloads/download/160/scottish-local-government-elections-2022>

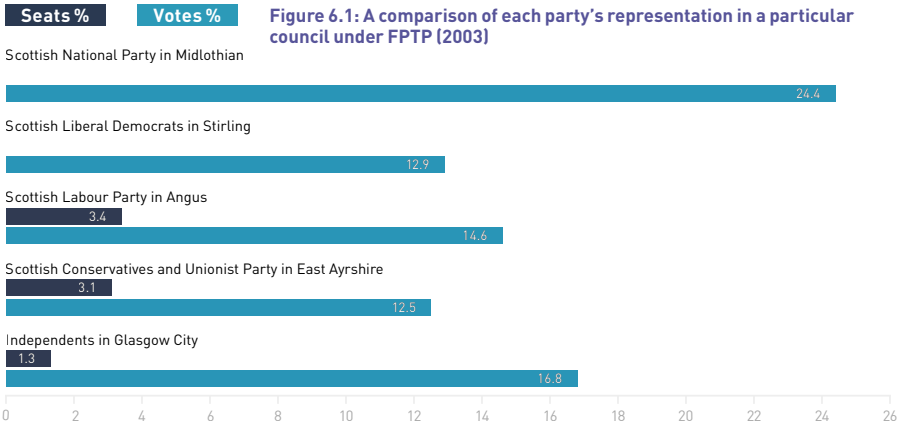
16 Data sourced from: <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/the-power-of-preferences-stv-in-scottish-local-elections/#sub-section-5>

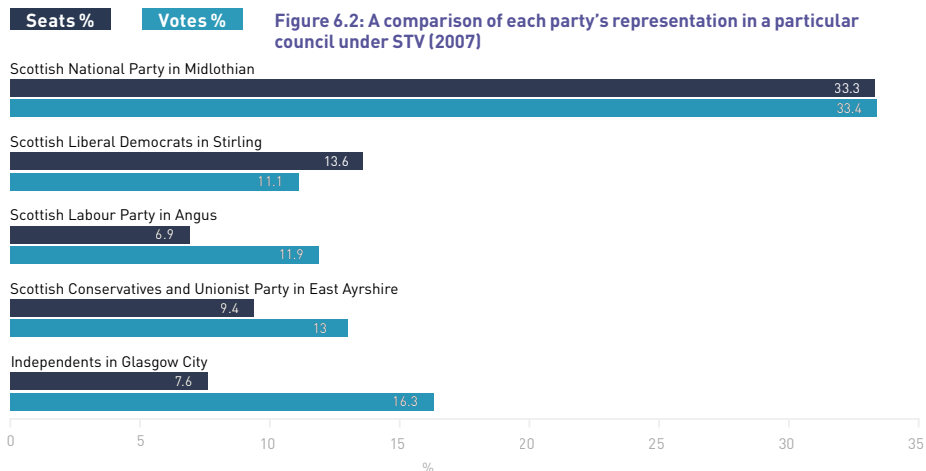
17 Three wards across Scotland were under-contested, with three vacant seats which are not included in these results

Party	Seats <sup>15</sup>	Change (from 2017 election) <sup>16</sup>
Scottish National Party	453	+22
Scottish Labour Party	282	+20
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party	214	-62
Independents	149	-19
Scottish Liberal Democrats	87	+20
Scottish Greens	35	+16
Other	3	-1
Total	1,223 <sup>17</sup>	N/A

### Proportionality

Proportionality has improved massively in Scottish elections since the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote in 2007. Results under STV are much more reflective of the votes cast than under FPTP (Figure 6).

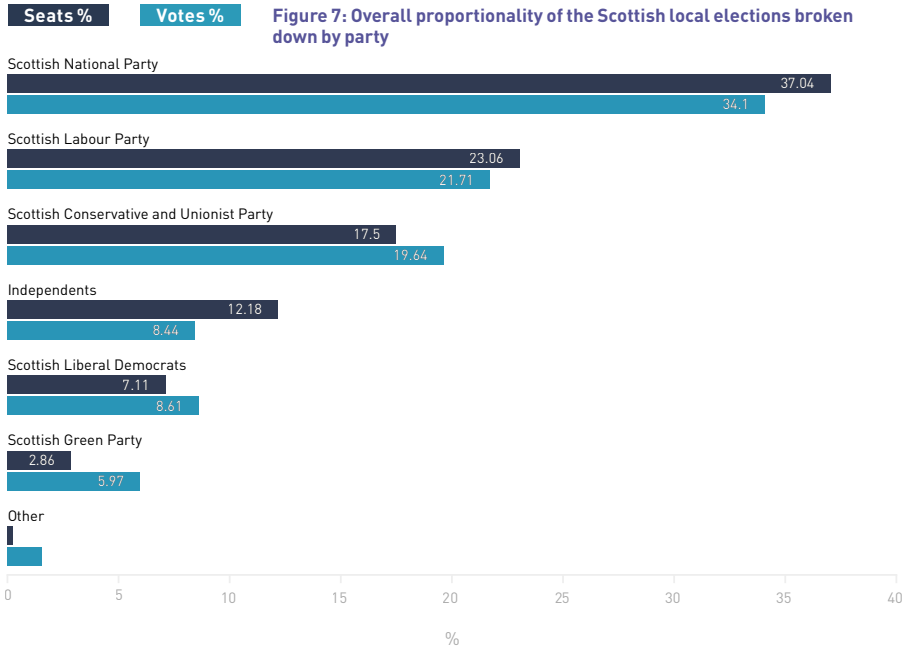




As shown above, the introduction of STV in 2007 delivered much more proportional results than the final FPTP elections in 2003. For example, the SNP in Midlothian in 2003 had 24.4% of the votes and 0% of the seats. In 2007 that changed with the SNP receiving 33.4% of the first preference vote and 33.3% of the seats. Vote shares and seat shares do not always match as closely as this, however overall proportionality vastly improved in the 2007 elections from 2003 due to the introduction of STV. One way of measuring this is with a Deviation from Proportionality (DV) score, which is a measure of how proportional an election is. The smaller the DV score, the closer the result in seats is to the votes cast by the electorate. The median DV score across Scottish councils at the 2007 local elections (10.4) was half what it had been at the 2003 local elections (20.9), indicating much more proportional outcomes in 2007, under STV, than had been the case in 2003, under FPTP.<sup>18</sup>

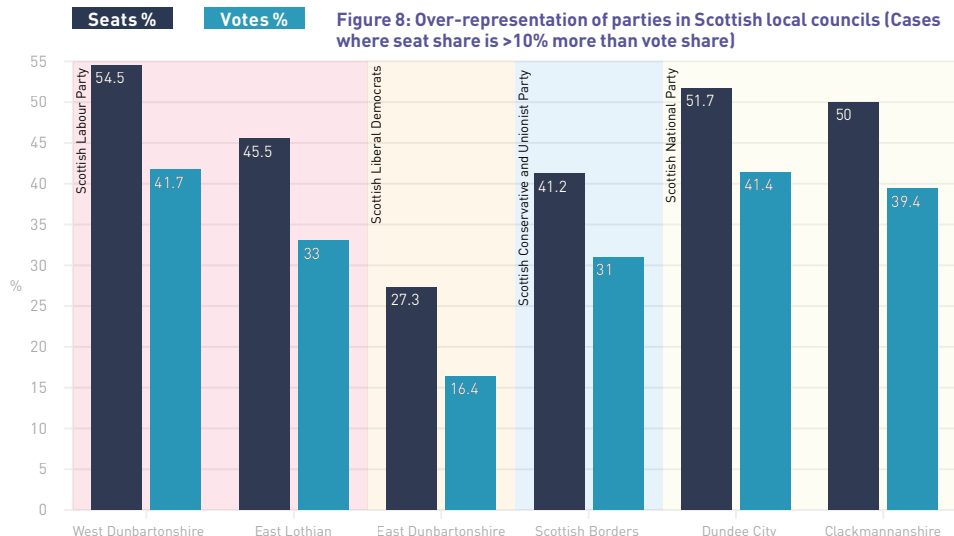
<sup>18</sup> <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/2007-scottish-local-elections/>

These more proportional results were once again seen in the 2022 local elections due to the STV voting system with overall first preference party vote share across all Scottish councils broadly matching the overall seat share (Figure 7).



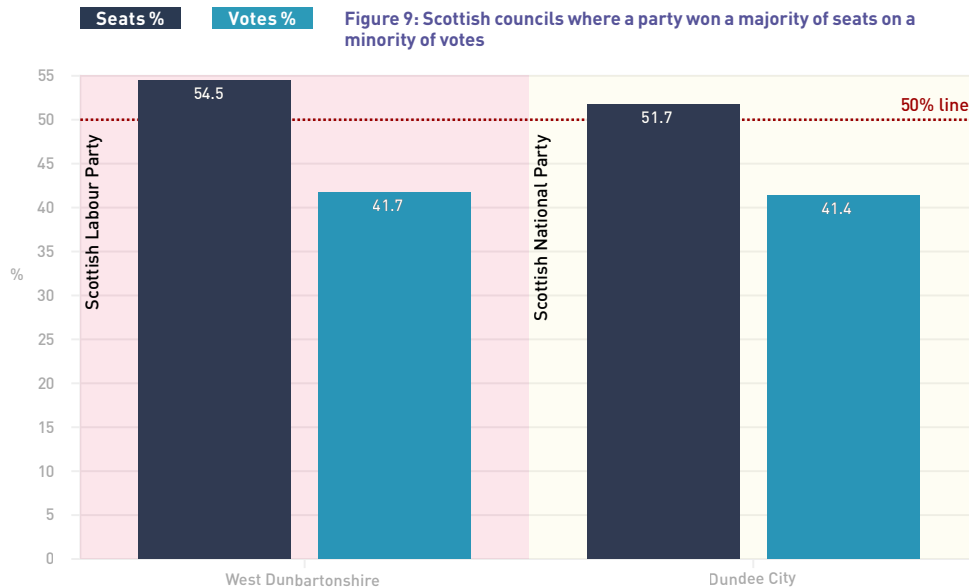
There were six incidents where the difference between first preference party vote share and seat share was greater than 10 percentage points across councils in Scotland (Figure 8). All six of these are over-representation where a party holds over 10% more seats than votes and were spread broadly across the four main parties. There were no cases of under-representation where a party holds over 10% less seats than votes. It is important to note that under STV not everything is decided by first preference votes alone, as latter preferences also contribute to the allocation of seats.

**Figure 8: Over-representation of parties in Scottish local councils (Cases where seat share is >10% more than vote share)**



There are just two councils in Scotland where a party holds the majority of seats on a minority (i.e. less than 50%) of the first preference vote, this represents 6% of all councils (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Scottish councils where a party won a majority of seats on a minority of votes**



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## Uncontested seats

In 2022, there were eight wards with uncontested seats in Scotland, with 18 councillors being elected without a vote across these (Table 4). This includes three wards where two seats were up for grabs but only one candidate had been nominated, bringing the number of councillors either elected without a vote or where a seat was vacant to 21.

**Table 4: Uncontested seats in Scottish local elections 2022**

19 ERS analysis

Council	Uncontested seats <sup>19</sup>	% Uncontested seats
Shetland Islands	5	21.7%
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	4	13.8%
Inverclyde	3	13.6%
Moray	3	11.5%
Highland	3	4.0%
Total	18	1.5%

While uncontested or under-contested seats were an issue in the 2022 elections, it is clear that this has significantly reduced since Scotland changed its voting system for local elections to STV from FPTP in 2007 (Figure 10).

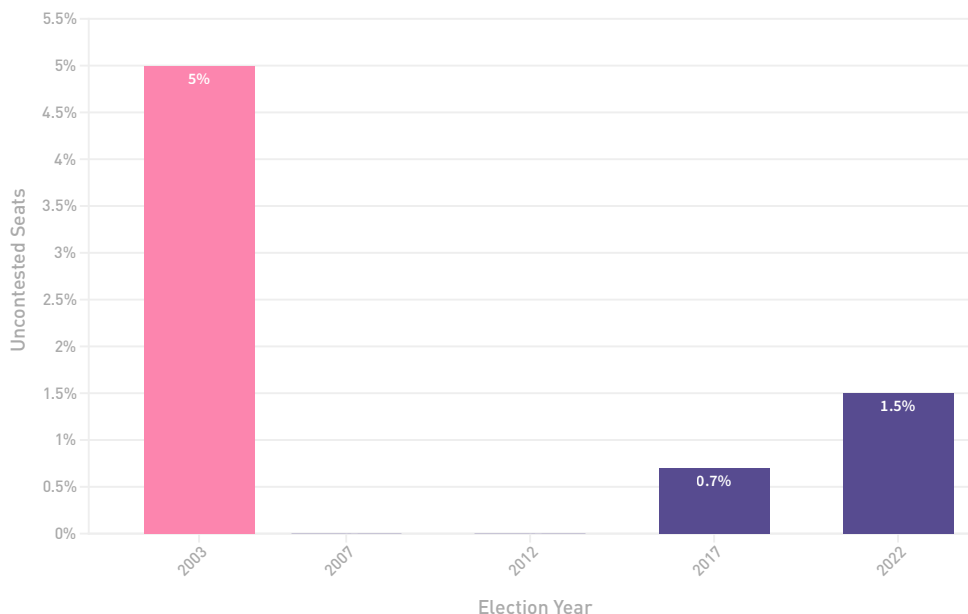
In the final FPTP local elections in Scotland (2003) there were 61 councillors elected unopposed in 61 wards (all single member wards). In the first two elections under STV there were no uncontested seats. At the 2017 Scottish elections there were 3 uncontested wards electing 9 councillors without a vote.<sup>20</sup>

20 [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf\\_file/2017-Scottish-Council-elections-Report.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/2017-Scottish-Council-elections-Report.pdf)

FPTP %

STV %

Figure 10: Uncontested seats in Scottish local elections 2003-2022



## Diversity

ERS Cymru did not collate data on the diversity of the Scottish local elections, however for this section we have used data collected and published by Engender. This data comes with the same caveats as our own Welsh dataset on candidate and councillor data.<sup>21</sup>

In Scotland it was estimated that 33% of council candidates were female, an increase from 30.5% in 2017.<sup>22</sup> The number of elected female councillors also increased from 29% in 2017 to 35% in 2022.<sup>23</sup> However, similarly to Wales, at this rate gender parity in local government won't be reached for another 2 to 3 elections. There is one council in Scotland, West Lothian where it is estimated that 51.5% of the councillors are female although the route to gender parity in this council is less clear than in Wales where we know that positive action by parties played a big role.

<sup>21</sup> This data was gathered through anecdotal methods and assumptions which cannot be considered robust given the importance of the information.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/guest-post-womens-representation-in-the-scottish-local-council-elections-2022-what-we-know/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/making-it-happen-for-2027-transforming-local-democracy-for-women/>



## View from the ground - Mat Mathias, ERS Cymru



Mat Mathias,  
ERS Cymru

### **The differences in campaigning in Scotland versus Wales**

To witness an STV election first hand ERS Cymru headed to East Ayrshire in Scotland during the local elections in Spring 2022. We not only talked to voters but met with and interviewed candidates from a range of parties, including independents, spending time observing them campaigning.

I've been at ERS Cymru for 5 years and looked in depth at a few elections in that time. As such, it's interesting to see some of the differences in the way the campaigns work under different voting systems.

In Scotland, as a candidate you would campaign everywhere because potential votes are everywhere, whereas in Wales some parties will typically field candidates only where they think they can win.

For candidates in Wales you knock a door at election time and that person will either be voting for you or not. That's it. As I walked with party canvassers in Kilmarnock the change was obvious. If the candidate wasn't to be a voter's first choice, they had to show they were the right person and had the right policies to earn a second or third choice because in an STV election, that counts.

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As one candidate on the campaign trail told me, “Even if you know that they don’t vote for my party, you still chap (knock) their door because they know me or they may know I do the work.”

The real change is for the voter. It’s about choice, quite rightly, their choice.

We are a nuanced society and therefore we need a nuanced electoral system. STV is that system. People may like and support policies from a number of parties or independents but under FPTP they can often be railroaded into a binary choice. Some voters in the village of Dalmellington told me that they could reward a hard-working candidate from a party they normally wouldn’t support, by placing them first or second and still remain loyal to their own party. One of the huge positives with fairer elections in Scotland is that a large majority of the people in each ward would now have a councillor that they had voted for, given the proportional system and multi member wards.

Strategy and tactics while campaigning for election matters regardless of the electoral system. It was interesting to see it in an STV election. There were subtle differences from parties even from village to village. Being in a multi-member ward means candidates still have a strong link to their communities but that parties have to consider the best use of their resources. This includes the number of candidates to stand in a ward, how candidates are presented in literature and how you communicate that choice to voters. For example, as a party how do you engage with your voters on the doorstep over which candidate the party is keen to encourage first preferences on?

This was summed up by a candidate in New Cumnock who told me “In places where my running mate is really popular, our leaflets ask voters to put me as a 1<sup>st</sup> choice and him second and in other villages in the ward it’s the other way around.”

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It is clear that since the decision was made in 2003 for all its councillors to be elected using STV, local politics in Scotland now has a system fit for a democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The change in the electoral system doesn't mean our politics have diverged completely. In Scotland, like here in Wales, you still see dedicated and passionate candidates, buoyed by their teams getting out and about in their neighbourhoods to knock on doors, to visit community centres, their local streets, businesses and farms to convince people not only to vote but to vote for them. The difference is that in Scotland, the candidates have to speak to more people and make sure that they have ideas to inspire a majority of voters, not just the small minority that could deliver a win in our moribund system.

In Scotland voters have a choice to reward a number of candidates who have worked hard and they feel deserve their vote. Those three or four ward councillors elected by STV show the diversity of people, of views and ideas of the people that elected them and surely that's the whole point?



**YOUR LABOUR CANDIDATE FOR**  
Dennistoun - Ward 22

**are for you**

I have been fighting for my community for 5 years. I deserve better than Tory and Labour.

**Vote for me**

**YOUR LABOUR CANDIDATE FOR**  
Dennistoun

**Vote for me**

**Scottish Green Party**  **1**

**VOTE MARTHA WARDROP**  
**#1 FOR HILLHEAD**

 Investment in tenement improvements

 Safe, secure, and key

**Transport Plan**

Theo is calling for extended subway opening hours, electric buses and universal travel cards as part of an integrated transport plan; supporting pandemic recovery and tackling the climate crisis.


**VOTE THEO No.1 ON 5TH MAY TO DEMAND BETTER FOR GLASGOW HILLHEAD**


**Theo LOCKETT**

Printed by SaxoPrint (Unit 4 Spartan Ct, Warwick) Andrew Hollyer (34 Dunearn St, Glasgow) Dem...

**Best wishes,**  
**Theo Lockett**  
Theo Lockett- Lib...

**P.S Don't let the Tories win they can't ignore what our area deserves.**

**Scottish Liberal Democrat**  **1**

**Scottish Green Party** 

## Comparing the Welsh and Scottish elections 2022

In Wales local elections are still conducted under First Past the Post (FPTP) with wards varying in size from single-member to multi-member. The majority of wards in Wales, 430, elect a single councillor, while the two biggest wards in Wales both elect five councillors and are in Swansea. In contrast, Scottish local elections are held under the Single Transferable Vote (STV) with multi-member wards, these predominantly elect either three or four councillors, with a post-2017 boundary review introducing a small number of two and five seat wards for the first time this election. These include seven two-seat wards, six in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and one in Shetland council, and three five-seat wards all in North Ayrshire. In the six Scottish council areas that include inhabited islands, one member wards are permitted. There is currently one such ward, on the Island of Arran, where the victor is effectively elected under the Alternative Vote (AV) system.

The way data is collected and reported also differs between the two nations. In Wales individual local authorities publish their own results with the exact information varying by area. In Scotland, the publication of results is standardised across all local authorities with each providing the same data. This includes; number of ballots, number of valid votes, turnout, the full STV election results and information

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24 <https://www.emb.scot/elections/scottish-local-government-elections-2022>

25 <https://gov.wales/consultation-electoral-administration-and-reform-white-paper.html>

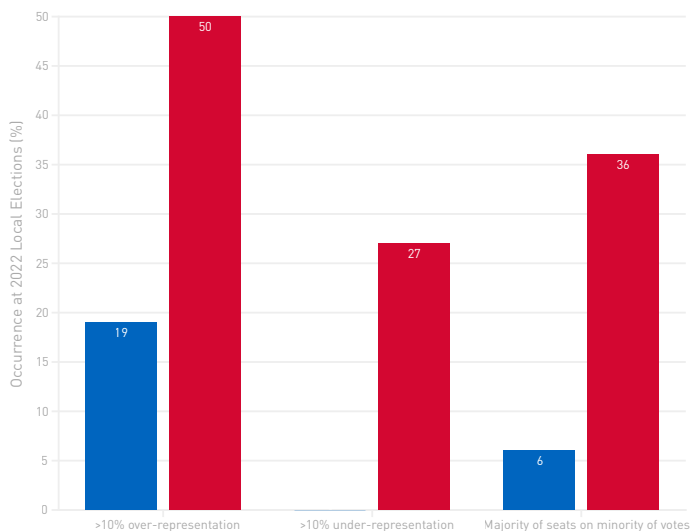
on spoilt ballots. Scotland also has its own Electoral Management Board which provides full and transparent access to the overall results of Scottish local elections, including the breakdown of party vote share and seat share by individual council and ward.<sup>24</sup> The Welsh Government is currently consulting on introducing an Electoral Management Board in Wales as part of their White Paper on Electoral Administration and Reform, which could provide this data standardisation for Wales.<sup>25</sup>

## Proportionality

The major difference in local elections in Wales and Scotland is the proportionality of results, which is a result of the voting systems used in each election. In Wales FPTP essentially guarantees disproportional results, while STV has made Scottish elections much more proportional.

As shown below, there are stark differences between the 2022 local elections in Wales and Scotland (Figure 11). In Wales, 11 of the 22 local authorities (50%) feature a party receiving over 10% greater representation in seat share than vote share, versus less than 19% of authorities in Scotland. In terms of where seat share is more than 10% lower than the vote share for a party, this occurs in 27% of authorities in Wales and 0% of authorities in Scotland. Finally, in Wales over a third of authorities have a party with a majority of seats on a minority of votes, six times more prevalent than in Scotland, where this occurs in just 6% of authorities.

**Figure 11: Comparison of percentage of councils with disproportional results between Welsh and Scottish local elections**



Ultimately, disproportionality means voters lose out, as votes do not match seats and many won't see representation from candidates they voted for. However, voters aren't the only ones losing out. Parties are also at a disadvantage under FPTP, having to play the system and often not seeing fair representation from their hard won votes.

In Scotland, the picture has vastly improved since the introduction of STV and as shown in Figure 10, this change was instantaneous with the electoral system change.

### Uncontested seats

Uncontested seats are a real problem for local elections in Wales, with a total of 74 at this year's local elections. While this was down from 92 in 2017 it remains a persistent issue which is unlikely to improve for the next elections unless real action is taken.

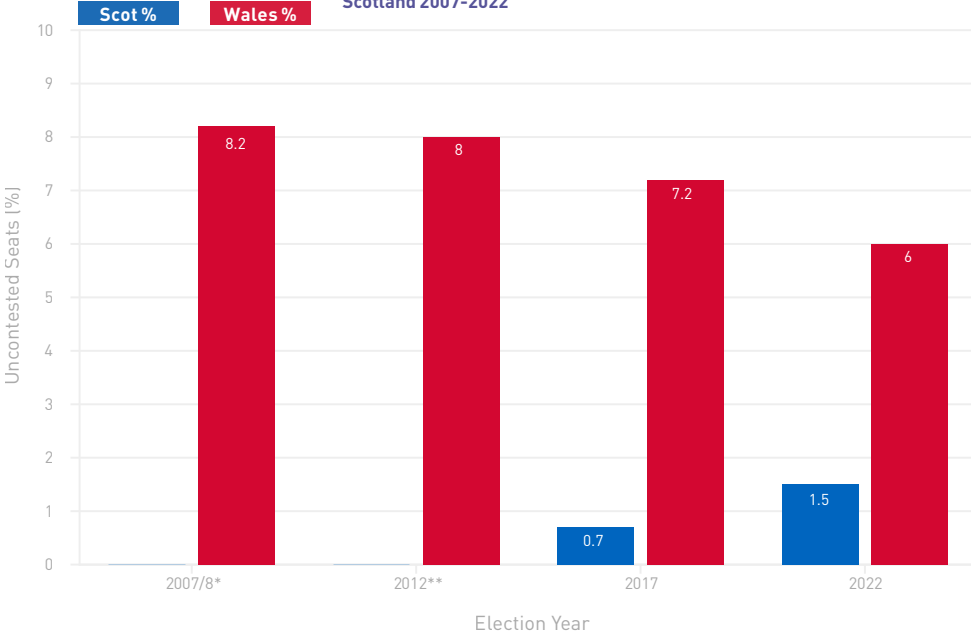
The voting system has a part to play in the number of uncontested seats in Wales. These uncontested seats are largely in single member wards and there are examples

26 <https://www.cambrian-news.co.uk/news/politics/first-election-for-more-than-four-decades-544173>

of a lack of competition in many of these seats. The Machynlleth Ward in Powys saw competition for its seat for the first time in over 40 years at this election.<sup>26</sup>

Scotland used to have similar issues with uncontested seats with 61 uncontested seats out of 1222 in the 2003 election (5%) but since the move to the Single Transferable Vote this has significantly reduced. The first two elections in Scotland under STV saw 0 uncontested seats. Both 2017 and 2022 had examples of under or uncontested seats particularly in rural areas, however these were a lot lower than Wales under the FPTP system (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Percentage of uncontested seats at local elections in Wales and Scotland 2007-2022**



\* Council election was held in 2007 in Scotland and 2008 in Wales

\*\* 2012 Welsh election held across all councils except Ynys Môn while a review of electoral arrangement was conducted

## Diversity

Data on the diversity of candidates and elected councillors is weak in both Wales and Scotland. In the absence of such data, we have only been able to produce an estimate of the gender balance of candidates and councillors in Wales and have relied on similarly

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caveated data gathered by Engender in Scotland. Neither ERS or Engender have been able to produce an estimate of the number of people standing and elected who have other protected characteristics such as age, disability, race, or sexual orientation.

A fundamental requirement of getting a more accurate picture on the diversity of our councillors is improving the data around this. The enactment of section 106 of the Equality Act, which would require political parties to collate and publish their diversity data, is long overdue. We are pleased that this was a point considered and agreed by the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd reform, who said in their final report “We recommend that a legislative requirement is placed upon a devolved Welsh Authority to collect and prominently publish anonymised candidate diversity data”.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup><https://senedd.wales/media/5mta1oyk/cr-ld15130-e.pdf>

With the limited data we have, the picture on gender diversity in Scotland and Wales is relatively similar. Both Wales and Scotland have seen an increase in the estimated number of women elected in local elections, with Scotland seeing approximately 35% of its council seats held by women.<sup>28</sup> In Wales this is now estimated to be 36%. In Wales there is a clear link to positive action, with two local authorities hitting a 50% gender balance as a result of various positive action measures.

<sup>28</sup><https://www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/making-it-happen-for-2027-transforming-local-democracy-for-women/>

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# Conclusion

This report has shown that the electoral system used in Scotland for local elections is significantly fairer than the system used in Wales. While no system is perfect, the introduction of STV in Scottish local elections has led to far more proportional results, meaning more people are represented by someone they have voted for, and fewer seats have been uncontested over the last 15 years.

In Wales we now have a chance to follow Scotland's lead, with individual councils able to vote to move to STV ahead of the 2027 elections.



Councils will need to vote to move to STV ahead of 15th November 2024. They will require a two thirds majority and a vote can only be held once per term. Local authorities seeking to make the move will also have to undertake a process of engagement with stakeholders in their area.

We expect further details on the rules for changing the electoral system to be published by the Welsh Government for consultation in the new year. This process for changing the system is difficult but the benefits for voters, and for local government will be huge. We would see fairer results, with people feeling like their votes count and we'd likely see fewer uncontested seats. Under STV we'd see competitive

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multi member wards, so all parties would stand a chance wherever they campaign.

As this report has demonstrated, the change in Scotland back in 2007 was a positive one for Scottish local democracy. Now, here in Wales councillors should grasp the nettle and back discussions within their authority to deliver strong Welsh local democracy.



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