

Chapter 1: Choosing a government

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Chapter 1: Choosing a government

Overview

In Australia we have a form of government known as a representative democracy. This means that people elect representatives to sit in the parliament to make laws on their behalf. Members of parliament are elected for a set period of time, so they have to be able to perform well enough to convince the voters to re-elect them after that period of time.



FIGURE 1 Federal Parliament House in Canberra

Our federal parliament is made up of the Governor-General, representing the Queen, and two 'houses' — the Senate (upper house) and the House of Representatives (lower house, also known as the people's house). Most members of parliament belong to an organisation known as a political party. The aim of each political party is to win a majority in the House of Representatives and form government. This means winning 76 or more of the 150 electorates (also called seats) in the lower house. Winning government enables the successful political party to run the country until the next election. The party's leader becomes the prime minister, and other senior members of the party become government ministers.

Each government minister is responsible for a government department, such as health, defence, communications, immigration, social services, the environment, education or foreign affairs. The government employees and public servants in these departments then become responsible for carrying out the policies of the government, acting on the instructions of the minister.

Whichever major party fails to win enough seats in the House of Representatives to form government becomes the Opposition. In the 2013 federal election, a coalition of the Liberal and National Parties won 90 seats and so formed government. The Labor Party won 55

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seats and became the Opposition. The leader of the Opposition usually becomes prime minister if the Opposition party wins the next election.

Senior members of the Opposition become shadow ministers. For each government minister, there is a corresponding person in the Opposition who is a shadow minister. A shadow minister is expected to scrutinise the activities of the relevant minister, and will often publicly criticise that minister's performance. This is one way in which ministers and the government remain accountable to the people. Shadow ministers would expect to become ministers if the Opposition wins the next election.

STARTER QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever taken part in an election within your class, or in a sports club? What was the process used? Who voted and how was the vote conducted?
2. What are the names of the major political parties in Australia? Make a list of what you know about each one.
3. How often are elections held in Australia for the federal parliament? What is the difference between federal elections and state elections?
4. Who is the current prime minister of Australia? Which political party does this person represent? How did he or she become prime minister?
5. What is the name of your local federal electorate?
6. Who is your local member of federal parliament? Which political party does he or she represent?

1.1 Australia's political parties

Political parties are groups of people who band together because they share the same views about issues they think are important. People join a political party because they support the party's views. The main aim of a political party is to get its candidates elected so it can control government.

Political parties in Australia range from traditional organisations to special interest groups. They work hard to promote their ideas and encourage members of the public to join them. Their main aim is to have candidates elected to parliament. In this way they can aim to have laws passed that are consistent with their beliefs and values.

All political parties must be registered with the [Australian Electoral Commission](#). There are two requirements for this registration:

1. the aims of the party must be submitted
2. the party must have at least 500 [eligible voters](#) unless the party already has a member in parliament at the time it is formed.

Figure 1 illustrates when the major political parties were formed in Australia.

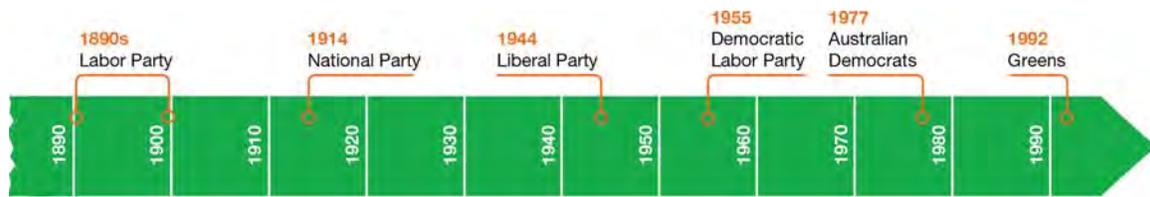


FIGURE 1 Timeline showing formation of Australian political parties

Australian Labor Party

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) is the oldest political party in Australia. It was formed in the 1890s. Unemployment was then high and living conditions were harsh, so workers relied on their trade unions for support and protection. The unions felt they would be more effective if they could gain a voice in parliament. For this reason they formed their own political party to put forward their own candidates for election. This background has meant that trade unions have always had strong links with the Labor Party.



The ALP most recently held government in the federal parliament from 2007 to 2013. During that time it had two changes of leader — Kevin Rudd was initially elected prime minister only to be replaced by Julia Gillard, who in turn was replaced by Mr Rudd when he was reinstated as prime minister shortly before the September 2013 election. When the Labor government was defeated in that election, both Ms Gillard and Mr Rudd left the parliament and Bill Shorten became the Labor Party leader.

The Labor Party believes that government has a responsibility to look after the people. Its main aims are to:

- ensure wealth and power is more evenly and fairly shared in society
- make sure everyone who wants to work can find a job
- abolish poverty and improve the living standards of all Australians
- ensure that all Australians can obtain the education, housing and community services they need.



FIGURE 2 Leader of the Labor Party and the Opposition, Bill Shorten

The Liberal Party of Australia

The Liberal Party of Australia was founded by Robert Menzies in 1944 and first won government in the federal parliament in 1949. In a **coalition** with the National Party, the Liberal Party has been in government for 20 of the last 40 years. In the 2013 election, the Liberal–National coalition won 90 of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives and so was elected to government. The Liberal Party won the largest share of the coalition parties' seats and the leader of the Liberal Party, Tony Abbott, therefore became prime minister.



The Liberal Party believes in individual freedom and free enterprise. Its main aims are to work towards:

- a lean government that minimises interference in daily life and minimises taxes
- a government that encourages private businesses and does not compete with them
- a just and humane society in which the family and the role of law and justice are maintained.



FIGURE 3 Prime minister and leader of the Liberal Party, Tony Abbott

National Party of Australia

The Nationals were established as a federal party in 1920, originally as the Country Party. Since then, the Nationals have been able to form government on several occasions as the junior partner in coalition with the Liberal Party since 1949, and with other parties before that. When the National Party is in government with the Liberal Party, the leader of the National Party becomes deputy prime minister. This position is currently held by Warren Truss. In Queensland, the Liberal Party and National Party combined to form the Liberal National Party (LNP) in 2008.



The Nationals are dedicated to representing people who live, work or operate a business in regional Australia. The Nationals fight for an equality of services, lifestyle and opportunity between the cities and the regions. Their main aims are to:

- provide strong representation of local communities
- ensure security for families through decent health, safety, social and economic welfare standards
- promote individual achievement, free choice and a fair go
- encourage investment, wealth generation and reward for private enterprise.



FIGURE 4 Deputy prime minister and leader of the National Party, Warren Truss

Australian Greens

The Australian Greens party was formed in 1992. It grew out of the activism of environmental groups in the 1980s and based many of its principles on European Greens Parties. The party is currently led by Senator Christine Milne from Tasmania. Its main aims are to:

- look after the environment and preserve the Earth's resources for the future
- ensure that everyone in our society is treated fairly and with respect
- create a safe, harmonious world in which force is not used to solve differences
- ensure that society is governed by the people, and not run by the wealthy and powerful.





FIGURE 5 Leader of the Greens Party, Christine Milne

Palmer United Party

The Palmer United Party (PUP) was founded in 2013 by the wealthy Queensland businessman, Clive Palmer. He had previously been a supporter of the Liberal National Party in that state. The PUP won two seats in the Senate in the 2013 election, and Clive Palmer was elected to the House of Representatives for the Queensland electorate of Fairfax. The party is largely centred around the political views of its leader, and supports the following:

- increased growth in the mining industry
- regional self-government; for example, through the division of Queensland into two states by establishing the new state of North Queensland
- removal of all fees for tertiary education
- a closer economic relationship with Asian countries.



FIGURE 6 Leader of the Palmer United Party, Clive Palmer

Other small parties

A number of small parties are also represented in the federal parliament.

- Katter's Australian Party has a member, Bob Katter, in the House of Representatives although he was originally a member of the National Party.
- The Democratic Labor Party had a senator elected from Victoria in the 2010 election.
- The Liberal Democratic Party had one senator elected from New South Wales in the 2013 election.
- The Motoring Enthusiasts Party had a senator elected from Victoria in 2013.
- The Family First Party had a senator elected from South Australia in 2013.

Independents

Members of parliament who do not belong to a political party are called independents. They sit alone in parliament and may choose to vote with one of the major parties or with minor parties, or abstain from voting. In the current parliament there is one independent senator, Nick Xenophon from South Australia; and two independent members of the House of Representatives, Cathy McGowan from the Victorian electorate of Indi, and Andrew Wilkie from the Tasmanian electorate of Denison.

It is difficult for independent members to be elected because they do not have a party structure and membership to support them. An independent senator will usually be someone who has a high profile across his or her whole state. An independent attempting to be elected to the House of Representatives needs to gain strong local community support in the electorate.



FIGURE 7

As an independent senator, Nick Xenophon has a high profile throughout his home state of South Australia.

Majority rule

Winning the vote in an electorate gives the successful candidate a seat in the House of Representatives. The party with the majority of seats in this house forms the government, and its leader becomes prime minister. As the government, the winning party has the power to make laws for governing the country. Note that all laws must be agreed to by a majority vote in both houses of parliament, not just in the lower house.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. What is a political party?
2. What is a coalition?
3. How does a political party become the government?

EXPLAIN

4. Why is the trade union movement influential within the Labor Party?
5. Explain what the Liberal Party and National Party have in common that has allowed them to form a coalition in the federal parliament for over 65 years.
6. What are the key policies of the Greens? In what ways are they different from the major parties?
7. Why is it difficult for an independent to win a seat in parliament?

DISCOVER

8. Select one of the political parties described in this section and use the **Political parties** weblinks in your Resources section to visit that party's website.

 - a. What is your selected party's vision for the future of Australia?
 - b. Identify and explain six key policies that your selected party believes will help achieve this vision.

1.2 Voting and the electoral process

We elect representatives to state and federal parliaments, as well as to local councils, to make laws and to take other decisions on our behalf. It is important that the voting system is as fair as possible because this ensures that the composition of parliament is a true representation of the voters' wishes.



FIGURE 1

Our democratic system is based on the principle that all Australian citizens over 18 vote to elect members of parliament.

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The Australian electoral system

The Australian electoral system is based on a number of key principles. These are:

- universal suffrage and secret ballot
- compulsory voting
- fixed or maximum terms for parliament
- one vote, one value
- combinations of single member and multimember electorates
- preferential voting and proportional representation.

Universal suffrage and secret ballot

Voting in all parliamentary elections in Australia is through universal adult **suffrage** or **franchise**. This means that all Australian citizens over the age of 18 have a right to vote. There are some exceptions to this. For example, anyone serving a prison term of three years or longer cannot vote while they are in prison, but can resume the right to vote once they are released.

We have not always had universal adult franchise in Australia. In the 1850s, colonial parliaments granted the franchise to adult males over the age of 21. In 1902, the right to vote in elections for the Commonwealth Parliament was extended to women over 21. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were excluded from voting until 1962. The right to vote was lowered from the age of 21 to 18 in 1973.

Australia was one of the first places in the world to introduce a secret ballot for voting. A secret ballot allows every voter to keep their vote private, so that no-one can force them to vote for a particular candidate. Before the introduction of the secret ballot, voters had to announce who they were voting for to an official. This vote was then recorded beside their name, so everyone could see who everyone else voted for. This system often led to the intimidation and bribery of voters. Most of the Australian colonial parliaments introduced the secret ballot in the 1850s. Under this system, voters fill out their voting papers in private, fold them so no-one can see, and place them in a ballot box. Once in the box, there is no way of identifying one voting paper from another.



FIGURE 2

Australia was one of the first countries in the world to use the secret ballot.

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The Australian Constitution

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eLesson

What is parliament?

Watch this video to learn more about our parliament.

Searchlight ID: ELES-2077

eBook plus

eLesson

Federation

Watch this video to learn more about Australia's federation.

Searchlight ID: ELES-2080

Compulsory voting

Compulsory voting is not required by the Australian Constitution, and was only introduced in Australia in 1924. Now, voting for federal, state and territory parliaments is compulsory for all eligible citizens over the age of 18. In some states, voting is also compulsory for local council elections. Failure to vote can result in a fine if the voter does not have a reasonable excuse, such as serious illness on the day of the election. To assist those who may have difficulty voting on election day, a number of alternative methods are available:

- Early voting centres are open in all electorates, often up to three weeks before the actual election. If a voter knows that he or she will be away from their home electorate on election day, it is possible to take advantage of this method.
- Voters can apply for postal votes, which allow them to receive ballot papers before the election and to post them to the appropriate electoral office. Envelopes containing these votes are opened face down to preserve the secrecy of the vote.
- It is possible to vote interstate or overseas if you have not been able to organise early voting or postal voting before travelling.

Australian Electoral Commission and the electoral rolls

All Australian citizens are required to register to vote when they turn 18. This can be done either online or by obtaining an enrolment form from an office of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The AEC is the official body responsible for the conduct of federal elections. It also maintains a record of all registered voters, known as the electoral roll. This record is updated regularly to allow for new voters to be added, changes of voter addresses to be recorded, and names to be removed when voters die. You can enrol to vote any time after turning 16, although you will not be able to vote until you have turned 18. Failure to enrol to vote can result in a fine.



FIGURE 3

All registered voters in an electorate have their names and addresses recorded in the electoral roll.

Fixed or maximum terms for parliament

The Australian Constitution requires that elections for the House of Representatives be held at least every three years. They can be held before three years have elapsed — usually because the prime minister at the time chooses to hold an early election.

All of the states and territories are required to hold elections every four years except Queensland, which has elections every three years. Each state has its own rules for holding these elections. For example, in Victoria the state parliament has a fixed term, with an election held on the last Saturday in November every four years. In some other states, an early election is possible if a state government chooses it so.



FIGURE 4

The Australian Constitution requires that elections for the House of Representatives be held at least every three years.

The Senate also has elections every three years, but the rules are different from those in the House of Representatives. All senators are elected for six years, so only half the senators have to face election every three years. This means that the six senators from each state elected in 2007 had to face election in 2013, while those elected in 2010 will have to stand for re-election in 2016. There are two senators from each of the two territories, but they are elected only for three-year terms. Some of the states have similar arrangements for their upper houses, with only half the members facing election at a time.

One vote, one value

Each person has only one vote for each house of parliament, so all voters are equal. However, the numbers of representatives and senators elected to parliament differs because of provisions written into the Australian Constitution at federation.

House of Representatives

As far as possible, all federal electorates for the House of Representatives have a similar number of voters. This is to ensure that all votes have as close as possible to equal value throughout Australia. It also means that each state has a different number of electorates, according to population. The average number of voters is around 90 000 in each electorate, with some anomalies. Because the Constitution allows for a minimum of five electorates in any state, Tasmanian electorates have about 70 000 voters each, as Tasmania has the lowest population of the states. Each of the territories is allowed to have two electorates. The population differences between the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory means that each of the Northern Territory electorates has about 60 000 voters, while each of the ACT electorates has about 130 000 voters.



FIGURE 5 The population and the number of elected representatives of each state and territory

The Senate

One of the original functions of the Senate was to protect the interests of the six states. The representatives of the smaller states were concerned that they could be out-voted in the House of Representatives by the combined members from Victoria and New South Wales. For this reason, the Senate has an equal number of members from each state. Currently this stands at twelve per state, with two from each of the two territories, making a total of seventy-six. The principle of one vote, one value does not apply to the Senate. Consequently, New South Wales with almost 7.5

million people has the same number of senators as Tasmania, which has a population of just over 500 000.

Combinations of single member and multimember electorates

The Commonwealth, state and territory parliaments use a variety of methods to determine the way in which the voters are represented. The House of Representatives has 150 members, with each member representing a single electorate or seat. Figure 5 shows the number of electorates in each state and territory.

The Senate has a different form of representation. Each state and territory is a single electorate for the purpose of electing senators, so all senators effectively represent the entire state or territory rather than a smaller electorate. Each state is effectively a multimember electorate as it has 12 senators representing it at any given time.

The states and territories have a combination of single member and multimember voting systems.

- In New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, each lower house is made up of members elected from single member electorates.
- The Tasmanian and ACT lower houses elect members from multimember electorates.
- The New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian and Western Australian upper houses have multimember electorates.
- The Tasmanian upper house has 15 single member electorates.
- The two territories and Queensland have no upper house in their parliaments.



FIGURE 6

The Tasmanian lower house is the only state lower house with multimember electorates.

Preferential voting and proportional representation

The type of voting system used in Australian elections depends on whether the election involves single member electorates or multimember electorates. When an election occurs in a single member electorate, a system known as preferential voting is used. In multimember electorates, proportional representation voting is applied.

Preferential voting

A preferential system of voting is used for members of the House of Representatives, and state houses of parliament with single member electorates. This means that voters are usually required to vote for the candidates in order of preference. The voter places the number 1 in the square next to their preferred candidate, the number 2 next to their second preference, and so on down the ballot paper. In House of Representatives elections, voters are expected to place a number in every square. In some state elections, such as for the New South Wales lower house, a system of optional preferential voting is used. In this system, the voter only has to number as many squares as he or she wishes. Placing the number 1 beside a square is all that is required to make the vote count. (Section 1.4 discusses the process for counting preferences.)

BALLOT PAPER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE
ELECTORAL DIVISION OF
DIVISION NAME

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice.

2	SURNAME, Given names INDEPENDENT
3	SURNAME, Given names PARTY
7	SURNAME, Given names PARTY
4	SURNAME, Given names PARTY
1	SURNAME, Given names PARTY
5	SURNAME, Given names PARTY
6	SURNAME, Given names PARTY
8	SURNAME, Given names PARTY

Remember...number every box to make your vote count.

AEC
Australian Electoral Commission

SAMPLE

FIGURE 7

In House of Representatives elections, voters are required to number every square next to the candidates' names.

Proportional representation

Proportional representation is the system of voting used in all elections for multimember electorates in Australia. It is also used for the Senate. In most cases, voters are required to number their preferences on the ballot paper. The votes are divided up in such a way as to elect the required number of successful candidates based on the proportion of the total vote given to each party.

The counting method is quite complex, but the end result is that the members elected will usually come from a variety of different political parties, including some parties with a relatively small share of the total vote. Candidates are grouped on the ballot paper according to the party they represent. The possibility of being elected with a relatively small share of the vote has usually resulted in a large number of small parties nominating candidates for the Senate. In the 2013 federal election, there were 97 candidates on the Senate ballot paper in Victoria; in New South Wales, the ballot paper included 110 candidates. In each case only six senators were to be elected.

With the number of candidates increasing over the years, it became very difficult for voters to mark all the squares without the risk of missing a number or mistakenly using a number twice. In order to deal with this problem, a system of 'above the line voting' has operated in Senate elections since 1984. This means that instead of placing a number in every square, the voter simply has to place the number 1 above the group representing the political party that he or she prefers. Each political party decides how they want their preferences distributed among the other candidates, so by voting above the line, voters agree to have their preferences allocated accordingly. Over 90 per cent of voters have voted above the line in recent Senate elections. The sample Senate voting papers in figures 8 and 9 show the two different methods of voting.

(a)

YOU MAY VOTE IN ONE OF TWO WAYS

Either:

Above the line
By placing the single figure 1 in one and **only one** of these squares to indicate the voting ticket you wish to adopt as your vote.

A	B	C	D	E
<input type="checkbox"/>				
PARTY	PARTY	PARTY	PARTY	

Or:

Below the line
By placing the numbers 1 to 17 in the order of your preference.

A PARTY	B PARTY	C PARTY	D PARTY	E	Ungrouped
10 SURNAME Given names PARTY	3 SURNAME Given names PARTY	15 SURNAME Given names PARTY	9 SURNAME Given names PARTY	16 SURNAME Given names PARTY	11 SURNAME Given names INDEPENDENT
14 SURNAME Given names PARTY	7 SURNAME Given names PARTY	2 SURNAME Given names PARTY	5 SURNAME Given names PARTY	1 SURNAME Given names PARTY	8 SURNAME Given names INDEPENDENT
4 SURNAME Given names PARTY	12 SURNAME Given names PARTY	6 SURNAME Given names PARTY	17 SURNAME Given names PARTY		
	13 SURNAME Given names PARTY				

SAMPLE

FIGURE 8

Voting below the line: voters can choose to number every Senate candidate by voting below the line.

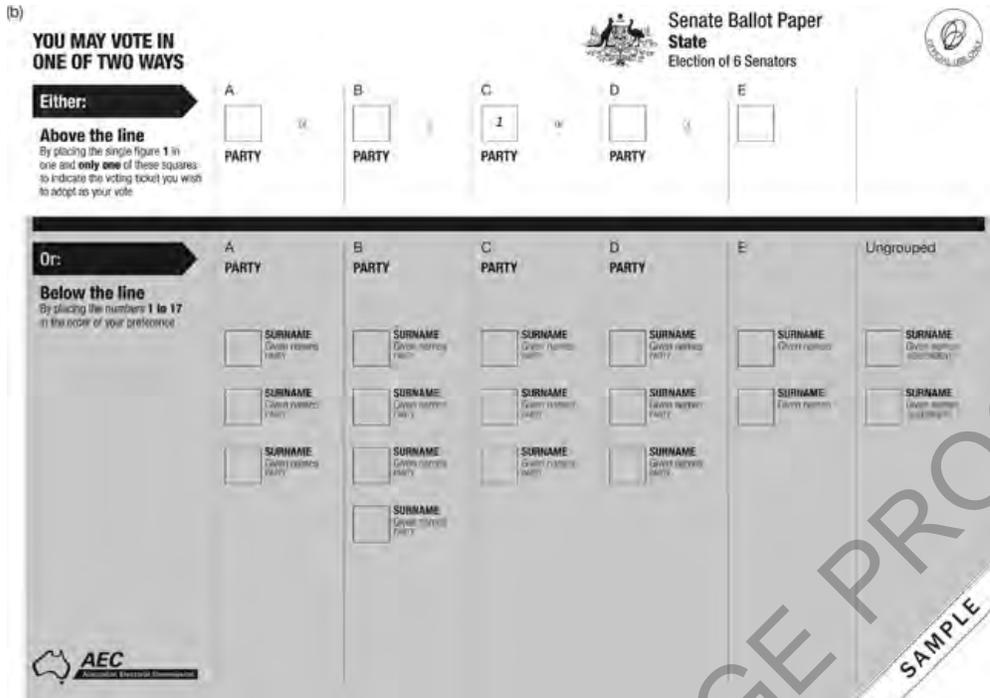


FIGURE 9

Voting above the line: voters can accept the preferences decided by political parties by voting above the line.

Federal election day

The procedure for voting in a federal election is shown in figure 10.

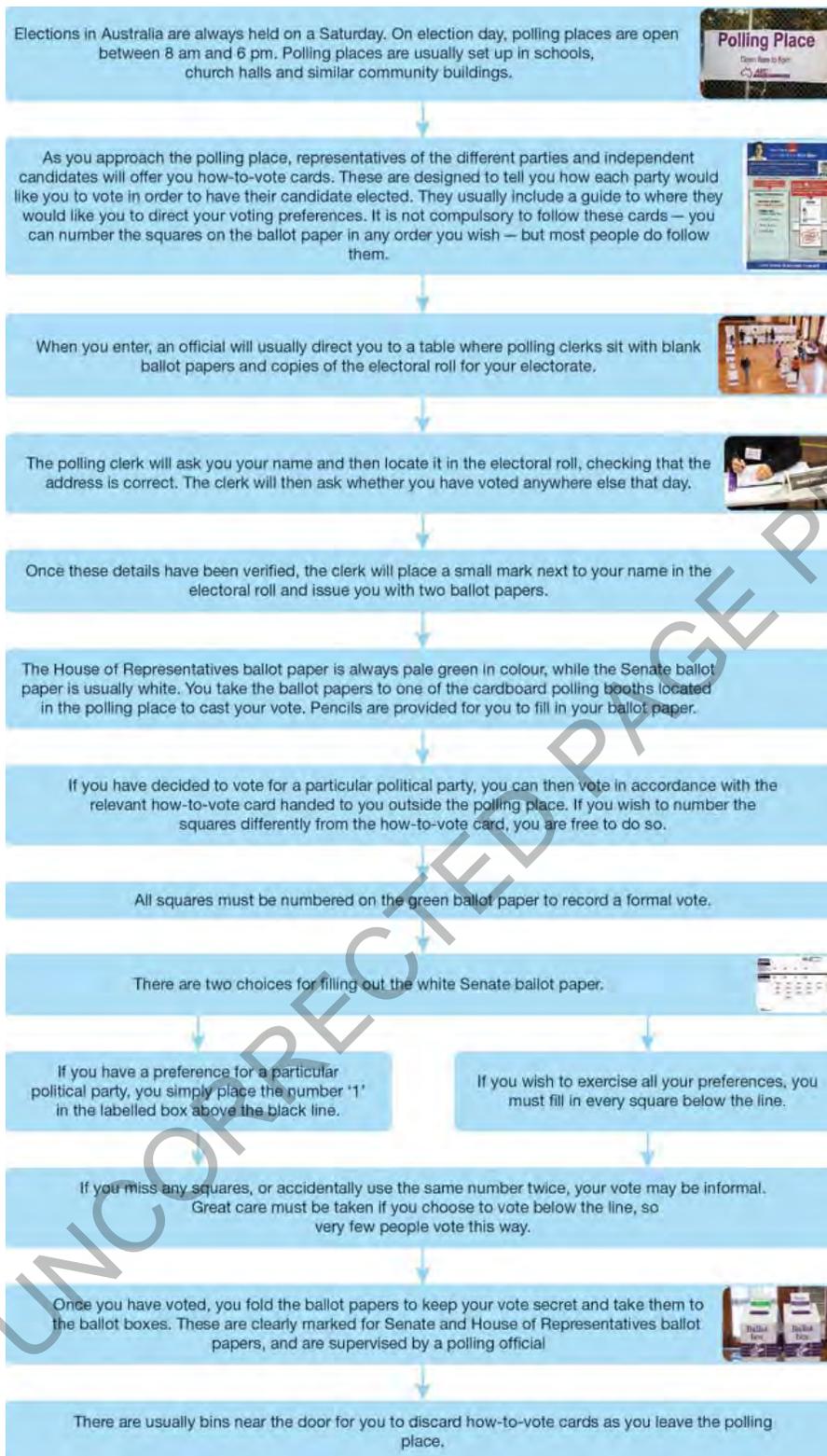


FIGURE 10 Voting in a federal election

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. What is the meaning of the term 'universal adult suffrage'?
2. What is the electoral roll? How does someone have his or her name and other details included in the electoral roll?
3. Identify two houses of parliament in Australia that have single member electorates.
4. Identify two houses of parliament in Australia that have multimember electorates.
5. What are how-to-vote cards?

EXPLAIN

6. What is the importance of the secret ballot?
7. Explain two ways in which you can vote if you are not going to be in your home electorate on election day.
8. Why is it important to have a maximum period of time between parliamentary elections?
9. Explain how the method of electing members to the House of Representatives upholds the principle of one vote, one value. Why is this not the case with the Senate?
10. Explain the difference between preferential voting and proportional representation.

DISCOVER

11. Using internet resources, research the electoral system for your state or territory.
 - a. What is the voting system for the lower house? Does it have single member or multimember electorates?
 - b. What is the voting system for the upper house?
 - c. Do all members of the upper house face election at the same time? If not, explain the system used in the upper house of your state or territory.
12. What is the voting system for your local council? Is voting for local council compulsory in your area?

THINK

13. The Australian Constitution does not make voting compulsory, but compulsory voting was introduced by the federal parliament in 1924. Most other countries with parliamentary systems similar to Australia's have voluntary voting. These include Great Britain, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. Over the years many people in

Australia have argued that it is undemocratic to force people to vote, and that Australia should switch to voluntary voting.

- a. Working in groups of four or five, use the internet to research the arguments both in favour of and against compulsory voting.
- b. Discuss these arguments within your group and decide where your group stands on the issue (in favour, against or undecided).
- c. Each group should then present its findings to the rest of the class.

1.3 Influencing your vote

The key aim of the major political parties is to win government. In order to achieve this, the parties devote a lot of effort and resources to convincing voters to support their candidates. In particular, the parliamentary leaders of the parties will be very visible in these campaigns.

Public debate

During an election campaign, representatives of the parties will often seek opportunities to debate issues with representatives of different parties. Such debates can take a number of formats.

Leaders debates

It has become a regular part of election campaigns for the leaders of the two major parties to take part in televised debates. This means that the leader of the Liberal Party and the leader of the Labor Party will meet face-to-face for an hour in a previously agreed format. Usually each leader has the opportunity to make an opening statement for a set period of time. This is followed by questions directed to both leaders by a panel of journalists who specialise in writing about political issues. Each leader then has an opportunity to make a final statement to conclude the debate.

The 2013 federal election debate between the leaders can be viewed by following the **Leaders debate** weblink in your Resources section.

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FIGURE 1 Party leaders Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott in the leaders debate before the 2013 election

Other debates

In addition to the party leaders, other representatives will often appear on TV and radio during an election campaign. Current affairs programs will invite party spokespeople on to debate issues that are within their area of responsibility. For example, the minister for health may appear representing the government while the shadow minister for health will represent the Opposition. Both will be asked questions and given the opportunity to explain their respective party's policies for improving health services. Each representative will be trying to convince the voters that they will be better off by voting for the representative's party.

Interviews and debates between politicians can be found by following the **Political interviews and debates** weblink in your Resources section.

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Traditional media

As well as appearing on current affairs programs to answer questions and debate issues, political parties and their leaders will attempt to use the full range of the media to get their message across. This includes the traditional media outlets of television news, newspapers and radio.

Television news

During an election campaign the two leaders travel around the country, accompanied by journalists and camera crew from all the television stations. Each day they attempt to make a significant announcement or promise that they hope will be broadcast on that evening's television news. This is a recognised strategy that all parties use to ensure they receive daily media coverage.

Newspapers

Just as they make use of television, political parties and their leaders also try to have their message put before voters in daily newspapers. Political parties provide detailed documentation to journalists on every policy and promise. Whether in print or online, newspapers provide an opportunity for these policies to be published in greater detail. Newspapers often use their online editions to provide the means by which their readers can comment on stories and issues of the day. Daily online opinion polls are also a feature of newspapers and allow them to gain speedy feedback from readers on a variety of issues.



FIGURE 2

Newspapers provide an opportunity to communicate political promises and policies in greater detail.

Radio

Radio provides another opportunity for political leaders and other party representatives to present their policies to the public. Current affairs programs on ABC Radio such as *AM* and *PM* carry out regular interviews with leaders, government ministers and Opposition spokespeople. During an election campaign, large portions of these programs are given over to discussing political issues. Talkback radio programs also give political leaders a chance engage with the public. In addition to being interviewed by the host of the radio program, politicians will often have the opportunity to respond to listeners who phone in and ask them questions.



FIGURE 3 During election campaigns, talkback radio hosts regularly interview political leaders.

Opinion polls

Opinion polls are surveys taken of people from all over Australia and from all walks of life. They are conducted by different polling companies. Most of these conduct their surveys by telephoning people and asking them a series of questions. While conducting their surveys, they often also ask the person being surveyed their age and level of income. This is done to help ensure that they survey a broad range of different people.



FIGURE 4 Opinion polling companies conduct surveys by phoning large numbers of people.

A small but important part of their business is to conduct surveys on people's attitudes to government policies and actions. To achieve this, they will survey people to find out whether they support or oppose a particular policy or political promise. When an election is close, they will also

conduct surveys to find out who people intend voting for. It is this polling that can provide the political leaders with feedback on how well they are performing. Opinion polls also alert the leaders to issues that voters are concerned about, and in this way can influence the policies and promises the leaders make during an election campaign.

Advertising

All political parties put together an advertising program as part of their election campaign. Television advertising is the most common form used, but parties will also advertise on radio and in the newspapers. Most advertising has to be short, with a message that is easy to understand. Political parties make use of slogans they hope will be easy to remember. They also try to create a negative impression of their opponents. The party leaders feature heavily in these advertisements because they want voters to identify with that leader as the next prime minister.

Some samples of advertisements used in the 2013 election campaign can be found by following the **Election campaign advertising** weblink in your Resources section, which also has some commentary on the advertising campaign.

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Interest groups

Each party has support among a number of interest groups throughout the community. The Liberal Party has support from a number of business groups, and many of these will donate money to help cover the cost of that party's advertising. In the same way, the Greens often get support from environmental groups, who will provide time and resources to help that party's campaign. Labor has strong links with the trade union movement, so the union movement donates large amounts to that party's campaign. Unions will also often campaign directly against the Liberal Party. In the 2007 election, for example, the unions campaigned strongly against the Liberal government's WorkChoices laws on the grounds that the laws harmed ordinary workers, who were often union members.



FIGURE 5

Unions launched the 'Your rights at work' campaign in response to the Liberal government's WorkChoices laws.

Other political party campaign activities

Political parties have a variety of additional campaign techniques that are used in most elections. These include:

- *Letterboxing.* Parties will print and distribute advertising leaflets during an election campaign. These will usually feature a photo and information about the local candidate, as well as information about the party's policies. Local party members then volunteer to walk around the electorate delivering the leaflets to letterboxes.
- *Polling.* As well as opinion polling companies carrying out surveys of voters' opinions, political parties carry out their own opinion polls, particularly during an election campaign. They want up-to-date feedback on how well their campaign is being received by the voters, whether their policies are popular or not, and how well the leaders are performing. The political parties carry out polling almost every day during an election campaign to achieve this.
- *Doorknocking.* A traditional method of campaigning has been for a candidate to walk around the electorate, knocking on doors to talk to voters. This is less likely to occur during the official campaign, but some candidates may have spent many hours doing this between elections, particularly if they are challenging a well-known member of parliament.
- *Letters to editor and talkback calls.* During an election campaign, there is always a strong emphasis on political issues in the letters pages of the newspapers as well as on talkback radio programs. Members and supporters of political parties regularly send letters to the newspapers, and phone up talkback radio programs during this time. They usually pretend to be ordinary members of the public, and do not reveal their party membership.
- *Handing out how-to-vote cards.* On election day, political parties rely on volunteers and ordinary party members to stand outside polling places and hand out how-to-vote cards.

Social media

In today's world it seems that millions of people are almost constantly connected. Your ability to access websites, email and social media from almost anywhere through your smartphone means that you can express an opinion on any issue, to almost anyone, anytime, anywhere. Political parties and their leaders are very aware of the significance of social media, and have been adopting social media to appeal to the public, particularly younger voters. In recent years they have expanded their efforts on social media in a variety of ways:

- All of the major parties have Facebook pages to keep their supporters updated, and most individual members of parliament have their own Facebook pages. As well as providing information about party policies, individual members use their Facebook pages to provide updates on their activities within their electorates.
- Almost every member of parliament in Australia today has a Twitter account. One of the first to do so was the former prime minister, Kevin Rudd. At its peak his Twitter account had over 1.3 million followers. Prime Minister Tony Abbott has over 270 000 Twitter followers.
- As an example of the power of social media in politics, we only have to look at the American experience. When Barack Obama was running for president of the United States in 2008, his campaign team created election advertising to be shown on YouTube. The material was watched

for 14.5 million hours, all free, which is the equivalent of \$47 million worth of paid television advertising. President Obama launched his re-election campaign for 2012 on Facebook in April 2011. Voters in the United States can post comments, suggestions and ideas for the future on the president's Facebook page.

Members of parliament, supporters of particular political parties and opponents of the same political parties, as well as people campaigning for changes in the law, can all use social media to get their message across. Members of parliament and candidates for election can publicise their activities and gain immediate feedback from followers through the use of different social media platforms.

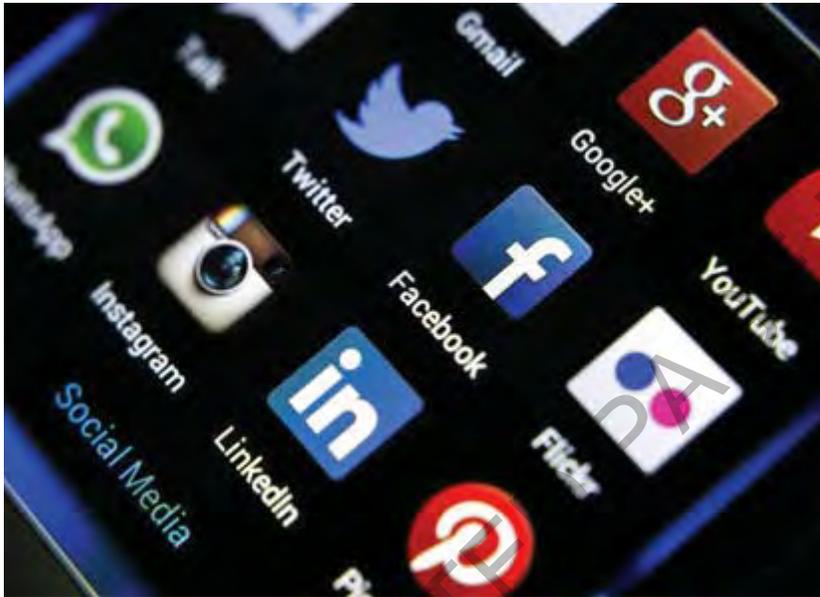


FIGURE 6 Everyone can use social media to get their message across.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. Identify two ways in which candidates for parliament can engage in public debate during an election campaign.
2. How can a candidate use radio programs to help his or her campaign?
3. Which interest groups are most likely to support the Australian Greens Party?
4. Outline two ways in which a candidate can make direct contact with voters in his or her electorate.

EXPLAIN

5. How do political leaders make use of the evening television news during an election campaign?
6. What advantage do newspapers have over other media during an election campaign?
7. Why are opinion polls an important part of an election campaign?
8. What features must a political advertising campaign have to be successful?

DISCOVER

9. Locate the Facebook page or Twitter account of the leader of one of the major parties.
 - a. What kind of information is made available through this medium?
 - b. How does the leader use social media to promote his or her image to voters?
 - c. Do you think it is successful or not? Give reasons for your answer.
10. Find your local member of parliament's Facebook page or Twitter account.
 - a. What information does the member provide in relation to his or her local community activities?
 - b. How does the member use the social media to promote his or her party's policies?

PREDICT

11. Imagine that opinion polls indicated that a political party's policy was unpopular with voters during an election campaign. The leader has to take action to change public opinion. What do you think might happen in the following circumstances?
 - a. The leader refuses to change the policy but initiates a new advertising campaign to better explain it.
 - b. The leader makes minor changes to the policy to make it more acceptable.
 - c. The leader drops the policy completely.

1.4 After the election – the formation of government

After all the polling places close at 6 pm on federal election day, counting of the votes commences immediately. The votes are counted at each polling place in an electorate and then added up for the electorate as a whole. When the votes for all electorates are eventually counted, it will be clear which candidates have won each electorate. The political party that wins at least 76 of the 150

seats in the House of Representatives will be declared the winner of the election and will form government for the next three years.

What's the result?

Once the doors of the polling place are locked at 6 pm, counting of the votes cast during the day commences. The count is usually carried out by the same electoral staff who have managed the election process at the polling place that day. House of Representatives votes are counted before Senate votes.

Counting the House of Representatives votes

The ballot boxes are opened and the green ballot papers are spread onto tables. The polling clerks then sort the ballots according to first-preferences votes, and count them as they go. Any **informal votes** are put to one side and not included in the count.



FIGURE 1 Polling officials empty ballot boxes in readiness to count the votes.

As well as the polling officials, each candidate is permitted to have at least one **scrutineer** present for the count. Scrutineers are usually members of the candidate's political party. They are required to fill out a form before the polling place closes, and to wear an identification badge while in the polling place. They will carefully watch the count to make sure it is conducted fairly and properly. Scrutineers have the right to challenge any aspect of the count. For example, if a vote is declared informal because there appears to be a mistake in filling it out, the scrutineer may challenge that decision if he or she believes it should be counted as a vote for his or her party's candidate.



FIGURE 2 The counting of votes is watched carefully by scrutineers representing each candidate.

When first preferences have been counted, the results are phoned through to the divisional returning officer. This is the official in charge of the voting process for the whole electorate. The divisional returning officer then enters the results for each polling place in the electorate on the AEC's computerised election-management system. This system tallies the votes for all electorates across Australia and keeps a running total of seats won by each party. The media also has access to these results, and a number of TV channels run special election night programs in which they provide updates and commentary on the progress of the count.



FIGURE 3 Television channels present detailed coverage of vote counting on election night.

In order to be elected, a candidate has to have an absolute majority of votes. This means having 50 per cent of the votes plus one. For example, if there are 100 000 **formal votes** cast in an electorate, a candidate must have 50 001 votes to win. If one candidate has more than this number of first-

preference votes, then he or she will be declared elected. If no candidate has that number of first-preference votes, then other preferences on ballot papers have to be counted. The process for doing so is illustrated in figure 4.

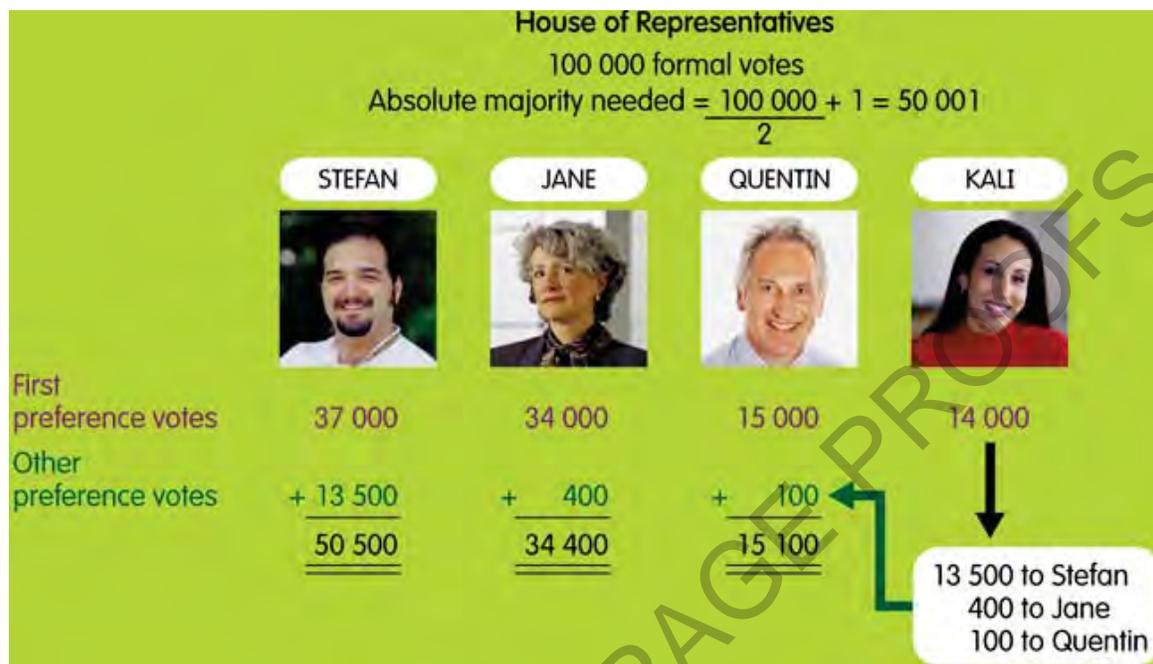


FIGURE 4 Counting preferences in the House of Representatives seats

As you can see from the example in figure 4, none of the candidates has an absolute majority of 50 001 so preference votes have to be counted. This is done by excluding the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes. In this case, that candidate is Kali, with 14 000 votes. Her votes are counted again, according to where those voting for her allocated their second preference votes. In this case, 13 500 of those who gave Kali their first preference gave their second preference to Stefan. The other 500 of Kali's second-preference votes were split between Jane and Quentin as shown. This distribution of second-preference votes was enough to give Stefan an absolute majority. If there had been no clear winner after Kali's second-preference votes had been distributed, Quentin's votes would have been distributed in the same way — and so on until there was a clear winner.

Counting the Senate votes

The proportional representation system used in the Senate is far more complex because it has to elect six senators from each state. Each state operates as one electorate for this purpose. You will notice that candidates on the Senate ballot paper are grouped according to the parties they represent. This is based on the expectation that most voters will support a party rather than individual senators in the election. If a voter votes below the line, he or she will usually give first preference to the first candidate in a group, second preference to the second candidate listed in that group and so on to the end of that group before moving to the next group.

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Weblink

Counting votes in the House of Representatives

If a voter votes above the line for a particular party, the vote is interpreted as giving the voting preferences in exactly the same way. This means that the first candidate gets all the first-preference votes for that party, while the other candidates only get second- or third-preference votes. In a preferential system like that used in the lower house, this would be a problem because a candidate needs to have a certain number of first-preference votes to stay in the count. The Senate vote-counting system is quite different, however, so this is not an issue.

To be elected to the Senate, a candidate has to achieve a **quota** of votes. If a candidate gains more first-preference votes than is required to meet the quota, those surplus votes are distributed to the candidates who have gained second preferences in the votes for the candidate who won on first preferences. Usually that will be the candidate in the same group on the ballot paper whose name appears immediately below the candidate who won on first preferences. If the first candidate within a group gains more than two quotas worth of votes, the second person within that group will usually also be elected even though they might not have received any first-preference votes. To be elected, a candidate has to achieve a whole quota — either in first-preference votes or in the surplus passed on because of second preferences.

If a candidate requires a quota of 300 001 and gains 350 000 first-preference votes, he or she effectively has a second quota to pass on. Because it is not possible to guarantee that all voters will have given their second preference to the second candidate in the group, we cannot just choose any votes to pass on. Instead, we pass on a proportion of all votes — known as the transfer value — representing the ratio of surplus votes to the total number of votes received by the first candidate. This means that we divide the surplus above the quota by the total number of first-preference votes received by the first candidate.

Look at the example in figure 5. A quota is calculated by dividing the number of formal votes by the number of vacancies plus one, and then adding one to the result. In Australian senate elections, this usually means dividing the number of formal votes by seven before adding one to the result. In figure 5, Ying gets a quota on first-preference votes. Her surplus votes are passed on to other candidates in the order in which second preferences appear on her ballot papers. This means that all the second preferences are passed on at the transfer value. This is calculated by dividing Ying's surplus votes (49 999) by the total of her first-preference votes (350 000). This gives a transfer value of 0.143.

Once these votes are distributed, Anna has a quota and 2290 surplus votes. These will be passed on at a transfer value calculated by dividing her surplus (2290) by her original first-preference total (298 000), which would give a value of 0.008.

Once all the surplus votes have been passed on, if there are not enough candidates with full quotas to fill all the vacancies, the candidate with the fewest first preferences (Peter) is excluded. His preference votes are passed on at full value to those candidates who have not gained a quota. This process continues until the required number have quotas, and all vacancies are filled.

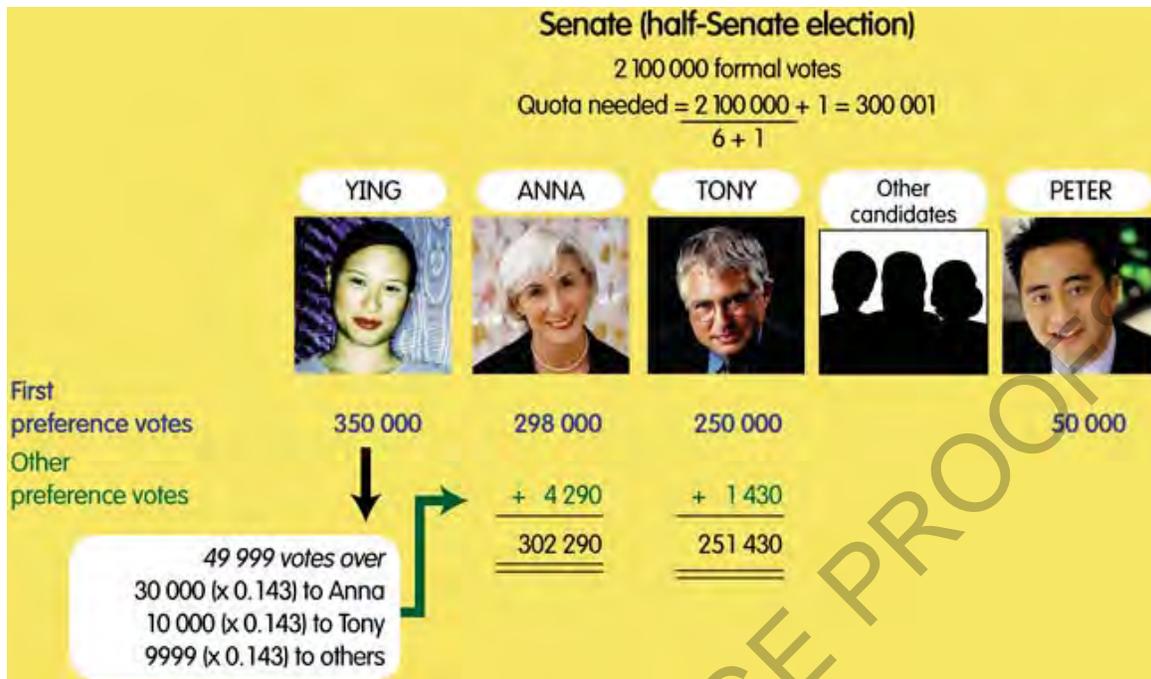


FIGURE 5 Counting preferences in Senate seats

In recent Senate elections in most states, it has been fairly common for the major party candidates listed first in their group to receive two quotas, with some votes left over. As a result, the first two candidates standing for the ALP and for the Liberal–National coalition tend to fill the first four vacancies. It has also been common for the Greens, as the most popular of the minor parties, to have the first candidate in their group gain one quota in their own right. This provides the fifth of the six candidates required. Consequently, there are a number of candidates who have a portion of a quota but none with a whole quota. What happens to solve this issue?

Once all quotas have been allocated, the system becomes similar to that used in the House of Representatives vote counting. The candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is excluded, and his or her second preferences allocated to those other candidates who have not already gained a quota. This often means that the sixth successful candidate may not be known for some time after the election. It often happens that an independent, or a member of a very small party, can be elected to the sixth seat in some states.

Forming the federal government

The party that forms the government is the one that wins a majority of seats (electorates) in the House of Representatives. In most circumstances, enough votes will have been counted for this to be known on election night. However, this is not always the case. In the 2010 federal election, neither major party had a majority of seats in the lower house. Each won 72 seats, making a total of 144 out of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives. The remaining six seats were won by independents and representatives of minor parties.



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Counting votes in the Senate

It then became necessary for the leader of the Coalition, Tony Abbott, and the leader of the Labor Party, Julia Gillard, to negotiate with these six members to convince them to support his or her particular party. The Coalition or Labor had to gain the support of at least four of the six members to have a majority of votes in the lower house and therefore form government. It took 17 days from the date of the election before the necessary four members agreed to support one of the two parties. They chose the Labor Party, which was therefore returned to power with Julia Gillard retaining her position as prime minister.

An election will result in either the re-election of the existing government for another three-year term, or the defeat of the government and the election of the Opposition to form a new government. Since the end of World War II in 1945, there have been 27 federal elections held in Australia. On 20 of these occasions, the existing government has been returned. In only seven elections has there been a change of government.



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Swearing-in of a new prime minister

If the party in government retains power, its leader remains as prime minister and his or her government continues as before. If the government is defeated, the leader of the Opposition prepares to take over as prime minister. The outgoing prime minister will usually visit the Governor-General to resign early in the week following election day. The newly elected prime minister then visits the Governor-General to be sworn in as prime minister.

Once counting is complete for all electorates and the result is finalised, government ministers will be appointed and will in turn be sworn into office by the Governor-General. From this point the new government takes control and has three years before having to face the voters again.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. What is the role of scrutineers during the counting of votes?
2. How is the result in each polling place communicated to the AEC's computerised election-management system?
3. What is required to achieve an absolute majority of votes?
4. How is a quota calculated for election to the Senate?

EXPLAIN

5. Why are preferences important in counting House of Representatives votes?
6. Why are votes above a quota passed on at a transfer value?
7. Explain the method for calculating the transfer value of Senate votes.

DISCOVER

8. Using internet resources, investigate the Senate results in your home state or territory and answer the following:
- How many quotas did the highest placed candidate receive?
 - How many major party candidates were elected from the passing on of surplus votes above a quota?
 - Name any independents or minor party candidates elected.
 - How many first-preference votes did these independents or minor party candidates receive?
 - What was the final party-by-party breakdown of the six successful candidates?

THINK

9. The following first-preference votes were recorded for a House of Representatives seat at an election:

Candidate	Votes
Ahmed	32 000
Michael	21 000
Jan	29 000
Tran	8 000

- Voters who gave first preferences to Jan gave 18 000 second preferences to Ahmed and 11 000 second preferences to Michael.
- Voters who gave first preferences to Michael gave 8000 second preferences to Ahmed and 13 000 second preferences to Jan.
- Voters who gave first preferences to Tran gave 3000 second preferences to Ahmed and 5000 second preferences to Jan.

Who would win the seat?

SkillBuilder: Creating and analysing a table

Tell me

What is a table?

A table is a way of displaying information, or data, in an organised way. The data (text or numbers) is arranged in columns (reading down) and rows (reading across). The table is sometimes called a grid. This is because rows and columns are separated by lines to form a grid.

Why are tables useful?

- Tables provide a lot of information in a small amount of space.
- They are a very good way of arranging data so that it can be easily understood.
- The column and row headings help tell you what the data is about.
- The data in a table can be used to create a graph.
- The information in a table can be used to help people make decisions.

Show me

You are given a set of figures that provide details of the number of House of Representatives seats in 1901 compared with today, and the state-by-state population for 1901 and 2011 (the date of the last national census). You will be required to analyse and interpret this data, so you will need to create a table to assist you.

In 1901, the first Australian parliament had 26 members from NSW, 23 from Victoria, 9 from Queensland, 7 from South Australia, and 5 each from Western Australia and Tasmania. The population breakdown of the states in 1901 was as follows: NSW had 1.35 million people, Victoria had 1.2 million, Queensland had 498 000, South Australia had 36 000, Western Australia had 184 000 and Tasmania had 172 000. In 1901, the Northern Territory was included in South Australia, and the ACT in New South Wales.

Today, the breakdown of seats in the federal lower house is NSW 49, Victoria 37, Queensland 29, Western Australia 15, South Australia 11, Tasmania 5, and the two territories 2 each. Australian population in 2011 was: NSW had 7.21 million, Victoria had 5.53 million, Queensland had 4.47 million, Western Australia had 2.35 million, South Australia had 1.64 million, Tasmania had 511 200, Northern Territory had 231 300 and the ACT had 367 800.

This data can be summarised in a table by placing the dates, population and number of seats along the top as column headings, with the names of the states as labels for the rows. This would create something similar to table 1.

Table 1 Comparison of population and House of Representatives seats, 1901 and 2011

	1901		2011	
	Population	Seats	Population	Seats
NSW	1 350 000	26	7 210 000	49
Victoria	1 200 000	23	5 530 000	37
Queensland	498 000	9	4 470 000	29
South Australia	363 000	7	1 640 000	11
Western Australia	184 000	5	2 350 000	15
Tasmania	172 000	5	511 200	5
Northern Territory			231 300	2
ACT			367 800	2
Total	3 767 000	75	22 310 300	150

The following questions require an analysis and interpretation of the data:

1. As the total number of seats in the lower house has doubled since 1901, why hasn't the number of seats in each state simply doubled?
2. Compare New South Wales' proportion of the total population in 1901 with that in 2011. Has the state maintained, increased or decreased its share of the seats in the House of Representatives? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Which state has experienced the greatest increase in its share of the number of seats since 1901? Why has this occurred?
4. The number of seats in Tasmania has not increased despite an increase in population. Why is this?
5. Which state has the largest average population per electorate? Which state has the smallest average population per electorate?

Once you have answered these five questions, compare your answers with those in the **Analysing and interpreting data** worksheet in your Resources section.

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Let me do it

Draw up a table using the following data:

In 2010 in the House of Representatives, Labor won 72 seats, the Liberal–National coalition won 72 seats, the Greens won one seat, a National Party member from Western Australia won one seat, and independents won four seats.

In the 2013 election, Labor won 55 seats, the Coalition won 90 seats, and the Greens retained their one seat. Two new parties, Palmer United Party and Katter's Australian Party, each won a seat in Queensland, and two independents were also elected.

1. Create a table to present the data.
2. Answer the following questions in relation to your table:
 - a. Under the principle of majority rule, what did each of the major parties have to do to try and form government in 2010?
 - b. How many seats did the Coalition gain in the 2013 election compared with the 2010 election?
 - c. How many seats did the Labor Party lose in the 2013 election?
 - d. What is the size of the majority won by the Liberal–National coalition in 2013?
 - e. If the independents and minor parties retain their seats in the 2016 election, how many seats would the Labor Party have to win from the Coalition to form government?
 - f. How many seats could the Coalition afford to lose in the 2016 election and still retain government, assuming the independents and minor parties retain their current seats?

Review and reflect

Review

Australia is governed by a system of parliamentary democracy in which government is formed by members of the political party that holds the majority of seats in the House of Representatives. Senior members of that party perform the functions of government by taking roles as government ministers. Each minister assumes responsibility for a particular area of government, and is also responsible for ensuring that government policies and promises are put into action. The power of the voters to choose a government is influenced by the following factors:

- Political parties — groups of people with similar opinions and values. Parties compete with each other at election time, each hoping to win enough seats in parliament to form government.
- The Australian electoral system — based on the principles of universal adult suffrage, secret ballot, compulsory voting, regular elections, and preferential and proportional voting systems based on single member and multimember electorates.
- The media — between elections, and particularly at election time, parties and their supporters use every available form of media to attempt to influence voters to support them.
- Our systems of voting — designed to reflect the will of the voters. This happens through preferential voting, which ensures that the candidate who is preferred by the majority of voters is likely to be elected. Proportional representation is also designed to return candidates who have the greatest support from the greatest number of voters.


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Multiple choice
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Interactivity
True/false
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Interactivity
Crossword
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Reflect

Consider the following facts in relation to a particular senate election:

- As usual, there are six vacancies to be filled.
- The number of formal votes cast is 1.4 million.
- Each party group has four candidates.
- About 95 per cent of voters vote above the line.
- The first placed Labor candidate receives 430 000 first-preference votes.
- The first placed Liberal–National coalition candidate receives 560 000 first-preference votes.
- The first placed Greens candidate receives 220 000 first-preference votes.
- The first placed Palmer United Party candidate receives 100 000 first-preference votes.
- Nine other groups/candidates receive between 2000 and 15 000 first-preference votes each.

Answer the following:

1. What number of votes would constitute a quota in this state?
2. How many Labor candidates would achieve a quota?
3. How many Liberal–National coalition candidates would achieve a quota?
4. Explain whether or not the Greens candidate would be elected and why.
5. Which candidate, from which party, would be the most likely to be elected to fill the sixth place?
6. Explain what might have to happen for that candidate to be successful.