Democracy Rules
An electoral education resource

Topic 3:

What's your vote worth?

AEC
Australian Electoral Commission

Topic 3: What's your vote worth?

'What's your vote worth?' allows students to explore key features of the electoral system, such as compulsory voting and the voting systems used to elect representatives to federal, state and territory parliaments. It also examines why voting is important, the democratic principles that underpin a democratic electoral system and the role of redistributions in ensuring the equality of citizens' votes.

This topic contains two Investigations:

- Investigation A: How and why do Australians vote?
- Investigation B: How do electorates change over time?

Introductory activity

Resources

- **BLM 1** Hypothetical – student election

In a 'think, pair, share' exercise, ask students to consider their experiences of voting, especially in relation to television programs that allow audiences to express their opinions of contestants or participants through voting. Have students outline or describe the method of voting used, taking care to record the details of the procedure. They might ask, for example: Who votes? How many times can they vote? Who counts the votes? Is there a cost for voting?

Maintaining the pairs, ask students to use their knowledge of voting in formal elections to compile a list of key principles or stages of an election. Their list could include details such as enrolment, voting once, voting in private, compulsory voting, 'one vote, one value' and so on. Once students have compiled this list, ask them to compare it to the process they described for voting in a television program. This comparison may be made using a Venn diagram, or by ticking the shared features on the list.

Figure 19: Voting in an election

Once the comparison is complete, ask students – in a class discussion – to consider the fairness of each process, and to contribute to a class list of voting principles.

Using **BLM 1** students work in groups to complete the activities and present their findings. Ask students to use their findings to supplement or modify the class list of voting principles.

Students should now be able to propose definitions for 'secret ballot', 'one vote, one value' and 'preferential voting', as well as definitions for any other principles they suggest are needed for the conduct of a free and fair election.

This knowledge can now be applied to a review of the current voting provision for student elections in your school. Have students propose amendments to these voting provisions and prepare a set of recommendations for the school's Student Representative Council to consider.

From the margin

Voter turnout

Approximately 92% of eligible electors voted in the 2019 Australian federal election.

In the USA, where voting is not compulsory, approximately 67% of eligible electors turned out for the 2020 presidential election.

In the UK in 2019, 67% of eligible electors voted.

Investigation A
How and why do Australians vote?

In this investigation students explore compulsory voting, the importance of participation in a democracy and the reasons why it is important for people to enrol to vote. They consider the role that political parties play in democratic elections. They examine the voting systems used to elect representatives to the federal parliament as well as to state and territory parliaments. The investigation also asks students to evaluate the principles that underpin democratic elections including 'one vote, one value', equality of representation, fair representation, majority rule and representation of minorities.

The investigation at a glance

Background briefings for teacher reference	• Australian Electoral Commission; democracy; electoral division; full preferential voting; House of Representatives; representation; Senate
Suggested classroom teaching time	• **Activity 1:** The value of a vote (80 minutes) • **Activity 2:** Parties and elections (60 minutes) • **Activity 3:** Profiles of Parliament (80 minutes) • **Activity 4:** Voting systems (80 minutes)
Indicators of student achievement	• Understand electoral law relating to voting in Australia • Analyse the role and influence of political parties in elections • Analyse the voting systems used in federal elections and in the states and territories • Evaluate the impact of voting systems used on the outcome of elections and representation in parliament

Activity 1
The value of a vote

Figure 20: Mobile polling makes voting accessible to all electors

📁 Gathering information

Discuss with students their current understandings of the following:
- Who can vote?
- How do you enrol?
- What are the arguments for and against compulsory voting?

Show students the animation 'History of voting' and discuss with them changes in the franchise over time. Provide students with a copy of BLM 2. Divide the class into groups and ask them to use the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) website to research who can vote, how citizens enrol to vote, the purpose of the electoral roll and the arguments for and against compulsory voting.

🔍 Identifying and analysing

Have student groups report back to the class and discuss the following:
- What arguments are there for and against compulsory voting? (Have students, in turns, present an argument for or against compulsory voting.) Which arguments are most convincing to students?
- Who is eligible to enrol to vote?
- Who is excluded from voting currently? Who was excluded from voting in the past?
- How do you enrol?
- What is provisional enrolment?
- How does provisional enrolment encourage increased participation of eligible voters?

Have students complete the interactive 'The history of voting game' as a summative activity.

🖥️ Presenting findings

'Compulsory voting is good for democracy'. Ask students to compose a paragraph where they agree or disagree with this statement.

OR

Have students use knowledge to design an advertising campaign, targeting young people, to promote enrolling and voting.

Activity 2
Parties and elections

📁 Gathering information

Discuss with students their understanding of political parties. What are political parties? What part do political parties play in government? What part do political parties play in elections? Why might it be better to work with others to pursue goals?

Some key ideas:
- A political party is an organisation of people with similar ideas and interests.
- They aim to have party members elected to Parliament.
- They develop policies (such as on environment, health, education, trade) to present to the voters and to implement if elected to parliament.
- A party or a coalition of parties form the government if they win a majority of seats in the House of Representatives. The leader of the party becomes the prime minister.
- The party or coalition of parties with the second-most seats won form the Opposition in the House of Representatives.

Explain to students that generally people distinguish major parties and minor parties, with the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the Nationals being the major parties in Australia.

Read through **BLM 3** with students. Discuss with them the party representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Which house has most parties represented? What is the other (independent) category?

Have pairs of students investigate one of the parties listed for the House of Representatives or the Senate using party websites and the Parliament of Australia website for information. (One pair of students could also investigate the independents). Have students consider:
- the vision (goals and beliefs) of the party
- the main policies or priorities of the party
- how citizens can be involved
- representation in the current House of Representatives and Senate
- leading elected members of parliament and/or senators
- the reach of the party, that is, if the party is focused on Australia, on a particular state or territory, or on a particular segment of the community.

Identifying and analysing

Bring students together to present their findings about each party. Discuss the following with students:

- Which parties are represented in both the House of Representatives and the Senate?
- Which parties are represented in the Senate only?
- Which parties are national in focus and which parties appeal to sections of the community?
- Which parties are led by well-known public individuals?
- How can citizens be involved in political parties and policy making?
- Which parties allow for young people to be involved?
- Which parties are more focused on individual issues?
- What role do political parties play in supporting citizen participation and informed citizenship?
- Which party/parties had the most accessible information for young people?
- What might be the advantages and disadvantages of being an independent?

Students should then consider the role that parties play in governing and how the results of an election impact on how parliament works. For the current parliament, students use the U diagrams in **BLM 3** to create a diagram of the party composition of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Then students consider the following:

- How do the numbers in each house affect the passing of bills?
- What parties vote together to gain a majority?
- How might minor parties and Independents influence government decisions in the House of Representatives and the Senate?
- What role does the Senate play in legislating to implement government policies?

Presenting findings

Using evidence from the class presentations and discussion, have students write an informative account of at least two parties represented in the Australian Parliament. Ensure they explain their policies and why they might appeal to voters.

Activity 3
Profiles of Parliament

Focus questions
- How do citizens vote for the House of Representatives and the Senate?
- How are the votes counted?
- What role is played by the AEC in conducting democratic elections?

Resources
- BLM 4 Voting for the House of Representatives and the Senate
- Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives: www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives
- Parliament of Australia, Senate: www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/
- Australian Electoral Commission, Counting the votes: www.aec.gov.au/voting/counting/
- Animation: Making your vote count
- Animation: Election day
- Interactive: Voting challenge – What do you know?

Gathering information

As a preliminary activity to researching the voting systems used in the House of Representatives and the Senate, have students research the role and functions of the two federal houses of parliament using the Parliament of Australia website. Information should be arranged under the following headings:
- name of house (as well as other names given to this house)
- who is represented?
- number of representatives
- terms of office of members of parliament and senators
- roles and functions.

Have students view the animations 'Making your vote count' and 'Election day'. Discuss with them the processes involved in conducting an election and in counting the vote.

Provide students with a copy of BLM 4 and the party federal election results from BLM 3.

Read through BLM 4 with students. In pairs, students investigate the electoral systems – the process of voting and the process of counting the vote, as well as the latest election results.

Identifying and analysing

Bring students together to report on their findings and discuss the following questions:
- How does the electoral system used for the House of Representatives support the principle of majority rule?
- How might minor parties and independents influence the outcome of an election?
- What are the principles of Senate voting?
- Why might Senate elections take a long time to finalise?
- What might be the advantages for a democracy of having a range of parties represented in the Senate?
- What are the implications for democracy when the same political party has a majority in both houses of parliament?

As a summative activity have students view the interactive 'Voting challenge – What do you know?'

Presenting findings

Have students use the results of their research and discussions to produce an information guide on one on the following:

- voting for the Senate
- voting for the House of Representatives.

Students should include charts, diagrams, photographs and illustrations to explain and analyse their chosen voting system, including the ways that votes are counted.

From the margin

Hung parliament

Capital punishment was abolished in Australia so 'hung parliament' does not refer to hanging parliamentarians! It's a term that describes a parliament in which no political party or coalition of parties has a majority in the House of Representatives. The term is becoming more applicable to modern parliaments, as minor parties and independent candidates are increasingly holding the balance of power in minority governments.

Figure 21: The Australian Senate

Activity 4

Voting systems

From the margin

Westminster system

Westminster is the place where the British Government sits, so the Westminster system refers to the procedures of the British Parliament, which were adopted by Australia at the time of Federation and are still in use today.

📁 Gathering information

Provide students with a copy of **BLM 5**. Divide students into eight groups, each to research one state or territory. Refer them to the websites listed above as well as the parliamentary websites, which can be found by using a search engine and entering keywords such as 'Northern Territory Parliament'.

Ask students to find out:

- a brief history of the parliament
- the symbols of government (such as coats of arms, colours, bird and flower emblems)
- the length of parliamentary terms
- the number of representatives in house(s) of parliament
- the number of electorates and the ways they are organised
- the nature of the voting systems used.

🔍 Identifying and analysing

Discuss with students the similarities and differences among the states and territories, as well as differences between the state and federal systems. What accounts for these differences and similarities?

How do the voting systems of the states and territories uphold democratic principles and values such as majority rule and representation of minorities, fair representation and 'one vote, one value'?

🖥 Presenting findings

Ask students to present their understandings in groups for the classroom. Have them include the aspects in the research list above. Their presentations should include visual aids, charts and images such as state coats of arms and symbols, and timelines of key electoral events.

Investigation B
How do electorates change over time?

A fair electoral system ensures that each citizen's vote has equal value and that voters have, as near as possible, equal representation. For the House of Representatives, each state and territory is divided into electoral divisions. The number of electoral divisions is determined by the population in each state and territory. To ensure equal representation, the boundaries of these divisions have to be redrawn or redistributed periodically. This rearrangement of electoral division boundaries is called a redistribution.

In this investigation students analyse the characteristics of Australian electorates, investigate the redistribution process and analyse how democratic values are evident in these processes.

The investigation at a glance

Background briefings for teacher reference	• Australian Electoral Commission; democracy; electoral division; redistribution; representation
Suggested classroom teaching time	• **Activity 1:** Electorates (80 minutes) • **Activity 2:** Redistributions (80 minutes) • **Activity 3:** Issues (120 minutes)
Indicators of student achievement	• Analyse the characteristics of their own and other Australian electorates • Understand the process and importance of redistributions in maintaining a democratic electoral system • Explain the ways that local issues can influence the way people vote

Activity 1

Electorates

Gathering information

Ask students what they understand about the term 'electorate' or 'electoral division' and if they can name the federal electorate their school is based in. Explain that each state is divided into electoral divisions based on population, which each elect a representative to the House of Representatives.

Provide students with a map of the electoral division and the profile of the electorate your school is located in (from the AEC website).

Discuss with students the type of information about electorates that can be obtained from the profile, including name derivation, size, local councils, demographic rating and the current member of parliament.

Provide students with definitions of the four demographic ratings of electorates (inner metropolitan, outer metropolitan, provincial and rural) and ask them to give examples of places that might fit these categories.

Demographic ratings for electorates	
Inner metropolitan	Situated in capital cities and consisting of well-established built-up suburbs
Outer metropolitan	Situated in capital cities and containing large areas of recent suburban expansion
Provincial	Outside capital cities, but with a majority of enrolment in major provincial cities
Rural	Outside capital cities, and without a majority of enrolment in major provincial cities

Ask students to examine the map. Discuss with them the considerations that appear to have been made in drawing up the boundaries of your electorate (such as major roads, rivers or suburb boundaries).

Have students, in pairs, use the AEC website to locate electorate profiles and maps in each of the four demographic boundaries. For each electorate note:
- the name of electorate
- the name derivation
- the area of the electorate
- a location description
- considerations that appear to have been made in drawing up electoral boundaries
- the number of enrolled voters in each electorate, using the 'Monthly enrolment statistics by state and division' page on the AEC website.

Identifying and analysing

Have student pairs report back on their research.

Discuss the similarities and differences between electorates.

- What is the significance of electorate names?
- How did electorates with different demographic ratings compare to their own electorate?
- What do students notice about the differences in area between electorates with different demographic ratings?
- What considerations appear to be made in drawing up boundaries in each of the electorates?
- How does the numbers of enrolled voters compare in each electorate?

From the margin

Overseas voting

Eligible Australians living, working or holidaying overseas can still vote in a federal election.

Many Australian embassies, consulates and high commissions act as polling places during a federal election. In the weeks leading up to election day, Australians overseas may be able to visit one of these overseas voting centres and vote in person, or they could apply for a postal vote and receive their ballot papers in the mail.

Presenting findings

Have students prepare a brief informative presentation on their own electorate or another electorate.

Figure 22: Schools and other public buildings are used as polling places on election day

Activity 2
Redistributions

Figure 23: Polling official checking for the voter's name on the electoral roll for his division

Gathering information

Ask students to provide reasons why the enrolment in electorates might change over time. A useful way to approach this is to ask students about population changes in the state or territory, and in their local area. For example, have there been any new housing estates or apartment complexes in the inner city areas or has there been a decline in rural populations? Why might these changes have occurred?

Ask students to suggest reasons why it might be important for a democratic electoral system to have enrolments in electorates with approximately equal populations.

View the animation 'Redistributions' with students.

Also provide students with a copy of BLM 6.

Discuss with students:
- the conditions under which a redistribution occurs
- the process of redistribution, including determining the quota
- the factors the redistribution committee takes into account
- the ways that the public can take part in this process.

Identifying and analysing

Discuss with students:
- how rules covering redistributions support democratic principles including equality and 'one vote, one value'
- the factors that redistributions must take into account, for example: What is meant by 'community of interest'? What would the 'community of interest' be in regards to our electorate?
- ways that people can have input into the process.

Presenting findings

Ask students to imagine that there has been a significant population increase (or decrease) in their electorate and a redistribution has been announced. This means that part of their electorate boundaries will be redrawn.

Have students prepare an online local newspaper article (which includes a map of their electorate) for the general public, to explain the goals of the redistribution and how redistributions contribute to a fair and representative electoral system. The article should also clarify the process of redistribution and invite input from local people.

Activity 3
Issues

Focus questions
- What issues might concern people in our electorate?
- What issues might concern people in different types of electorates?
- What issues might affect the way that people vote?

Resources
- BLM 7 Electorate issues
- AEC, Current federal electoral divisions: www.aec.gov.au/profiles/index.htm
- Farm Online (portal for rural newspapers): www.farmonline.com.au
- Newspapers: www.onlinenewspapers.com
- Interactive: Democracy rules – The quests 1 and 2

Gathering information

Review the demographic ratings from Activity 1. For each type of electorate, ask student groups to hypothesise about the issues that might affect the way that people in these electorates might vote. For example, a rural electorate with a dairy industry might be interested in the price of water, or an outer metropolitan electorate might be interested in home loan interest rates.

Have students report back on their hypotheses.

List their suggestions on four charts labelled 'Inner metropolitan', 'Outer metropolitan', 'Provincial' and 'Rural'. Ask students in pairs or groups to test their hypotheses by researching issues in the online local newspapers of one of these electorates.

Each group should collect and analyse four newspaper articles available from online newspapers and record them in BLM 7.

Identifying and analysing

Have student groups report on their findings to the class and discuss the following:
- What issues are important in each of the electorate demographic categories?
- What issues do different electorate types have in common and what issues are different?
- What issues might be important in determining the ways that people vote in each of these electorates?

Presenting findings

Have students present their findings in a feature newspaper article or report. Ask them to consider an audience and purpose for their writing.

Figure 24: Voters' interests can often be inferred by their location and the communities in which they live

Going further

Resources
- **BLM 8** Voting issues survey

Have students develop a questionnaire and interview some members of their community about their voting habits and the issues that affect the way they vote in elections.

Develop, with the class, a common class survey sheet for students to use.

Decide the best way of conducting this research with the class. Students may be more comfortable conducting interviews in pairs. (Face-to-face interviews are ideal but there may be opportunities for telephone, video call or email interviews as well.) Talk with students about the ways they can locate interviewees and the protocols of interviewing – such as politeness and guarantees of anonymity.

Inform parents or other members of the community about this activity through the school newsletter. Provide students with a proforma letter from the school that will enable them to approach members of the community and that outlines the purpose of the research and guarantees the anonymity of the interviewee. Offer to provide participants with the results of the survey.

Data analysis generated by the interview could include:
- age and voting interests
- gender and voting interests
- occupation and voting interests
- background and voting interests
- party affiliation and voting interests
- location in the electorate and voting interests
- analysis of the most important issues for voters in your community
- interest in politics and voting in your local community.

Figure 25: Voters' interests can be determined by their age, gender and occupation

Consider having the class compile their combined results into a class booklet or electronic presentation. This could be used as the basis for:
- an article for the local newspaper or school newsletter
- a presentation to the senior students at the school
- a presentation to the local council
- a presentation to your local Member of Parliament.

Students could focus on the following questions:
- What issues are most important in our electorate?
- Do issues differ with gender, age and occupational background?
- What is the nature of these differences?
- What should be the most important considerations for a person seeking to represent your electorate?
- Are political parties important to voters?

Alternatively, use the survey sheets (**BLM 8**) to conduct the interviews.

As a summary activity for Topic 3, have pairs of students compete in the **interactive 'Democracy Rules: The quests 1 and 2'**.

Hypothetical – student election

One vote, one value

Imagine that each class at your year level is allowed to elect one representative to your school's representative student body. There are three classes at your level in the school. Each class will elect one representative.

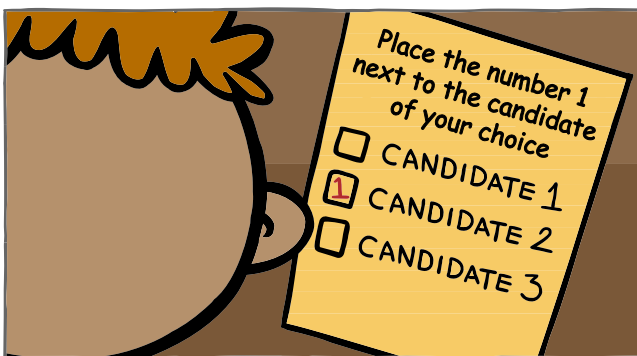Class A has 24 students, Class B has 15 students and Class C has 26 students.

Discuss and record your answers:

- In which class is each student's vote worth the most?
- In which class is each student's vote worth the least?
- How might the school rearrange the vote at your year level to ensure that each student's vote is worth the same?
- Write down a definition of what 'one vote, one value' means.
- Why might this be important when electing representatives?

Imagine that Class A, Class B and Class C each adopt different methods of electing their representatives.

Class A: First past the post and secret ballot

There are three students in Class A who want to be elected as the class representative. They use a voting method called first past the post. In this voting system the candidate who gets the most votes is elected. All members of the class are given a ballot paper with each candidate's name on it. They are asked to put number 1 next to the name of the candidate they wish to represent them. They are also given the opportunity to vote privately. That is, there is no opportunity for any other student to see how anyone votes. (This is called a secret ballot.)	The results of the election are: John　　　6 votes Gabriella　7 votes Huyn　　　11 votes **Total**　　**24 votes** • Which candidate has been elected? • How many students voted in favour of that candidate? How many students voted against that candidate? • Does the elected person have the support of an **absolute majority** (more than 50%) of the class? • Why do you think this is called a **first-past-the-post** method of voting?

Class B: Hands up and first past the post

|	
The students in Class B decide to use a different method. They also have three candidates who wish to represent the class but instead of secret ballot they vote in public by a show of hands. This means that the whole class knows who each individual voted for.	• What are the advantages and disadvantages of this method of voting?

Hypothetical – student election

Class c: full preferential voting and secret ballot

Class C also has three student candidates for the election but has decided to use another voting method. The aim of the election is to get a class representative who is most preferred by an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the class.

Class C is asked to number the three candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3) on the ballot paper. This is called a full preferential voting system. Class C students are also given the opportunity to vote in private (called a secret ballot**)**.
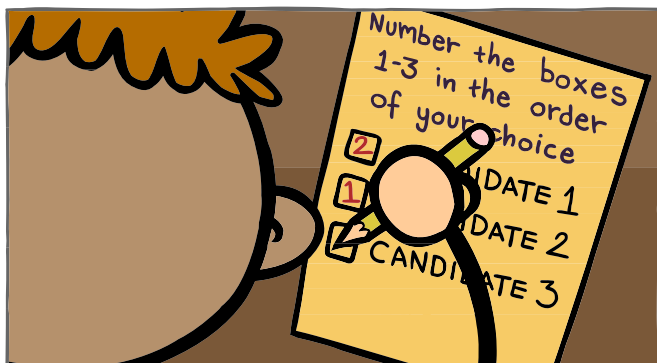
- How many votes would a candidate in Class C need to get in order to have absolute majority support in the class?

The results of the election are:

First preference count

Susan	8 votes
David	11 votes
Frank	7 votes
Total	**26 votes**

None of the students has received an absolute majority (more than 50% of the formal vote or 14 votes).

As Frank has the fewest votes, he is excluded from the count and, according to the order of the preferences on the ballot papers, his votes are distributed to the other candidates. The candidates who were listed second (numbered 2 on the ballots) receive the votes.

Once this distribution of preferences is complete, the totals for the remaining two candidates can be determined. If one voter who originally voted for Frank indicated David as their second preference, then David's tally of votes would increase to 12. If six voters who originally voted for Frank put Susan second, then Susan would receive a total of 14 votes. The final count would look like this:

Final count

Susan 8 votes + 6 votes	= 14 votes
David 11 votes + 1 vote	= 12 votes
Total	**26 votes**

Susan has now received an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the votes. We call her the 'most preferred' candidate and she is elected.

Discussion

- Compare the different results of the elections in Class A (first past the post) and Class C (preferential voting).
- Which class, A, B or C, is represented more fairly?
- How does the voting system used affect the outcome of the election?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these voting systems?
- Is one voting system fairer than the other?

Compulsory voting

(Extracts from Compulsory Voting in Australia, AEC: www.aec.gov.au/About_Aec/Publications/voting/index.htm)

The *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, under section 245(1), states: 'It shall be the duty of every elector to vote at each election'.

Under the Electoral Act, the actual duty of the elector is to attend a polling place, have their name marked off the certified list, receive a ballot paper and take it to an individual voting booth, mark it, fold the ballot paper and place it in the ballot box.

Participation rates

One of the initial reasons for introducing compulsory voting in Australia – and one of the arguments frequently advanced for maintaining it – is that it maintains a high level of participation in elections.

The turnout at Australian elections has never fallen below 90% since the introduction of compulsory voting in 1924.

Engaging the electorate

Proponents of compulsory voting argue that it teaches the benefits of political participation.

Opponents argue that it may increase the number of 'donkey votes' (ballot papers numbered from 1, 2 and so on down the ballot paper; the 'reverse donkey' goes from 1, 2 and so on up the ballot paper) and the number of informal votes, and so diminishes the quality of the vote.

Donkey votes are a correctly completed vote. There is no way of knowing whether the preference order indicated accurately reflects the elector's considered opinion.

The link between informal voting and compulsory voting is difficult to prove.

Considering the full electorate

Proponents of compulsory voting argue that government and opposition parties must consider the total electorate in policy formulation.

Compulsory voting is claimed to encourage policies that collectively address the full spectrum of elector values, because all voters have to be appealed to by government and opposition parties in order to win and maintain a majority in parliament.

Opponents argue that it increases the number of safe electorates and clearly identifies the marginal electorates on which government and opposition parties need to concentrate.

Legitimacy

Proponents of compulsory voting argue that a parliament elected by a compulsory vote more accurately reflects the will of the electorate.

As electorates have about the same number of electors, each member of parliament is elected by the majority decision of the same number of electors as any other MP.

In a voluntary system, the turnout could vary significantly from electorate to electorate.

Compulsory voting

Voting as a civic duty

Proponents of compulsory voting argue that voting is a civic duty comparable to other civic duties, such as taxation, compulsory education and jury duty.

Opponents argue that it is an infringement of liberty to force people to vote, and that the ill-informed and those with little interest in politics are forced to the polls.

Resource implications

Proponents of compulsory voting argue that candidates can concentrate their campaigning energies on issues rather than encouraging voters to attend a polling place and vote.

Opponents see this as wealth transfer, to the advantage of political parties, while proponents see it as a wealth transfer to the advantage of the democratic process.

Opponents also argue that resources must be allocated for the enforcement of compulsory voting – determining whether those who failed to vote have 'valid and sufficient reasons' and penalising those who do not.

Parties, policies and elections

- Political parties have an organised structure and usually one or more branches located in each state and territory where members of the party meet and discuss policies.
- Before a political party can enter a candidate in an election, it must officially register with the Australian Electoral Commission. It must also have a written constitution and 500 members on the electoral roll under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.
- Political parties preselect (choose) candidates for elections and ensure they are qualified to stand as a candidate, as set out in section 44 of the Australian Constitution.
- Political parties present their policies and candidates to the voters during the election campaign (and argue against the policies of other parties).

- Political parties produce and hand out how-to-vote cards on election day. These promote their party's preferences for the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- Political parties help scrutinise (examine) the counting of votes after the polls close.
- The party or coalition of parties that wins the most seats in the House of Representatives forms the government and claims a mandate (authority to act) to implement its policies from the voters of Australia.
- The voters of Australia provide the party or coalition of parties with the authority to govern on behalf of all Australians.

Parties in Parliament

Political parties represented in House of Representatives and the Senate after the 2019 Election.

(Source: AEC Electoral Pocketbook, 2019: www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/electoral_pocketbook/2019/2019-electoral-pocketbook.pdf)

House of Representatives election result 2019

Party	Seats won	Percentage of vote
Australian Labor Party	68	33.3
Liberal Party	44	28.0
Liberal National Party	23	8.7
The Nationals	10	4.5
The Greens	1	10.4
Katter's Australian Party	1	0.5
Centre Alliance	1	0.3
Other	3	14.3
Total	**151**	

Senate 2019 (half-senate election)

Party	Half	Full
Australian Labor Party	10	20
Australian Labor Party (Northern Territory) Branch	1	1
Country Liberals (NT)	1	1
Jacqui Lambie Network	1	1
Labor	2	5
Liberal	14	26
Liberal National Party of Queensland	3	6
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	1	2
The Greens	4	5
The Greens (Vic)	1	2
The Nationals	1	2
Centre Alliance	-	2
Australian Conservatives	-	1
Total	**40**	**76**

Parties, policies and elections

What does the Parliament look like?

Government

House of Representatives

Opposition

Independents and minor parties

Government

Senate

Opposition

Independents and minor parties
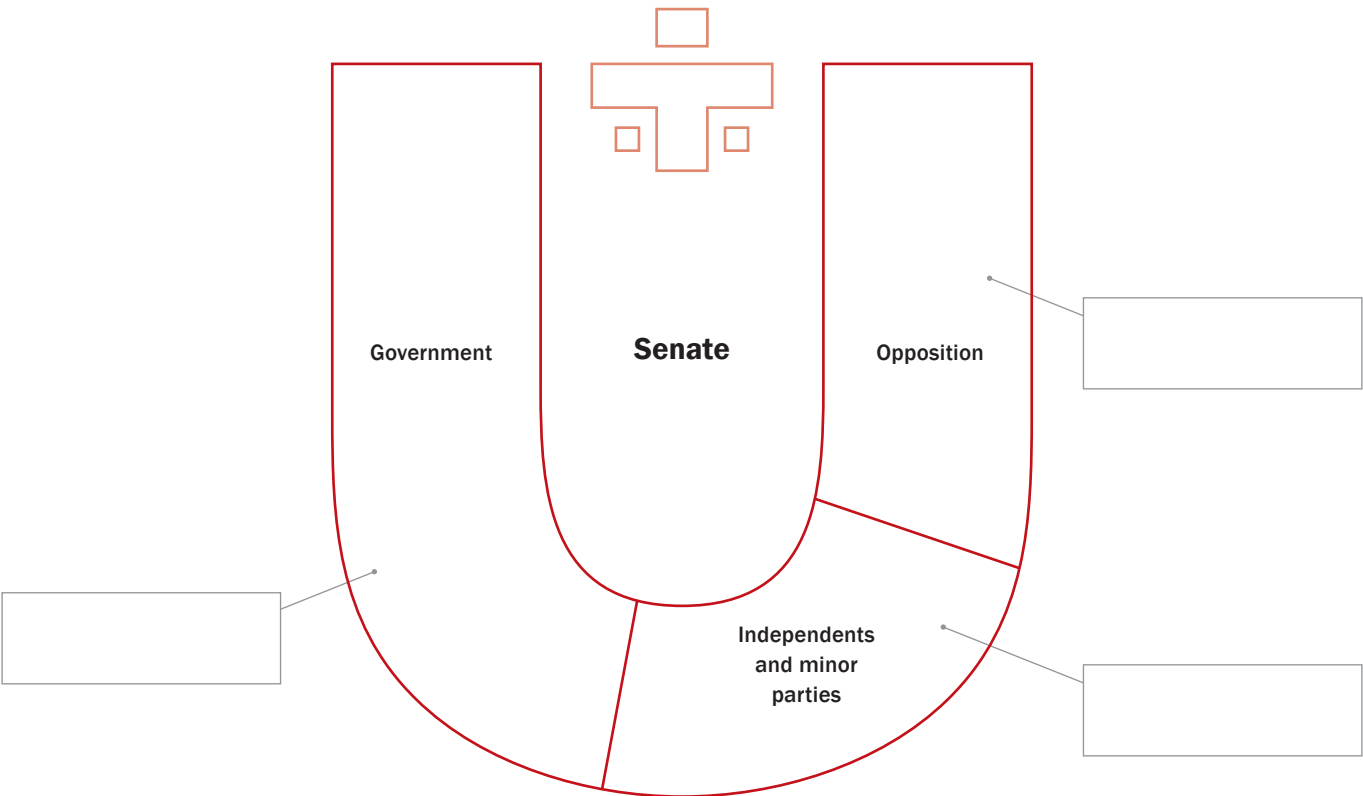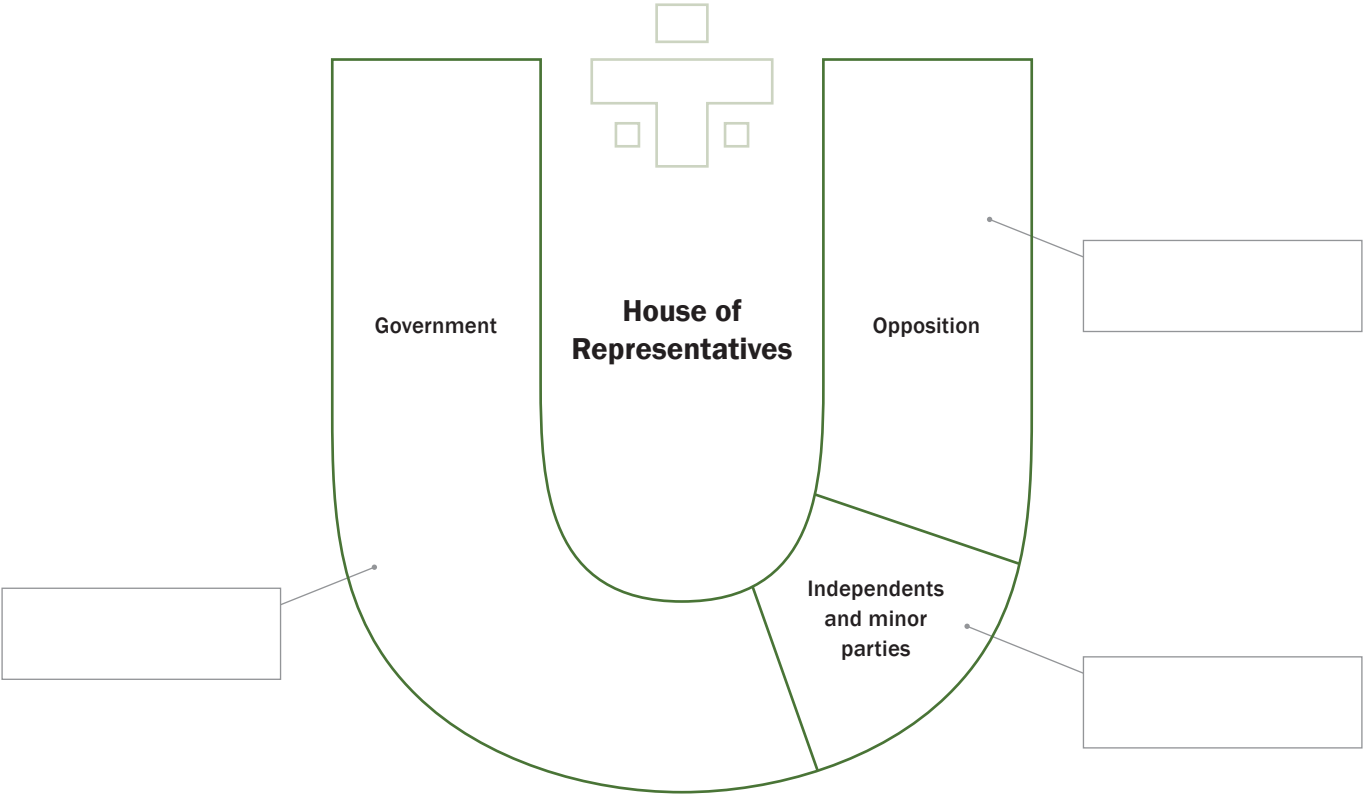
Voting for the House of Representatives and the Senate

Voting for the House of Representatives

When voting for the House of Representatives, electors are choosing one person to represent their electorate (or electoral division) in the parliament. Each state and territory is divided into electorates, which contain as near as possible equal numbers of electors.

The House of Representatives uses the full preferential voting system and requires successful candidates to gain more than 50% of the formal votes. Candidates are listed on the ballot paper along with the names of their political parties. Some candidates do not belong to any political party and are known as independents. House of Representatives ballot papers are green.

The order of candidates on the ballot paper is determined by a double random draw. The fist draw gives each candidate a number and the second draw determines the order in which each candidate appears on the ballot paper.

Political parties and individual candidates usually provide a 'How to Vote Card', which advises voters about how to direct their preferences (or order their votes on the ballot paper).

Voters fill in a ballot paper by writing the number 1 in the box next to the candidate of their first preference, number 2 next to their second preference, and so on until all the boxes are numbered in the order of choice.

To be elected, a candidate in each electorate must receive an absolute majority (more than 50%) of the formal vote.

A sample ballot paper for the House of Representatives

From the margin

Make your vote count

The party or coalition of parties that wins the majority of seats (electorates) forms the government in the House of Representatives.

A formal vote is a ballot paper that has been correctly filled in. It means it will be counted. An informal ballot paper is an incorrectly marked ballot paper; it will not be counted.

Voting for the Senate

When voting for the Senate, electors are choosing a group of candidates to represent their state or territory (12 per state or two per territory). The state and territory borders are the electorate boundaries.

The Senate also uses a full preferential voting system but voters have a choice of two ways to express their preferences. Senate ballot papers are white and are divided into two sections by a black line. The top of the ballot paper shows the parties or groups that are standing for election whereas the bottom half of the ballot paper lists the individual candidates. Electors can vote either above the line or below the line.

If electors vote above the line, they need to number at least six boxes from 1 to 6. By voting above the line, preferences will be distributed in the order that the candidates appear below the line for the party or group chosen.

Preferences will first be distributed to the candidates in the party or group of the voter's fist choice, then to candidates in the party or group of voter's second choice and so on, until all preferences have been distributed.

Voting for the House of Representatives and the Senate

A sample ballot paper for the Australian Senate

If the elector votes below the line, they need to number at least 12 boxes from 1 to 12. By voting below the line, preferences will be distributed to the individual candidates as numbered on the ballot paper, in the order of the voter's choice.

The order in which the party or group names appear on the top of ballot paper is determined by a double random draw, as for the House of Representatives. The order of the candidate names listed below the line is provided to the AEC by the parties to which they belong.

To count the vote, the Senate uses a proportional representation system.

To be elected, a candidate must receive a quota (proportion) of the vote, which is determined by dividing the number of formal ballot papers by one more than the number of vacancies to be filled and adding 1 to the result.

$$\frac{\text{Number of formal votes}}{\text{Number of vacancies} + 1} + 1 = \text{quota}$$

Above-the-line voting was introduced in 1984. It led to a marked reduction in the level of informal voting in the Senate (see table below).

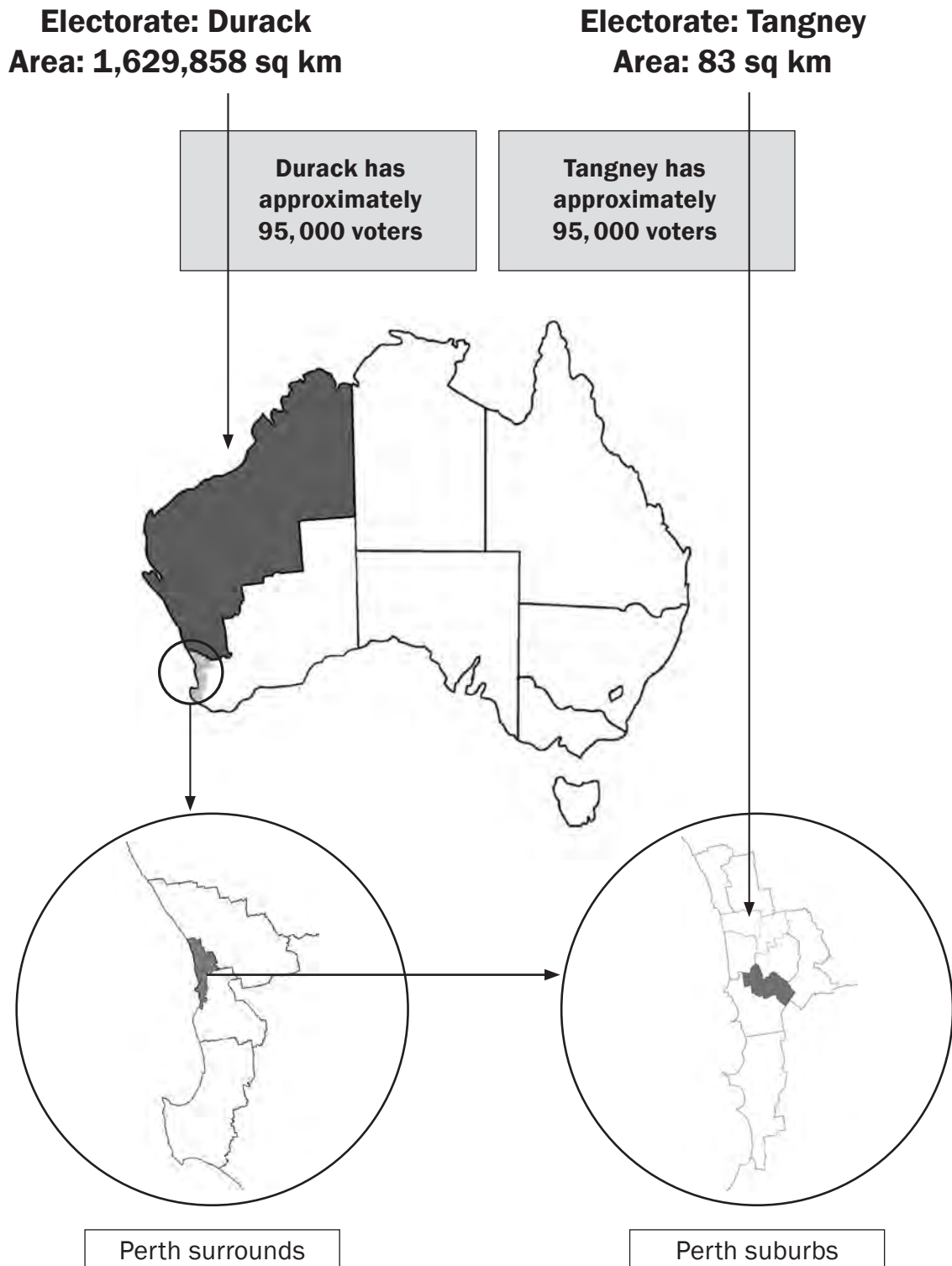| LEVEL OF INFORMAL VOTING IN THE SENATE													
1949	1983	1984	1990	1993	1996	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019
10.8%	9.9%	4.7%	3.4%	2.6%	3.5%	3.2%	3.9%	3.8%	2.5%	3.8%	3.0%	3.9%	3.8%

(Sources: Jaensch, Dean, *Elections!: How and Why Australia Votes*, Allen and Unwin, 1995, p88; *Electoral Pocketbook*, Australian Electoral Commission, 2007, p56, 2010, p60, 2013, p49, 2016, p49, 2019, p30)

States' and territories' voting systems

State/Territory	Houses of Parliament	Voting systems
Australian Capital Territory Population: 431 100 Federal Capital Territory was fist established in 1911 on land given up by NSW. It became the Australian Capital Territory in 1938 and achieved self-government in 1988.	Legislative Assembly	Optional preferential voting Proportional representation count (Hare-Clarke system)
New South Wales Population: 8.16 million The oldest state in Australia with the oldest parliament. Had a Westminster-style government by 1856.	Legislative Council Legislative Assembly	Partial preferential voting Proportional representation count Optional preferential voting
Northern Territory Population: 246 000 Fully elected Legislative Assembly in 1974. Self-government in 1978.	Legislative Assembly	Full preferential voting
Queensland Population: 5.17 million First Queensland Parliament, 1860. The only state parliament with one house. Its Upper House was abolished in 1922.	Legislative Assembly	Full preferential voting
South Australia Population: 1.77 million Settled by Europeans in 1836 and was a settlement without convicts.	Legislative Council House of Assembly	Full preferential – ticket voting above the line Proportional representation count Full preferential voting
Tasmania Population: 540 600 Became a separate colony from NSW in 1825. Named Tasmania in 1856.	Legislative Council House of Assembly	Partial preferential voting Partial preferential voting Proportional representation count (Hare-Clarke system)
Victoria Population: 6.69 million Became a separate colony from NSW in 1851. The fist Commonwealth Parliament met in Melbourne in 1901 and continued to sit there until 1927.	Legislative Council Legislative Assembly	Partial preferential voting Proportional representation count Full preferential voting
Western Australia Population: 2.66 million First settled in 1829. The last colony to join the Federation of Australia.	Legislative Council Legislative Assembly	Full preferential voting Proportional representation count – single transferable vote and ticket voting Full preferential voting

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): www.abs.gov.au, 30 June 2020)

Federal redistributions

A redistribution is the redrawing of electoral boundaries for a division to ensure that there are, as near as possible, equal numbers of electors in each division for a state or territory.

Electorate: Durack
Area: 1,629,858 sq km

Electorate: Tangney
Area: 83 sq km

Durack has approximately 95,000 voters

Tangney has approximately 95,000 voters

Perth surrounds

Perth suburbs

Federal redistributions

Redistributions

A redistribution is the redrawing of electoral boundaries to ensure that:

- each state and territory gains representation in the House of Representatives in proportion to their population
- there are a similar number of electors in each electoral division in a given state or territory.

The law

The process of redistribution is set out in law in the Australian Constitution and the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* (1918). Under section 24 of the Australian Constitution:

- the number of members of the House of Representatives 'directly chosen by the people' will be 'as near as practicable' twice the number of senators.
- the number of members chosen by the states shall be determined by a **quota** obtained by:
  - dividing the population by twice the number of senators
  - then dividing the number of people in the states by the quota.
- five members at least shall be chosen in each original state.

A redistribution is required under the **Commonwealth Electoral Act** when:

- the number of members of the House of representatives to which a state or territory is entitled has changed due to population changes
- the number of electors in more than one third of the divisions in a state or one of the divisions in the ACT or NT deviates from the average enrolment by over 10% for two consecutive months
- a period of seven years has elapsed since the previous redistribution.

The last provision is the most common reason for a redistribution.

The process

Prior to a redistribution, the Electoral Commissioner uses official population statistics to determine the number of members of the House of Representatives. A redistribution committee is appointed in the state or territory where a redistribution is to occur.

The Electoral Commissioner calculates the average number of people for each division – called a quota. This is worked out using the following formula.

$$\text{QUOTA} = \frac{\text{Number of people enrolled in a state or territory}}{\begin{array}{c}\text{Number of members of the House of}\\\text{Representatives to which the}\\\text{state or territory is entitled}\end{array}}$$

When a redistribution takes place, the enrolments in a division must not vary more than 10% from the average number of electors. The aim is for enrolments to be within 3.5% of the average enrolment, 3.5 years after the redistribution.

Factors considered in the redistribution:

- population
- community of interest
- geographical features
- means of communication and travel

Public involvement

During a redistribution, maps are put on display for public comment and people may object to the proposed boundaries.

Any written objections and comments made by the public along with evidence presented at public inquiries must be considered by an augmented Electoral Commission. When the boundaries are finally decided by the augmented Electoral Commission, new maps are prepared.

The decision of the augmented Electoral Commission is final and cannot be appealed.

Electorate issues

Electorate name	Newspaper name	Date	Issue	Arguments for and against

Voting issues survey

Student name/s:_____

Place, date and time of interview:_____

Interviewee number:_____

The respondent

Gender:_____

Age group:	18–25	26–35	36–45
46–55	56–65	66–75	75+

Occupation:

_____

Questions

1. The following issues have been nominated by our class as important issues that affect the way people vote. Could you please indicate their importance to you by placing a number from 1 (for very important) to 5 (for unimportant) next to each issue.

Issues

☐ Health ☐ Education

☐ Immigration issues ☐ Employment

☐ Environment ☐ Economic issues (such as interest rates)

2. What other issues would you regard as important in influencing the way you vote?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Would you describe yourself as generally interested in community affairs?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Thank you for participating in our research.